

Putting the Wow into Weddings



Sterling Aravalli Udaipur Lawn

As hotels become the preferred venue choices for weddings, the industry is certainly shaking things up.

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Hotels have learnt to adjust their operations to the requirements of a wedding function and be more flexible. And this is what is auguring well as hotels are increasingly becoming the first choice for weddings. Industry experts weigh in.

WED IN STYLE

Within the hospitality sector, the events business, especially weddings play a pivotal role. In 2023, this segment alone experienced a 30% growth, surpassing the pre-pandemic levels. Recent statistics about Indian weddings show that an estimated 20 lakh weddings will spend an average of Rs 1 crore on the event. Rising incomes have elevated the expectations of Indian couples, who increasingly desire luxurious, memorable weddings. "Another significant factor is the 'Wed in India' initiative, endorsed by our Prime Minister, which promotes destination weddings within the country. This initiative has encouraged couples to celebrate locally, boosting the trend of destination weddings at picturesque locations across India. As a result, popular destinations at a driv-



Nitin Srivastava, Director of Sales - Weddings, ZANA Luxury Resorts





The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas' wedding

able distance like Jim Corbett and Ranthambore from Delhi NCR and Udaipur from Jaipur and Gujarat are witnessing an uptick in hotel weddings, with venues embracing this demand," says Nitin Srivastava, Director of Sales - Weddings, ZANA Luxury Resorts.

GEARING UP

Hotels are pulling out all the stops to get ready for the wedding season. The Westin Resort and Spa Himalayas, for instance, offers a range of exclusive wedding packages designed for a luxurious and intimate experience. "With our buyout weddings, couples enjoy complete privacy and access to all venues on the property, ensuring an unforgettable celebration. To make a grand entrance, couples can opt for a helicopter landing on our Westin lawn, adding a touch of elegance. The stunning Himalayan valley and sunset



Rohit Chhokar, Director of Sales and Marketing, The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas



Vaishakh Surendran, General Manager, Lyfe Hotels Bhubaneswar



Owais Altaf Syed, Director, Empyrean Skyview Projects



Weddings at ZANA - A Luxury Escape, Dhikuli, Jim Corbett

backdrops serve as perfect settings for Jaimala, creating picturesque memories. We also provide 20 complimentary spa treatments for the bride and groom's intimate family, allowing them to relax and rejuvenate after the celebrations. Special room décor and thoughtfully curated gifts further enhance the couple's stay," says Rohit Chhokar, Director of Sales and Marketing, The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas. Vaishakh Surendran, General Manager, Lyfe Hotels Bhubaneswar, adds, "It is a well-known fact that demand for hotel weddings in India has continued to grow in 2024, driven by factors such as convenience, prestige, customization, rising incomes,

and evolving consumer preferences. Hotels across India are expecting a surge in bookings due to the wedding segment. Likewise, Lyfe Hotels Bhubaneswar is also gearing up for the wedding season by offering personalized, bespoke boutique weddings and festivities at our wide range of indoor and outdoor venues."

POPULARITY CHART

The rising popularity of hotel weddings can be attributed to the seamless blend of convenience, luxury, and sustainability they offer. More couples are embracing destination-style weddings, where every element, from the ceremony to accommodation can be beautifully curated in one location. "Skyview by Empyrean stands out with its combination of breathtaking natural beauty, sustainable practices, and world-class services, creating an immersive experience that reduces the need for travel and enhances the celebration. Our dedicated team ensures that every detail is handled with care, transforming your dream wedding into a reality with elegance and ease," says Owais Altaf Syed, Director, Empyrean Skyview Projects - A unit of FIL Industries Private Limited. Shekhar Sawant, General Manager, Heritage Village Resort and Spa, Manesar, adds, "We have introduced several initiatives tailored specifically for weddings. This includes a dedicated wedding coordinator to assist couples in planning their big day, customizable decor options, and exclusive access to our stunning outdoor venues. Additionally, we are offering wellness packages for bridal parties, including spa treatments and yoga sessions, to help them relax and enjoy the lead-up to the wedding."

HOTEL ADVANTAGE

There is a growing preference for hotel weddings due to the shift towards intimate and luxury celebrations, particularly post-pandemic. Hotels provide convenience by bundling services such as venues, catering, and event management



Skyview by Empyrean

under one roof, offering couples both ease and personalization. Additionally, the popularity of destination and micro-weddings has driven the trend towards booking exclusive hotel venues. Shangri-La hotels, especially in Delhi and Bengaluru, are preparing for the upcoming wedding season by relaunching key event spaces, such as newly transformed ballrooms, to create versatile and elegant venues for celebrations. The focus is on offering luxurious, bespoke services to attract couples seeking memorable experiences. Katerina Dixon, Assistant Vice President for Marketing (F&B) and Corporate Communications for MEIA region, Shangri-La Group, says, "Through Bandhan by Shangri-La, the brand is showcasing select properties to target Indian weddings, offering end-to-end services managed by specialists familiar with Indian traditions. Couples are matched with wedding experts for seamless planning, from pre-wedding events to receptions, ensuring tailored experiences across its global properties."



The Resort Mumbai

Shekhar Sawant, General Manager,
Heritage Village Resort and Spa, ManesarKaterina Dixon, Assistant Vice President
for Marketing (F&B) and Corporate
Communications for MEIA region, Shangri-
La GroupStephen D'souza, General Manager &
Associate Vice President, Chalet Cluster
Operations

Sayaji Kolhapur

PACKAGE DEAL

Another reason for the popularity of hotels as wedding venues is that most hotels offer comprehensive packages that cover the entire gamut of a big fat Indian wedding. Stephen D'souza, General Manager & Associate Vice President, Chalet Cluster Operations, says, "Our hotel offers personalized wedding packages designed to meet every couple's unique vision. From customized venue decorations to curated catering services, we work closely with our décor partners to provide exclusive themes and one-of-a-kind experiences. Our chefs also create bespoke culinary journeys, ensuring each wedding feast is an unforgettable experience." Mukesh Kumar Rakshit, General Manager, Sayaji Kolhapur, adds, "We have designed customized wedding packages catering to all communities in the city, including Marathi, Jain, Sindhi, and Marwari, to meet their specific needs. Our chef has introduced a new menu for the season, and we have partnered with renowned food vendors for specialty live counters."

"With our buyout weddings, couples enjoy complete privacy and access to all venues on the property. Couples can opt for a helicopter landing on our Westin lawn."
- Rohit Chhokar, The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas



Sterling Aravalli Udaipur poolside

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- Harinath M, Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd



Mukesh Kumar Rakshit, General Manager, Sayaji Kolhapur

Our décor vendors have upgraded their designs to reflect the latest trends. All these offerings are being promoted through our ‘Subh Vivah’ campaign.”

CUSTOM CUES

Another factor that is leading to the popularity of hotel weddings is their ability to customise experiences and ensure the wedding is as bespoke as possible. Harinath M, Senior VP of Marketing, Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd, says, “Our team at Sterling Aravalli Udaipur provides a range of customizable wedding packages, accommodating various budgets, themes, and preferences, including pre-wedding events, main ceremonies, and post-wedding brunches. Guests have the option of booking up the entire resort so that they can enjoy an exclusive wedding with maximum convenience and privacy. A dedicated staff member serves as a wedding coordinator, managing logistics like vendor coordination and last-minute changes to ensure smooth operations. Our customized packages include catering, décor, photography, entertainment, and logistics, appealing to clients seeking a seamless experience.” Ridhima Gandhi Puri, Director of Sales, Taj Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior, adds, “Our personalized wedding options are suitable to cater to different luxurious tastes and preferences along with a level of convenience that many couples seek. From customisable menus tailored to dietary and cultural preferences along with a range of indoor



Harinath M, Senior VP - Marketing, Sterling Holiday Resorts Ltd



Ridhima Gandhi Puri, Director of Sales, Taj Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior



Wedding at Niraamaya Retreats Surya Samudra, Kovalam



Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport wedding hall

and outdoor venue options, we aim to curate picture-perfect settings for every wedding function at the palace hotel.”

INTIMATE EXPERIENCES

With increased disposable income, couples are willing to invest more in creating unforgettable wedding experiences. Social media's influence has also played a significant role, as couples look to capture and share picture-perfect moments, which hotels are ideally suited to provide. Dhavalakeerthi, Senior Vice President (Marketing), Niraamaya Wellness Retreats, says, “There is nothing quite as mesmerizing as exchanging vows surrounded by some of the most scenic views, set against the famous Kovalam beach in Kerala. Niraamaya offers breathtaking locations and a complete package for tailor-made memories. Guests can choose a ceremo-

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- Irudaya Deepak, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore



Shangri-La cocktail event



Dhavalakeerthi, Sr Vice President (Marketing), Niraamaya Wellness Retreats



Philip Logan, Chief Operating Officer, Royal Orchid Hotels



Irudaya Deepak, Director of Business Development, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore



Amit Jain, General Manager, Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport

ny with traditional local rituals and decor or an elegant barefoot setting on the beach. Our wedding planner provides a range of celebrations, from discreet to opulent, with indulgent menus to match the occasion.”

TREND CHECK

Hotels provide beautiful, often customizable spaces that can accommodate both large and intimate ceremonies. Philip Logan, Chief Operating Officer, Royal Orchid Hotels says, “Many couples are opting for smaller, more intimate ceremonies with close family and friends, focusing on quality over quantity. There is a growing trend of destination weddings where couples choose scenic locales and hotels as their wedding venue, combining the wedding and honeymoon. Sustainable and eco-friendly weddings are becoming popular, with couples choosing biodegradable decor, local and organic food, and minimizing waste. Virtual streaming options for guests who cannot attend in person and high-tech AV setups for a seamless experience are in high demand.”

FOOD FILES

Food is an important part of the wedding festivities and hoteliers are clued into what works and what does not, even as they are able to up the ante with their culinary offerings. “Couples are moving away from traditional sit-down dinners and embracing more interactive and fun dining experiences, such as live cooking stations, craft cocktail bars, and dessert stations,” says Irudaya Deepak, Director of Business Development, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore. Amit Jain, General Manager, Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport, adds, “We are focusing on our strength of diverse food offerings for a wedding function. Our team of culinary artists are ready to provide exceptional cuisine experience whether Indian or international. Great food coupled with newly built rooms and a welcoming service approach will make sure that all guests can enjoy a memorable wedding function experience.” 