

## **‘Growth has to come from Bharat – not just from top 10 cities’**

Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) is accelerating its India expansion strategy with a strong focus on Bharat—India’s fast-growing Tier II to V cities, spiritual destinations, and experiential travel segments. At the recently concluded RHG India Roadshow 2025, held at Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport, Nikhil Sharma, Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer – South Asia, outlined the group’s ambitious roadmap, highlighting India’s evolving hospitality landscape and RHG’s commitment to inclusive, people-first growth.

### **Weddings with Soul: The Art of Weddings**

A key focus area is Art of Weddings, RHG’s signature initiative designed to blend traditional Indian wedding rituals with curated, aesthetic experiences.

“Art of Weddings is our one-stop solution for dream celebrations. With nearly 50% of our revenue coming from F&B—and 80% of that driven by MICE—weddings are a significant part of our business. In India, weddings are timeless, and we want to make them truly unforgettable,” Sharma said.

He noted that today’s couples are discerning, self-reliant, and keen on personalized experiences. “Radisson offers venues and services that help couples realize their vision. It’s not about competing; it’s about crafting seamless, heartfelt moments that stay rooted in tradition,” he added. This philosophy, he said, holds true even for Indian weddings hosted abroad.

### **The Bharat Push: Going Beyond the Metros**

RHG’s strategy reflects its belief in the long-term economic promise of India’s Tier II to V cities.

“While metros remain important, the next wave of growth is clearly coming from Bharat,” Sharma stated.

“Hospitality is the second-largest employment sector in India after agriculture, and this growth must come from smaller towns and cities—not just the top 10 urban centers.”

Currently present in 75 cities, RHG aims to scale up to 150 by the end of 2025. Upcoming destinations include Katra, Thrissur, Saputara, Jawai, and even spiritual hubs like Ayodhya—where RHG was the first international hotel group to establish a presence.

### **Talent, Training, and Local Empowerment**

Addressing the challenge of consistency across geographies, Sharma emphasized the importance of training and skilling:

“Consistency is always a challenge, especially in diverse markets. But with strong brand standards and targeted training, we ensure our service pillars remain intact.”

Dispelling the myth of a talent shortage in India, Sharma pointed out:

“India has no shortage of talent—800 million of our people are under 30. What we lack is structured skilling and opportunities.”

He cited examples like Saputara and Siliguri, where RHG has nurtured local talent and partnered with organizations such as DSE and four hotel management institutes to revamp training programs.

### **Midscale Boom: Democratizing Travel**

Sharma predicted a fundamental shift in Indian hospitality—from luxury dominance to midscale and experience-driven travel.

“Travel isn’t slowing down. It’s evolving. We’re seeing more demand for accessible, high-quality stays. Midscale and upscale experiential properties are the future.”

Referencing global benchmarks, Sharma explained that luxury comprises only 10% of total hotel inventory worldwide—India is now trending in the same direction.

“With GDP growth and rising disposable incomes—household earnings going from ₹2,300 to ₹4,000—India’s middle class will soon outnumber the entire population of the US. Infrastructure like highways and airports will fuel this transformation,” he added.

## **Policy Advocacy: Infrastructure Status & GST Reform**

On the regulatory front, Sharma reiterated industry-wide demands for policy support.

“Hospitality needs to be granted infrastructure status. This will unlock investment and facilitate faster growth, especially in rural Bharat. It’s already recognized in the US and China—India must follow.”

He also called for an urgent revision of GST thresholds, which have not been updated since implementation.

“The ₹7,500 threshold is outdated, especially given rupee devaluation. Revisiting GST slabs is crucial for sector sustainability,” Sharma said.

## **Introducing Literary Escapes: Where Culture Meets Leisure**

Blending hospitality with culture, RHG has launched Literary Escapes in partnership with Simon & Schuster, the world’s second-largest book publisher.

“This initiative is for book lovers seeking soulful, nature-filled getaways. Literary Escapes will offer guests curated stays where they can unwind with books, in serene settings designed for reflection and discovery,” Sharma shared.