

## **Conference Report**

### **16<sup>th</sup> India International Hotel Travel & Tourism Research Conference**

#### **Day 1: 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2026**

The 16<sup>th</sup> India International Hotel, Travel, and Tourism Research Conference represent a significant landmark in the ongoing growth and advancement of Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology. This prominent event was collaboratively organized by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell, Institute's Innovation Council and the Research and Development Committee of the Institute. Held from February 26<sup>th</sup>– 27<sup>th</sup>, the conference centered on the theme "**Healing Horizons: Integrating Spiritual Tourism & Indian Hospitality for Global Peace,**" providing a platform for scholarly discussion and innovation in the field.

The 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the India International Hotel, Travel & Tourism Research Conference was formally inaugurated by the Conference President, Professor R. K. Bhandari. In his opening address, he extended a warm welcome to the keynote speakers, conference delegates, and participants. The conference organized in collaboration with the Euro Asia Tourism Studies Association, commenced with an inauguration ceremony that set the stage for insightful discussions and academic exchange. Professor Bhandari mentioned that the present-day global landscape is marked by unrest, conflict, and uncertainty, resulting in loss of life, economic instability, and deep social fragmentation. He stated that the travel, tourism and hospitality industry built upon human connection is deeply affected by such turbulence. He mentioned that hospitality in India is not merely a profession; it is a spiritual practice rooted in compassion and respect. He emphasized on the timeless message that hatred does not cease by hatred, but by love. He also spoke about the present-day world that travels more than ever before, yet understands itself less. A world that is digitally connected, yet emotionally fragmented. A world technologically advanced, yet spiritually searching. He mentioned that in an era that is driven by artificial intelligence and rapid digital acceleration, this holistic model reminds us that true education is not merely the acquisition of skills, but the elevation of awareness, wisdom, and human consciousness. He concluded by highlighting the purpose of this Conference by accentuating that in a world that is continuously searching for stability and hope, Healing Horizons calls upon us to reimagine tourism not merely as movement across destinations, but as a journey toward shared humanity where hospitality becomes healing, and travel becomes a bridge to global peace.

**Professor R. K. Bhandari, President**, India International Hotel Travel and Tourism Research Conference welcomed honorable Chief Guest Diwan Gautam Anand, Founding Trustee at Cuisineindiafoundation.com & Former Executive Vice President, ITC Hotels. He also welcomed Guests of Honour: Mr. Romil Pant, Executive Vice President & Business Head- Leisure Travel, Thomas Cook India Limited, India and Prof. Piotr Zmystony, Vice President (Europe) (EATSA), Poland.

Professor R. K. Bhandari emphasized the significance of this milestone in the institute's academic journey, highlighting it as a noteworthy achievement. During the inauguration ceremony, he officially inaugurated the 18<sup>th</sup> volume of the annual Hospitality & Tourism

Research Journal, *Indian Journal of Applied Hospitality & Tourism Research* (ISSN 0975-4954), indexed in the UGC CARE List (Group-I) by the University Grants Commission of India.

**Honorable Chief Guest Diwan Gautam Anand, Founding Trustee at Cuisineindiafoundation.com & Former Executive Vice President, ITC Hotels**, congratulated the Institute and appreciated the lineage of the trust. He emphasized on the concept of demand creation to become market leaders. He underscored the concept of silent kitchens where the hotels are taking over our kitchens. Additionally, he emphasized that employers should look at ethical employment practices whilst highlighting the concept of the triple bottom line namely planet, people and profit. He elaborated on the concept of spirituality as an essence of our being and Earth as a sacred space.

In a keynote titled “**Sacred Journeys, Shifting Trends: The Evolution of Pilgrimage Travel in India**”, **Mr. Romil Pant, Executive Vice President at Thomas Cook India Limited**, explored the changing landscape of spiritual tourism. After outlining current market dynamics, like bhajan clubbing and leisure pilgrimage, Mr. Pant addressed critical systemic challenges, including overcrowding, over-commercialization, and sanitation concerns. Notably, he pivoted to the role of technology, urging students to view AI as a knowledge enabler and a powerful tool for growth rather than a threat to their future careers.

**Prof. Piotr Zmyslony, Vice President (Europe), Euro Asia Tourism Studies Association (EATSA), Poland** delivered an insightful address on “**Spiritual Tourism as a Bridge Between India and Central-Eastern Europe**”. He congratulated and expressed gratitude for being a partner of the 16<sup>th</sup> IIHTTRC. In his speech he highlighted the shared characteristics traits between Poland and India mentioning that both countries showed a respect towards tradition and history whilst showcasing their hospitality towards guests. He highlighted the inclination of Generation Z to individualized spirituality from institutionalized religion where travel motivations focused on bonding with family and friends, self-development and spiritual reflection, cognitive exploration and personal development. He emphasized travel trends associated with the faith-based pilgrimage, cultural-spiritual heritage, and contemporary spirituality and well-being.

**Shri Rajindera Kumar Memorial Scholarship**, a scholarship awarded annually as a remembrance by Shri Shivendra Kumar Ji in the loving memory of his father, recognizes students who exhibit financial need and academic excellence. This year, the scholarship was presented to Mr. Naman Gupta, a student from the Batch of 2022-2026. The Memorial Scholarship Fund provides renewable scholarships for four years, supporting deserving students in their academic journey.

In his keynote address titled “**Spiritual Tourism as a Catalyst for Global Peace Building**,” **Prof. Kumar Ashutosh, Head of Department of Continuing Education and Extension at the University of Delhi**, presented a visionary framework for leveraging spiritual heritage and cultural diplomacy as essential drivers of global stability and community development. Prof. Ashutosh argued that by fostering inner peace and designating sacred spaces as neutral grounds for conflict resolution, Spiritual Tourism (ST)

transcends mere travel to become a sophisticated instrument of soft power, as exemplified by the Bhutanese model of mindful engagement. He highlighted the transformative potential of initiatives like the PRASHAD scheme and the Ayush framework in reviving ancient peace traditions, empowering local communities, and healing collective trauma through shared cross-cultural experiences. Concluding with an emphasis on interfaith harmony and ethical hospitality, the address aligned these spiritual objectives with the sustainable connectivity goals of the European Cultural Roots Organization, advocating for a global model of ethical stewardship that bridges cultural divides through the preservation of sacred ecology and common humanity.

In her online keynote address on topic "**From Selfie to Soul-Searching: The Generational Shift in Spiritual Tourism,**" **Prof. Yanki Hartijasti, Associate Professor, Department of Management, Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Indonesia**, explored the evolving landscape of travel from performative social media moments to deep, internal transformations. She identified a paradox of connection where digital connectivity often leads to spiritual isolation, prompting a shift from rigid, institutionalized religious dogma to a liquid religion focused on individualized, experiential healing. By contrasting the high-stress, burnout economies of East Asia with the ancient, hospitality-driven traditions of India and Indonesia, Dr. Hartijasti highlighted how spiritual tourism serves as a vital "global therapy" and a bridge for international peace. She concluded by advocating for spiritual leadership in the tourism industry, integrating AI as a logistical companion while preserving the authentic, high-touch human connections and sacred silence necessary for true soul-searching.

**Dr. Arvind Kumar Saraswati, Conference Convener**, expressed his profound gratitude to all esteemed delegates connected from different time zones across the globe, distinguished speakers, industry experts, resource persons, and media partners for their invaluable participation in this prestigious international conference. He highlighted that the event provided a dynamic platform for an exceptional convergence of all delegates and participants from India and overseas for their participation whilst making us more determined to achieve quality objectives from the International Conference. He congratulated and appreciated the efforts of the editorial board, reviewers, contributors and the entire team for the publication of the 18<sup>th</sup> Volume of the Indian Journal of Applied Hospitality and Tourism Research. Dr. Saraswati extended special appreciation to the organizing committee, faculty members, staff, and the dedicated students of the Institute, whose relentless commitment and tireless efforts played a pivotal role in ensuring the smooth and successful execution of this mega event.

### **Technical Session I: Spiritual Tourism & Hospitality for Peace**

**Chairperson: Dr. Shweta Jha, Associate Professor, Apeejay School of Management, New Delhi**

In an era defined by relentless acceleration and heightened societal stress, this technical session explores the critical evolution of spiritual tourism and peace-centered hospitality as essential drivers of global harmony and individual well-being. Modern travelers are increasingly bypassing traditional leisure in favor of transformative experiences that offer inner tranquility and emotional stability, placing a new responsibility on the hospitality

sector to move beyond standard service. By incorporating spiritual principles such as compassion, cultural awareness, and sustainability, the hospitality industry can encourage intercultural appreciation and social cohesion. This session examines how hospitality that prioritizes peace can transform tourism into a means for achieving well-being and fostering global unity.

### **Immersive Technology as a Catalyst for Mindful Guest Experiences: A case study of 5-star hotels of Delhi NCR.**

*Dubey, K. & Sharma, S.*

The research highlights the transformative role of immersive technology in 5-star hotels of Delhi-NCR. By transitioning from traditional, transactional service models to interactive digital strategies that foster emotional connection and presence, 5-star hotels in the region are successfully enhancing both guest satisfaction and long-term loyalty. The study identifies a significant positive correlation between these technology-driven, mindful interactions and a guest's propensity to return, providing a strategic roadmap for hospitality growth centered on thoughtful innovation.

### **Pilgrimage and Peace: Exploring Jain Tirthas as Models of Sustainable Spiritual Tourism**

*Jain, A., & Singh, P.*

This study investigates how the Jain principles of Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and Anekantavada offer a tactical framework for promoting harmony and long-term viability in spiritual travel. By analyzing the management of Jain pilgrimage sites, the research demonstrates how the synergy between faith, community service, and environmental stewardship creates a comprehensive model of eco-spirituality. These findings provide tourism planners with actionable insights into utilizing ethical site management and simplified tourist experiences to enhance global sustainability and resource conservation. Researchers also identified India as a premier hub for peaceful, culturally rich spiritual interchange, offering a contemporary roadmap for integrating non-violence and mindful consumption into the modern travel landscape.

### **Study on Local Economic Development and Destination Promotion with Reference to Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary of Assam**

*Puzari, P., A.*

This study demonstrates how the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary has successfully integrated community-led initiatives with contemporary social media marketing and technology-driven hospitality to become a primary catalyst for local economic growth in Assam's Morigaon district. By leveraging the conservation of the iconic one-horned rhinoceros, the region has developed sustainable tourism itineraries that effectively increase domestic visitor numbers and enhance local livelihood security. While celebrating these advancements, the research underscores the critical necessity of balanced management to ensure that rapid infrastructure expansion and high visitor density do not deplete essential natural resources.

### **The Role of Buddha Temple, Dalai Hills, Mussoorie in Promoting Peace through Spiritual Tourism and Hospitality**

*Singh, S.*

The research highlights the Buddha Temple at Dalai Hills in Mussoorie as a vital epicenter for spiritual tourism, defined by its serene environment and iconic Buddha statue which serve as a catalyst for peace-building. By attracting a dedicated demographic focused on meditation and mindfulness, the site has significantly enriched the cultural landscape of Happy Valley and spurred regional hospitality development. While spiritual tourism is a well-established sector in India, this study specifically underscores the temple's unique contribution to peace-building and its potential to anchor long-term economic growth.

### **Women as Entrepreneur & Facilitator in Spiritual Tourism: A Conceptual Study of Uttarakhand**

*Sharma, S.*

This study examines the pivotal role of women as entrepreneurs and enablers within Uttarakhand's spiritual tourism sector, specifically highlighting their leadership in managing homestays, wellness centers, and self-help groups. By spearheading community-based tourism initiatives, these women have successfully diversified local livelihoods and preserved regional culture, effectively driving more inclusive economic growth. However, the research identifies significant structural barriers, including a lack of specialized skills, inadequate policy support, and a persistent absence of formal institutional recognition.

### **Exploring the Relationship between Spiritual Tourism and Cultural Revival: Insights from Dharamshala and Tawang**

*Kumar, R., Bhattacharyya, I., Sharma, N., & Gautam, P.*

This study investigates how spiritual tourism serves as a powerful mechanism for cultural revival and continuity within the Tibetan diaspora of Dharamshala and Tawang. By examining the dimensions of soul cleansing, transcendent experiences, and spiritual resilience, the research illustrates a profound connection between visitor engagement and the preservation of displaced cultural practices, including oral traditions, performing arts, and sacred rituals. The findings indicate that spiritual tourism is essential for upholding cultural identity in exile, providing a platform for these communities to safeguard their heritage while fostering global awareness.

### **Eco-Spiritual Retreats in the Himalayas: Assessing their Role in Sustainable Hospitality**

*Das, H., & Kumar, S.*

This study evaluates the burgeoning role of eco-spiritual retreats in Dharamshala, Ladakh, and Uttarakhand as pioneering models for sustainable hospitality that align environmental conservation with cultural preservation. Utilizing a qualitative approach including field observations and stakeholder interviews, the research demonstrates how these retreats successfully integrate traditional spiritual values with modern ecological practices, such as renewable energy adoption, organic food sourcing, and biodiversity conservation. The findings reveal that while Dharamshala excels in meditation-based eco-infrastructure, Uttarakhand harmonizes Ayurveda with community participation, and Ladakh showcases climatic resilience through solar innovation and local materials.

### **Research Workshop on Questionnaire Development and SPSS Fundamentals**

A special Research workshop on "Questionnaire Development and SPSS Fundamentals" was conducted for the students of the final year by Dr. Anushka Goel, Assistant Professor,

Marketing, Apeejay School of Management. The students were briefed about the various types of research designs and data types that can be used for conducting research at undergraduate level. The students were also educated regarding the design and development of questionnaire using structured guidelines, an understanding of dependent and independent variables along with appropriate Likert scales to be used while designing a questionnaire.

The students were taught the coding and importing of data in the Statistical package of Social Sciences and conducting tests like Descriptive statistics- mean, median, mode, graphical representation of data along with tabular representation and result analysis using Correlation and Regression and ANOVA. The session was interactive and appropriate for students at Undergraduate level to gain apt exposure and knowledge for preparing their Project Reports.

### **Day 2: 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2026**

**Prof. Amit Gangotia, Central University of Himachal, Dharamshala, H.P. India** delivered an insightful keynote address on “**Dynamics of Peace and Spiritual Tourism in the Changing World Order**” highlighting the Bhartiya perspective for peace and rejuvenation. His presentation focused on the rise of soft power in global affairs through spirituality being used as a strategy where leaders shall act as the bridge-builders with the key focus on attraction not coercion.

Prof. Gangotia highlighted the importance of shared responsibility among the governments, civil society and individuals for a peaceful future. He stated that the call for peace matters all the more at the moment for it is essential for saving lives, ensuring prosperity, preserving security and upholding the dignity of humans. He mentioned that global spiritual markets are dominated by regions with religious heritage and well-established pilgrimage retreats led by Asia Pacific region, European heritage followed by the emerging markets of North America and Middle East. He specifically emphasized that India is systematically transforming its sacred sites into economic powerhouses through investing in world class infrastructure and development of hospitality and pilgrim amenities. He stated that the revenue earned was reinvested in local communities. He also spoke about the country strategically leveraging the vast artwork of pilgrimage sites and shared spiritual heritage to deepen cultural ties and regional influences across South east Asia. He concluded by mentioning that peace tourism helps in bridging divides through travel by observing empathy through exposure, reconciliation in practice and acting as a double-edged tool.

### **Technical Session II: Sustainable and Eco-tourism**

**Chairperson: Dr. Neeraj Aggarwal, UIHTM, Panjab University & Dr. Bireswar Pradhan, Academic Counsellor, IGNOU, New Delhi**

This session is geared towards the pressing need for a shift from the highly impactful model of mass tourism into a regenerative form of eco-tourism that places a high value on sustainability and socio-economic equity. As we navigate the intricate landscape that will be seen in 2026, the discussion for this session will revolve around the incorporation of quantified sustainability measures, from consumer intervention strategies to the growing

phenomenon of spiritual tourism, into the hospitality landscape. By shifting the paradigm from a negative impact into a positive force for conservation and personal wellness, we hope to lay the foundation for a travel industry that rejuvenates the environment and the communities it touches.

### **Sustainable Consumption and plate Waste in Restaurants: A comprehensive Review of Consumer Behaviour and Intervention Strategies**

***Aggarwal, H.***

The research explores the critical intersection of diner psychology and food sustainability. The study addresses a significant research gap in the Indian context, specifically targeting urban restaurant dining where rapid lifestyle changes are redefining waste patterns. By investigating the relationship between consumer attitudes, portion sizes, and actual waste behavior, the research aims to propose a conceptual framework for responsible dining. Ultimately, the work seeks to align practical restaurant management solutions with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 12.3, which targets halving global food waste per capita by 2030.

### **Eco-Spiritual Destinations in Uttarakhand: A Pathway to Sustainable Hospitality and Community Development**

***Roy, B.***

This research evaluates the strategic integration of eco-spiritual values within Uttarakhand's hospitality industry, specifically analyzing its impact on renewable energy adoption, waste management, and regional economic expansion. Utilizing a dual methodology of surveys and comprehensive case studies, the report demonstrates that aligning spiritual ethics with tourism practices yields measurable socio-economic benefits for local communities while effectively safeguarding cultural heritage amidst industry growth. The findings suggest that when sustainable development and community engagement are prioritized, the result is a robust model for responsible tourism.

#### **Special Technical Session-III (for UG Student Researchers)**

**Chairperson: Dr. Anand K. Singh, Former Principal IHM, Bhopal**

The UG Student Researchers session at the 16<sup>th</sup> IIHTTRC, chaired by Dr. Anand K. Singh, Former Principal IHM Bhopal, featured insightful research presentations on contemporary topics in hospitality and tourism. The studies explored key themes such as restaurant choice decision among Gen Z, Hospitality Students' Perceptions and Acceptance of Artificial Intelligence in Education, Operational Structure and Market Performance of Brand Virtual Kitchens Operating from a Single Production Unit, Integration of Millet- Based Diets, Value-Creation through Hybrid Yoga Tourism, Impact of User Generated Content on Brand Awareness, Determinants of Student Satisfaction with Internship Programs, Impact of Work-Life Balance on Employee Satisfaction among Human Resources (HR) Staff and rooms division staff in 5- Star Hotels of Delhi and Accommodation Preferences of Female Travelers in 5- Star Hotels of Delhi.

Notably, research initiatives are being actively undertaken by undergraduate students, reflecting a strong emphasis on academic engagement and industry-oriented learning.

## **Technical Session IV: Technology, Digital Marketing & AI in Tourism**

**Chairperson: Prof. Ajeet Kumar, Royal Global University, Assam**

The global tourism landscape is undergoing a radical transformation, driven by the rapid evolution of the digital ecosystem. This technical session was designed to explore the intersection of cutting-edge innovation and traveler experiences. As the industry shifts from traditional service models to data-driven decision-making, understanding the synergy between hyper-personalized marketing and artificial intelligence has become a prerequisite for sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

### **An Analysis of Consumers' Perception towards the Consumption of Traditional Awadhi Food of Lucknow City**

***Kundu, A.***

This paper depicted the major factors that shape consumer preferences for traditional Awadhi cuisine in Lucknow, exploring the relationship between authentic culinary heritage and the tourism industry in the region. Through the analysis of eighteen different variables, this paper explores the significance of unique food preparation techniques and the cultural importance of traditional recipes in the development of the region. This paper also explores the significance of artisanal food practices in the economic development of the region, balancing traditional values with the needs of the modern consumer market.

### **Making Tourism Smart in the Era of Artificial Intelligence**

***Jadhav, S. S. & Sonawane, U.***

The research paper emphasized the transformative power of AI in reshaping the hospitality sector while emphasizing the continued necessity of human-centered values. The research highlights that while 82% of respondents actively embrace AI tools for efficiency and stress reduction, significant concerns persist regarding job displacement and environmental impacts, due to high energy consumption. The authors argue against the 'McDonaldization' of tourism, where speed and standardization might sacrifice authenticity, and instead propose a hybrid tourism model. This analysis also advocates for a collaborative future where AI handles routine data processing and predictive analytics, enabling human hosts to focus on providing the empathy, cultural understanding, and emotional connections that define true hospitality.

### **Sacred Journeys in the Digital Age: The Role of Digital Marketing in Maha Kumbh 2025**

***Godiyal, M. & Gupta, P.***

The research report evaluates the pivotal role of digital marketing and technology-driven spiritual tourism in reshaping the Maha Kumbh 2025 experience. By analyzing the deployment of mobile applications, social media, and live-streaming services, the study demonstrates that these digital strategies significantly improve global accessibility and cultural comprehension of the event. Statistical findings indicate a direct positive correlation between the use of real-time digital tools such as ritual notifications and virtual broadcasts and heightened levels of pilgrim satisfaction and spiritual awareness.

### **Mapping Spiritual Tourism through Digital Marketing: A Bibliometric Analysis and Future Trends**

***Kumar, S., Nazma, & Bhopal, R.***

This presentation provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the shifting landscape within spiritual tourism, specifically highlighting the transition from traditional outreach to technology-mediated immersion. By synthesizing existing academic literature, the study demonstrates that digital media, social media marketing, and virtual participation have become indispensable drivers for destination branding and cultural engagement. The research underscores an emerging interdisciplinary paradigm merging insights from information systems and cultural studies to deepen spiritual experiences.

The keynote address titled “The Organizational Culture of Luxury Resorts that Sustain Growth,” delivered by Prof. Shunsaku Hashimoto of the College of Sustainability and Tourism at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan, provided a comprehensive analysis of strategic resilience within the hospitality sector. Prof. Hashimoto detailed how the global pandemic prompted a critical shift toward value-driven operations, specifically citing Hoshino Resorts as a benchmark for excellence in organizational culture. The presentation underscored that the resort's sustained competitiveness is rooted in a management philosophy of innovation and adaptability, achieved by empowering employees with the autonomy to think and act independently. Central to this success is a robust human resources framework built upon mutual respect and trust, which served as a stabilizing force during the volatility of the COVID-19 era. Ultimately, the session demonstrated that a people-centric approach is not merely a cultural asset but a fundamental requirement for achieving long-term sustainability and growth in the luxury market.

**Technical Session V: Tourism Research & Community Participation**  
**Chairperson: Dr. Savita Sharma, SVSU, Palwal &**  
**Dr. Vimal Kumar, Chandigarh College of Hospitality, CGC, Mohali**

This technical session explores the critical intersection of academic inquiry and local empowerment, emphasizing that sustainable tourism development is only achievable when research is grounded in the lived experiences of the host community. As the industry moves toward a "meaning-making" economy in 2026, the discussion highlights the shift from passive local involvement to active co-ownership and participatory decision-making. By analyzing diverse typologies of engagement, from spontaneous grassroots initiatives to induced policy frameworks. This session underscores how robust community participation acts as a safeguard for cultural heritage and a driver for equitable economic distribution.

**The Moderating Role of Personal Norms on Perceptions of Tourism Impact and Community Support**

***Irungbam, B., & Meetei, K. D.***

This presentation examines the determinants of community support for tourism development in Manipur, specifically focusing on key sites such as Loktak Lake and the Khongjom War Memorial. By integrating Social Exchange Theory and Norm Activation Theory, researchers Irungbam and Meetei analyze how perceived economic and socio-cultural impacts shape local attitudes. A central finding of the study is the significant moderating role of personal norms and moral beliefs, which often prove more influential in driving community backing than traditional economic incentives alone.

### **Internship Experiences of Female Hospitality Students in Delhi NCR**

*Roy, S., Gupta, B., & Bose, I. N.*

This study investigates the internship perceptions and career orientations of female hospitality students in Delhi NCR, utilizing a descriptive-explanatory mixed-method research design. This research highlights that while female interns benefit from skill development, particularly in technical and communication areas, they face significant structural challenges, including gender-based role allocation and safety concerns during late shifts. The findings reveal that while mentorship and skill acquisition are strong predictors of career aspirations, perceived gender bias and limited leadership exposure significantly hinder long-term commitment to the hospitality industry.

### **Competency Determinants of Hotel Manager Effectiveness in a Wildlife Tourism Context: Insights from Jim Corbett National Park**

*Negi, M. S., & Kumar, A.*

This research identifies the critical determinants of managerial effectiveness within the unique, ecologically sensitive landscape of Jim Corbett National Park, proposing a specialized competency model that bridges traditional hospitality and conservation. By evaluating star-rated institutions across five core domains, cognitive, functional, social, meta, and environmental behavioral abilities, the study emphasizes that modern wildlife tourism leadership requires more than just administrative expertise; it demands a high degree of self-awareness, achievement orientation, and ecological responsibility. The findings underscore a vital need for managers to align operational leadership with sustainable practices, particularly regarding resource efficiency, providing a robust framework for human resource development in protected natural environments.

### **Tourism in Jharkhand (A Hidden Gem of India): Exploring Digital Innovation and Entrepreneurship- Redefining Management for the Digital Age**

*Chatterjee, S. & Dubey, S. R.*

This research work positioned Jharkhand as a hidden gem of Indian tourism, arguing that the state's untapped potential can be unlocked through a strategic fusion of digital innovation and entrepreneurial dynamism. By integrating smart technologies such as AI-driven analytics and mobile applications with the region's rich tribal heritage, the study demonstrates how digital transformation can bridge the gap between visibility and accessibility. This framework emphasizes that fostering a robust start-up ecosystem not only promotes sustainable, eco-friendly practices but also drives inclusive growth and community empowerment.

### **Guest Preferences in Hotel Accommodation: Evidence from an Emerging Urban Destination in India**

*Sati, S. & Singh, T.*

In their investigation of an emerging urban destination in India, the presenters identify the shifting dynamics of guest preferences, emphasizing that hotels must evolve alongside rapidly changing consumer behaviors. Utilizing exploratory factor analysis, the study examines various service and product dimensions to determine how fundamental quality standards influence modern traveler decisions. The findings reveal a dual expectation: guests place equal importance on traditional operational excellence—specifically cleanliness and hygiene and contemporary service standards, such as streamlined booking processes.

Consequently, the research concludes that maintaining a competitive edge in urban markets requires a rigorous commitment to high housekeeping standards and consistent service quality to meet the sophisticated demands of the current hospitality landscape.

### **Sustainable Agritourism: A Review of Practices, Challenges and Policy Interventions in Developing Economies**

*Sharma, R., Kushwaha, S., Nag, A., & Sharma, S.*

This paper evaluates how integrating agricultural production with tourism can drive rural development in countries such as India, Uzbekistan, and Nigeria. This research identifies that successful agritourism relies on authentic farm stays, community engagement, and sustainable farming methods like organic agriculture and rainwater harvesting. However, the sector faces significant structural hurdles, including critical knowledge and skills gaps among operators, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and limited access to finance. To address these barriers, the study proposes a multi-tiered framework emphasizing Institutional Drivers such as support from NGOs and universities and the establishment of cooperative frameworks.

### **Yoga Retreat as a Tool of Experiential Tourism: Perception, Practice and Potential**

*Sikari, S. & Sikari, I.*

This research explores the role of yoga retreats as a transformative instrument within the experiential tourism sector, investigating how immersive practices and restorative settings drive perceived well-being and participant satisfaction. Qualitative findings of the paper highlight that while retreats foster meaningful mental clarity and community belonging, the long-term sustainability of these benefits remains fragile due to post-retreat life constraints.

### **From Temporary Escape to Lasting Transformation-Reimagining Tourism as a Transformative Journey**

*Shah, A. M.*

Moving beyond the traditional view of travel as a fleeting escape, this paper explores the concept of tourism as a medium for lasting personal and systemic transformation. By shifting the focus away from passive consumption and surface-level sightseeing, the author advocates for a model rooted in active engagement and personal growth. This approach, which gained significant momentum in the post-pandemic landscape, reimagines the traveler's journey as an inward exploration that simultaneously fosters regenerative impacts on local communities and environments.

### **Valedictory Ceremony**

The 16<sup>th</sup> IIHTTRC 2026 concluded with a closure report presented by Dr. Gagandeep Soni, Co-Convener IIHTTRC and IQAC Coordinator. In her closure report she presented the research insights of the conference and stated that the international conference offered a stage for insightful discussions and academic exchange. She expressed gratitude to all delegates, industry experts and speakers, students, and participants for their valuable contributions. Dr. Arvind K. Saraswati, Convener IIHTTRC 2026 & Research Coordinator, shared the vote of thanks and acknowledged the collective efforts that made the event a success and emphasized on the importance of the ongoing collaboration between academia and industry.