

Branded Hotels See Room for Growth at Religious Spots

Shift in traveller profiles and rising demand for good quality accommodation key driving factors for the industry

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New Delhi: Hotel chains are ramping up their focus on religious destinations with significant additions in room supply pipelines.

With a shift in traveller profiles and rising demand for good quality accommodation, branded hotel chains are increasingly recognising the potential and expanding their presence in this segment, said Mandeep S Lamba, president and chief executive (South Asia) at hospitality advisory services provider HVS Anarock.

"As of early 2024, there were approximately 5,700 branded hotel keys across major religious destinations, with an additional 4,700 keys expected to be added over the next four to five years," he said.

"Notably, in the calendar year 2024 alone, of the over 45,000 branded

keys signed, nearly 18% were in religious destinations, taking the total pipeline for these locations to a significantly higher number," he added. In an interview with ET this week, Indian Hotels Company managing director and CEO Puneet Chhatwal said the chain is ramping up its focus on spiritual and religious destinations through a "multi brand strategy", with plans to open 2,800 rooms across brands in locations such as Ayodhya, Hampi, Vrindavan, Ujjain, Prayagraj as well as Makkah in the next three to five years.

Nikhil Sharma, MD and area senior vice president, South

Asia at the Radisson Hotel Group, said the chain is doubling down in Varanasi, Katra, Amritsar and Nasik given the demand in these markets and would be opening new hotels in Ujjain, Prayagraj, Guruvayur and Puri, adding more than 1,000 rooms.

"The pipeline in spiritual destinations is stronger than the previous year," Sharma said. "Currently, we have 10 operational properties in

spiritual destinations like Ayodhya (first branded hotel to open before the Ram Mandir opening), Varanasi, Amritsar, Vrindavan, Katra, Nashik, Thrissur and Pondicherry (Auroville) with over 1,300 operational rooms," he said.

Oyo said this month that it will add 500 hotels at major religious centres to support the government's programmes to boost spiritual tourism in India. The expansion

will focus on popular pilgrimage destinations such as Ayodhya, Varanasi, Prayagraj, Puri, Haridwar, Mathura, Vrindavan, Amritsar, Ujjain, Ajmer, Nasik and Tirupati. The company said it plans to add more than 150 hotels in Ayodhya, making it the "focal point of the expansion" as demand for quality accommodation is growing after the opening of the Ram Temple last year. Pilgrimage destinations accounted for more than 10% of MakeMyTrip's total room night bookings in quarter-three of financial year 2025. The company said on Thursday that to simplify the identification of the stay, MakeMyTrip is introducing 'Loved by Devotees', a curated collection of over 450 hotels and homestays across 26 spiritual destinations.

Lamba of HVS Anarock said several cities are at the forefront of this expansion.



VARANI SAHU