

## **FHRAI, LocalCircles seek inclusion of online travel, accommodation portals in e-commerce**

The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and online community platform LocalCircles have urged the government to bring online travel and accommodation marketplaces under its proposed e-commerce rules.

Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, vice-president of FHRAI, told that the association had written to the commerce ministry in this regard last month, and that it has been asked to prepare documents on the matter. Meanwhile, in a letter to the consumer affairs ministry, LocalCircles mentioned undisclosed high convenience fee and lack of trust at the time of cancellation of bookings as the key challenges for consumers. Local Circles wrote that just like returns and timely refunds are critical to e-commerce, timely booking cancellations and refunds or standard convenience charges would help in ensuring consumer interests.

LocalCircles said it has received plenty of feedback on draft e-commerce rules as well as on how online travel and accommodation booking sites work. Citing a recently conducted consumer survey on the subject, LocalCircles said that 60% of the participants were of the view that convenience fee is not disclosed to consumers till the very end, while about only a third of the participants said that hotel reviews on travel apps reflect the reality. Industry executives said there is a chance that online travel agents and accommodation marketplaces might end up getting included because of sustained pressure from hoteliers against companies like Go-MMT on matters like deep discounting.