

# STAYCATION AS A MARKETING TOOL FOR SURVIVAL POST COVID-19 IN FIVE STAR HOTELS IN PUNE CITY

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## Abstract

Vacations are periods of enjoyment, relaxation, travelling, holidaying and provide us a break from our daily routine. Tourism is a need, which we fulfill either domestically or internationally. This phenomenon has taken a severe plunge and is crippled since the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the world since December 2019. The hospitality and tourism industry stares at severe recession in the near future. All industries affiliated to the hospitality industry especially the hotels have to reinvent themselves to survive and sustain this period created due to this unprecedented situation. Due to the nature of the pandemic the traveler movement has been totally stopped. Hotels grapple with empty, unsold rooms and business is barely at 15% occupancy. The main product is the hotel room and due to its highly perishable nature, hotels are losing business on irreversible basis. This calls for strategies to make up for lost time, thinking out of the box and promote a full proof recovery plan.

Staycations concept is likely one that would take centre stage in today's scenario and few months to follow. The lockdown imposed lot of challenges especially to people who see travel as their need. Eventually the original concept of travel or recreation will take time to make a comeback and will need to change according to the conditions that prevail in the present day and near future. Staycations got recognized globally and got prominence in the financial crisis and economic meltdown that troubled the United States of America in the year 2008. As the economy nose-dived, people started to slow down their spending leading to vacations getting curbed. This gives rise to the idea of a person taking part in activities within his locality or city. The focus moved from taking expensive vacations to spend quality time with one's family, dining out, shopping or discovering your city more than ever before.

Many hotels used this concept to promote and liven up their weekend business of rooms. The concept popularized the need to take a break from the mundane routine without moving too far away from home. Hotels packaged these deals thoughtfully which includes the stay at the hotel, facilities to be enjoyed within the hotel like the spa. The staycations is made lucrative by adding food trails, nature walks, heritage walks or visits to museums within one's own city. Staycations may be one of the viable ways for hotels to open their facilities under caution with safety and security of the guest on top of the list. This concept has got impetus during and posts COVID-19 times. Probability of people traveling from outside is quite bleak and hotels would want to sell their rooms and facilities to people who are available in the city itself. Though caution has to be exercised through new norms like social distancing, stringent protocols of health and hygiene, this type of business can be explored and promoted taking the guests into confidence. This concept also would put focus on domestic and localized tourism. In short, Staycations are relevant as travel is not happening as it used to be and tapping of the local segment of guests may just save the day for the hotels to revive themselves. This may be a prominent trend in times to come giving guests a customized option to enjoy themselves surely but safely.

**Key words:** Staycations, COVID-19, Marketing tool, Five-star hotels.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been responsible to disable the world economy, debilitate organizations, create massive unemployment and put a knife in the hearts of the businesses worldwide. This is also true in the case of the Hospitality and Tourism industries. Hotels have spent their time in despair through the entire lockdown period and are still struggling to come to terms with the recent pandemic. Grave repercussions will continue for the months to come till a vaccine for this deadly virus comes into existence.

Hotels in India, foresee the next year to be tough for business and revenue earning to come back to normal. Hoteliers assess that the industry has been put through three phases which are to survive, to revive and ultimately thrive. With the unlocking of the restrictions in phases the hotel industry will make a comeback with a big change in the way it will function in the future (Biswas, 2020) Resilience and Optimism would be the next key words for hoteliers to get back to the original strength through strategies aimed particularly at sustaining their businesses. The new 'Normal' is an eye opener which will include stricter hygiene and sanitation protocols, deeper cleanliness outlook, enhanced customer engagement practices, need for social distancing, contactless service and an elevated role of technology.

As the hotel industry focus goes from touch points to contactless interactions, the entire guest experience is about to be altered severely. In wake of the pandemic, the local authorities who have imposed several restrictions have led to a catastrophic result on the sustenance of small ancillary businesses related to the hospitality industry. On the other hand, Hotel chains have been revenue strapped, bear high maintenance costs, have reduced operational capacity and have staff attrition issues to deal with.

The guest – host relationship will play a major role going forward and it is necessary for hotels to build trust and understanding and business both. This understanding will happen when hotels are vocal through social and print media about what efforts they are taking to make the hotel a safe haven.

Large chains of hotels have to deal with more inventory of empty rooms which being a perishable commodity has resulted in hotels being compelled to rethink their businesses and find ways to keep up the business from drowning during this unfortunate phase.

The hotel industry business depends upon situation of airlines and travel making it a challenge for all types of segments like Leisure, Heritage, Business, Niche and Adventure hospitality. Having said that, hotels have put their best foot forward to tackle the issues and be ready to welcome guests with a mask, a Namaste and a temperature check to begin with.

Staycations got introduced to the world in the year 2008 in the United States of America which was a result of global financial leading to the economy slowed down so did the spending of the people. Vacations typically expect people to travel and during the pandemic time, this phenomenon got curbed. The idea of Staycations rose during this time. A staycation is when a person stays in his/her city of residence and takes part in activities within his/her locality or city. A staycation includes several activities which are typical like driving around, shopping, watching movies, catching up with hobbies, pursuing an art. The main focus of a staycation is to spend quality time with one's own family and rejuvenate.

Earlier due to the global economic crisis in 2008, affordability was an issue and people could not spend on vacations. When one considers a vacation, one chooses a destination away from one's place of residence as it would take him/her away from the mundane and daily routine to rejuvenate. Holidays need us to spend money on accommodation, tickets, sightseeing which may be difficult due to scarcity of money. The staycation was a way to compensate for that holiday. Other than that it can be exercised when there is lack of time to take a fully fledged holiday, ideal for people who are scared of flying / seaways or people who do not like travel at all. Staycation planning needs certain rules to be kept in mind like, a time frame has to be set; a schedule of how you plan to spend the days has to be made while aiming to get a sense of a vacation in the background to make it a success. A well thought out staycation can be as satisfying as a vacation.

Seeing how this concept can be cleverly worked out for the revival of their business hotels have started promoting the Staycations, Workcations and Drivcations to the probable guests who are open to venture out of their homes. Workcations are for professionals who will get all the facilities of an office which is a welcome change for many who have been working from home since the lockdown. Hotels are opening their spaces for people to conduct meetings for smaller number groups.

(Singh, 2020) Slow travel is the type of travel trending in the travel world. The emphasis is on a slow pace of holiday which will give people time to heal from this pandemic, to see life more closely, take leisurely breaks every now and then and concentrating on each aspect of your itinerary unhurriedly. Quality over quantity is the rule.

Just before the pandemic hit the world, hotels used this concept to increase their weekend business for room sale. Food and beverage earns more revenue for the hotel on weekends whereas the rooms earn more money on weekdays. To make all days productive hotels also give offers on Staycations to earn money from both the areas simultaneously.

(Tullis, 2020), gives a brief yet interesting history of staycations in five different eras where he states that in 10,000 years B.C., the hunter gatherers were on a perpetual holiday to gather food & water and moved from place to place in search of these. The nomadic life was all they knew.

Then 7,000-5,000 years B.C. development started taking place after man learnt domesticate animals and grow crops. More temperate land was available at the end of the Ice Age. This was the shift or change from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic Age and that was the birth of the staycation. People stopped roaming in need of food to build new shelters and settled there.

Next came the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which was the real highlight of the staycation when medieval farmers had 8 to 10 weeks of leisure time at their disposal. Due to no means of transport most people spent their time in their village and spending time in that proximity. With problems such as Plague pandemic, Wars, work of harvesting and sowing throughout the year an average farmer had a significant time for him to enjoy. Possibly the only option he had was a staycation which he spent with seasonal celebrations and in and around his village.

In 1790, Xavier de Maistre wrote a book called 'A Journey Around My Room', which was a highly philosophical humorous piece which talks about the imagination while being confined to one room. He was confined to his room due to being under house arrest. He sat in that room to imagine it as was a great and exotic land. This book went on to be a highly acclaimed and still is in print till date. His experience in this room and imagining what he could do, can be treated as an extreme example of a staycation.

In 2002, Alain de Bottom came out with another thought provoking amusing book 'The Art of Travel' where he talks about the importance of the Vacation as well as the staycation. He also mention Xavier de Maistre's work and shares his own experience of travelling which in his opinion is never the same as he imagines it and this could be the case with most people who worry about a lot of things back home while being on a vacation.

The year, 2030 is a time of the future, and ten years going forward, Manyard Kenyes who is an economist has predicted that most advanced societies will have more time for leisure than work time allowing time for both Vacations and Staycations. And if the theory, he proposed is true then we would have a lot to plan to spend our leisure time this way or that way.

Staycations have existed long enough for us to understand their importance, which in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic are most relevant and a smart way to turn the wary customer hotel bound to enjoy them.

Thus, the staycation in a nutshell can be explained as a unique, qualitative way in which the local residents rediscover their own city at a leisurely pace with the help of local hospitality industry which is trying to revive, survive and thrive.

### **Objectives of the study:-**

- 1) To study the awareness of staycation concept in local population in Pune.
- 2) To examine the staycation as a viable survival option for five star hotels in Pune city post Covid-19.
- 3) To identify the motive of guests to go on staycations.

### **Need of the study:**

This exploratory study aims to examine the viability of Staycations as an option to revive the business pertaining to rooms, how hotels plan to market this concept further and would the locals of Pune city open to try out this type of travel substitute.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Five star hotels in Pune city are offering staycations as survival strategy during and post pandemic times

H2 : Staycations are preferred by customers as a way to relax and rejuvenate.

### **Literature Review**

The Hotel Industry is gradually limping back to business after 3 months of lockdown. Mr. Dilip Datwani, former President of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India says that easing of restrictions has given hospitality firms a chance to easy liquidity and earns guest confidence back. With customers who are cautious with money, now would focus on good deals like no fee for cancellations or amendments. According to Mr. Prashant Kumar, VP Accor Plus India and South Asia opines that upgrades as per availability, without any extra fee, prepaid vouchers are also a plus for members who can be used domestically as well as internationally. Parameters like flexible planning, savings, strict safety protocols will be the highlights in guest decision to book. Local guests will be encouraged to step out and book staycation. Take away options for food and beverages are being encouraged with extra safety. (Tewari, 2020) Rubin Cherien, General Manager Novotel Hyderabad Airport says that Airport hotels have been lucky to see increased occupancy levels due to landing of flights with passengers. Airport hotels were partially shut due to their proximity to the airport and had international guests unable to travel back to country of origin. Business has been limping back through weekend leisure guests / Staycations, MICE, Crew and long staying guests. Team members of the hotel as well as the guests were engaged in many activities which was a big hit with all especially through the period of the lockdown. Surprising jump in Room occupancy and F&B sale was observed on every weekend where locals are checking in and venturing out in the city. Indian Government's repatriation initiative Vande Bharat Mission is bringing good business especially for transit properties. (Ray, 2020)

Functioning according to Sunil Narang, General Manager of The Four Seasons, Mumbai has taken a new meaning in Mumbai being at the centre of COVID-19 pandemic. Hotels are working on reducing the effects of lockdown by

providing confidence and assurance of guests by typing up with international quality healthcare experts. His hotel has appointed a Hygiene Manager at the property for supervising all COVID related issues. The hotels focus is to work with the local government as the cases are increasing every day. Food and Beverage will be on by offering to guests full dining experiences at their home through deliveries and virtual experience for guests. His hotel too is offering staycations option through the offer titled "Restart your Time" which include plethora of packages. Hotels are looking at letting out space for work and office space. (Ray, 2020)

WE WILL BE EXPECTING MORE DOMESTIC TRAVELERS SAYS DEVENDRA BHARMA WHO IS EVP AT THE OBEROI GROUP SPOKE ABOUT BUSINESS IN THE POST PANDEMIC WORLD AND OPENING UP FOR BUSINESS IN MUMBAI. DOMESTIC TRAVELERS WILL BE LOOKED UPON WITH RENEWED RESPECT AND INTEREST AS THEY WOULD BE THE ONES TO BRING BUSINESS IN THE POST PANDEMIC WORLD. A STAYCATION IS A GREAT OPTION WITHOUT TRAVELLING OUTSIDE SOLACE. SMALLER MEETING AND INTIMATE EVENTS WILL MAKE A COMEBACK. THE GROUP HAS 'WEEKEND ESCAPES' PACKAGES AND 'STAYCATION EXPERIENCES' ACROSS THE OBEROI, MUMBAI; TRIDENT, NARIMAN POINT AND TRIDENT, BANDRA KURLA FOR THEIR GUESTS FOR WHOLESOME RELAXATION AND SOLACE.

As rules of the new normal are being followed hotel are leaving no stone unturned to resurrect themselves. This is the time to look at new possibilities in food and beverage areas and supply chain management says. Virtual tours and site inspection for guests to see the hotel are being designed. Recovery is slated to be slow and efforts to rejuvenate MICE and convention business are being looked into. [Ravi Rajpal](#), Owner, Ramathra Fort, Sapotra, Dist. [Karauli](#), Rajasthan quoted seamless relationship with guests have been planned through Staycations which bring flexible booking and discounted rates. Cost reduction will also a focus area of hotels post pandemic. (Singh, 2020) The pandemic has made us think out of the box says Darshan Dudhoria, Co-Owner, Bari Kothi, Murshidabad, informed [Ravi Rajpal](#), Owner, Ramathra Fort, Sapotra, Dist. [Karauli](#), Rajasthan. Slow travel is the buzz word making rounds where the emphasis is on a slow leisurely quality based staycation. This type of holiday will help people heal from this like jolting pandemic which is far from over. The staycation itinerary would include a relaxed look and inclusion of cuisine, culture and heritage walks etc. Hotels are encouraging use of their premises for Workcations as people are bored to work from home. Staycation with flexi policies of date change and cancellations, packages inclusive of all meals, hi-tea complementary, free WI-FI, guided nature walk and taking a COVID-19 RT PCR test at home before commencing to go to the resort are being offered inclusive of the package. (Singh, 2020)

The Radisson Sohna Road recently introduced a 'LuxeWheels' offer where guests travel to their vacation in a custom fitted [trailer](#) with all modern amenities, to begin their post COVID-19 vacation right from their home. As the tagline 'Epitome of Laid-Back Luxury' it is a unique way to get back into business has been introduced by Radisson in form of a 5 star trailer which is like a room with a fine dining restaurant and luxury vehicle. Gaurav Mehta, General Manager of the hotel says it is ideal for short holidays and part of staycation. A family of 4-5 people can travel or want to use it as a weekend getaway. The trailer comes with a chauffeur, a chef and butler and can be hired to travel within 50km radius from the hotel. Vikas Ahluwalia, General Manager and National Head, Zone by The Park talks about the packages offered by the group for Staycations or Holistays or Daycations stating that domestic travel has picked up compared to outbound travel. Intercity and short haul trips are the trend and leisure travelers are expected to make most of this option through Staycations. Workcations are also picking up where food is offered with the stay and free WI-FI. Interestingly the hotel is generating additional revenue through food and beverage sale. (Singh, 2020) Economic Times Hospitality World (2020), The Hilton group has reopened its Shilim retreat and spa property near Pune. The premium eco wellness property has assured guests of safety, hygiene protocols are in place. They can use this staycation to digitally detox, enjoy the beautiful outdoors and rejuvenate mind some and body. The local produce and ingredients are used, sourced from organic farms of Shilim which are close by to the property. Guests can indulge in recreational activities such as Nature Walks, treks and cooking workshops to name a few helping the safety at the core of all these activities as top priority.

## **Research Methodology**

Primary Data was collected from two groups of respondents with the help of a questionnaire. The researchers have used random sampling method and shared the questionnaire with 310 respondents / local residents of Pune city for their views on the said topic. 306 responses have been received and recorded. The other set of respondents were Hoteliers working in Sales and marketing department and revenue managers. This group was briefed through a pilot study and was ready to fill in the questionnaire. The researchers were able to analyze the following data collected from both groups of selected respondents.

## **Data Analysis & interpretation**

### **A. Customers view**

Out of the 306 respondents 170 people (55.7%) answered this question in affirmative which means people are aware of the term Staycation whereas remaining 136 people have heard the word Staycation for the first time. (44.3%). The data suggests that 218 people (79%) of the respondents have not checked into a five star hotel in the city of residence for a stay although there are 88 people (29%) who have actually checked-in to avail of a Staycation offer.

The data collected gives an insight about 203 people (66.3%) out of the respondents have not staycated within the city limits other than a star hotel. The obvious reason being that they have homes in the same city. Remaining 103 people (33.9%) staycated within city limits or within drivable distance of the city. The data suggests that 93 respondents (30.3%) answered that they would give staycation preference over a vacation clearly indicates that the people are ready to give this concept a try or would like to pursue this option. Out of the total of 306 responses, 151 respondents (49.3%) seemed undecided and it can be concluded that they may be inclined to try this option. 62 respondents answered saying they would not prefer a staycation over their vacation.

240 of the respondents (78.2%) are not aware of such a option available for staycation and 66 of the respondents were aware of the concept. Survey suggests that respondents in their opinion 56% said it is most preferred by middle aged people followed by 30.6% Youngsters and 13.4% senior citizens. 44% of the respondents say yes to gift a staycation, followed by 43% who say they may gift it and 13% said they would not consider it as a gifting option. 74% of the respondents said they would prefer a staycation as an option during long weekends or public holidays and 25.1% said they would not prefer to use the same. 75.6% of the respondents agreed that a staycation would be a unique way to discover their own city and 24.4 % respondents disagreed. 90.2% respondents said they would enjoy activities as a part of the staycation where as 9.8% said they would not. 72% of the respondents will staycate for a longer duration if they get a discount whereas 28% of the respondents denied. 42.3% respondents said they would maybe consider the option of a staycation during new years where as 30.3% respondents said they would and 27.4% respondents said they would not consider it. 69.9% of respondents said they would choose relaxation as the purpose of visit to a 5 star hotel, 9.8% respondents said celebration, 9.2% said the purpose would be wellness and spa, and 8.5% said it would be bleisure. 2.9% respondents said that nightclub would be the purpose. 54.1% of respondents said they would like to enjoy the Staycation with family, 22.2% of respondents who answered this question said Spouse, 21.9% said friends and 2% of the people gave relatives as their option.

## **B. Hotels' view**

87.5% of the respondents said they have Staycation package at their hotel and 12.5% do not have this option.

87.5% of the respondents said their hotels offer special rates and 12.5% said they do not have this option. Maximum of the respondents at 75% said their hotel does not target any specific age group for selling a Staycation whereas 16.7% said they target millennials and 8.3% said middle age was their target group. The answers were varied with weekends / long weekends being the given slightly more percentage of hoteliers saying Staycation business is preferred by guests on weekends. Few were of the view that all days were open to sell Staycations. Others said it would be dependent on the guests' needs. 83.3% of respondents said hotels get Staycationing guests on long weekends and 16.3% said they did not guests for Staycation purpose on those days.

Common inclusions are complimentary Breakfast, one meal, free Wi-Fi, Health club used for free, upgrades of rooms, free food and drinks for kids below 10 years of age, laundry and F&B discount is provided in the Staycation package. 33.3% of respondents said they get business during off season, followed by weekend business. Some hotels say they accept Staycation business even in the peak season. Maximum hotels promote their Staycation packages through online promotion, then through their brand loyalty programmes, followed by print media, OTA's etc. Promoting Staycations through their social media handles aimed at locals, loyalty programmes, offering discounts, highlighting safety protocols, active sales teams, print media etc. 95.8% respondents answered this question in the affirmative saying Staycation promotion will help hotels to earn revenue post COVID -19 and 4.2 % disagreed to say it will not help to earn revenue. 79.2% of the respondents said they get regular guests to staycate to earn loyalty points where as 20.8% said they do not guests for the same. 75% of the respondents said corporate companies send their employees to staycate and enjoy through Staycation offers where as 25% said they do not avail this facility for the same. 70.8% of the respondents said that their hotel would get 70.85 business for New Year whereas 29.2% respondents denied that it would. Purpose of visit of Staycation according to the respondents was weekend getaway at 70.8%, Celebration at 16.7% and 12.5 for bleisure.

## **Hypotheses Testing**

**H0: Five star hotels in Pune city are offering staycations but not as a survival strategy post COVID -19 pandemic.**

**H1: Five star hotels in Pune city are offering staycations as survival strategy post COVID -19 pandemic.**

To find out whether Five star hotels in Pune city are offering staycations as survival strategy post COVID-19. T –test was the tool used to test this hypothesis. It will help to check whether Staycation is a viable survival strategy used by five star hotels in Pune city .

T-test

Difference Scores Calculations

Mean: -1.46

$\mu = 0$

$S^2 = SS/df = 95.96/(24-1) = 4.17$

$S^2M = S^2/N = 4.17/24 = 0.17$

$SM = \sqrt{S^2M} = \sqrt{0.17} = 0.42$

T-value Calculation

$t = (M - \mu)/SM = (-1.46 - 0)/0.42 = -3.5$

The value of t is -3.49772. The value of p is .00194. The result is significant at  $p < .05$ .

It can be seen from the test results that the calculated p –value (.00194) is less than tabulated value of 0.05. Hence the null hypotheses is rejected and the alternate hypotheses (H1) has been accepted . It can be further concluded that **five star hotels in Pune city are offering staycations as survival strategy post COVID -19 pandemic.**

**H0 : Staycations are preferred by customers as a way to experience wellness.**

**H2 : Staycations are preferred by customers as a way to relax and rejuvenate.**

To find out whether staycations are preferred by customers as a way to relax and rejuvenate. The tool used to test this hypothesis was analysis of variance (ANOVA). It will help to check the preference of customers related to the motive behind choosing Staycation.

Summary of Data					
	Treatments				
	1	2	3	4	Total
N	308	308	308	308	1193
$\sum X$	1271	819	803	806	3699
Mean	4.2508	2.7391	2.6856	2.723	3.101
$\sum X^2$	5831	2547	2559	2484	13421
Std.Dev.	1.1987	1.0094	1.1621	0.9903	1.2797
Result Details					
Source	SS	df	MS		

Between-treatments	528.3582	3	176.1194	$F = 147.09902$
Within-treatments	1423.5714	1189	1.1973	
Total	1951.9296	1192		

The f-ratio value is 147.09902. The p-value is  $< .00001$ . The result is significant at  $p < .05$ .

It can be seen from the test results that the calculated p –value (.00001) is less than tabulated value of 0.05. Hence the null hypotheses is rejected and the alternate hypotheses (H2) has been accepted . It can be further concluded that **staycations are preferred by customers as a way to relax and rejuvenate**

### **Findings and Observations**

The primary data collected through the customer questionnaire suggests that 44.5% of the respondents need to be exposed to the Staycation option for it to be used by them. Hotels need to sell this concept to general public through social and print media for its awareness, to be sold. 78.4% of the locals of Pune city responded saying they are not aware that hotels in their own city of residence sell such packages. This needs attention from the hotels because if an offer is not known it's unlikely to be sold in spite of a market being available but not tapped.

87.5% Hoteliers respondents in Pune city said they have the option of Staycations to offer which gives the local population a wide choice of selecting the best according to their needs.

Earlier pre COVID-19 times, the hotels usually communicated about these Staycation offers mostly to regular guests or brand loyalty members through emails and now need to think how they can take this forward to local residents or to people who can drive to the property to experience this type of break especially in and post COVID-19 times. The hotels should take the fact that local residents are bored at home, cannot travel too far and are looking at a way to unwind.

There is a large segment of local population to whom a Staycation can be sold as an experience which gives them a chance to stay at a star hotel for relaxation, wellness etc which they might not do otherwise in normal circumstances. But due to severe restrictions on travel the idea of staying close by to home and have a experiential mini vacation could seem novel if marketed well by hotels.

66.3% of the respondents have not staycated \in a hotel, the obvious reason being that they have homes in the same city. The interpretation of the outcome suggests that people have weekend homes, farm houses, memberships of clubs within driving distance of their residence and they would go to staycate there. The other major cause being that this idea is known unexplored and needs to be marketed aggressively to the segment for which it is aimed.

49.3% of the respondents said they were most likely to consider staycation option in these pandemic times as travel has become expensive, risky and increasingly hectic. It is less likely for people to travel in absence of a vaccine .So if they know this option they can use it.

When asked for their opinion about the age group suitable for availing staycation at large; customer respondents said that the middle age demographic segment would see the Staycation option as Relaxation and would be an age group to make most of it. They would be able to afford it and be more open to such an idea and see it as an experience. Incidentally, hoteliers say that they do not aim to sell these offers to a particular age group and keep it open to all.

Viewing staycation as a gifting option is acceptable to 43.8% respondents who say they may consider gifting it as unique and memorable experience. An all paid star hotel staycation gift is a good option for any age group.

Earlier (pre-pandemic times) hotels were promoting staycations on weekends and long weekends as a tool to earn revenue. This was primarily due to the fact that room sale is considerably less compared to Food & Beverage sale on weekends. Rooms are a perishable commodity and any sale was welcome. Long weekends, public holidays and regular weekends are busy days for travel outside the city and 74.8% respondents feel that they would be open to a staycation to avoid the traffic and escape travel. Feedback from hotels suggest the same that majority of staycation business is seen over these days but now post COVID -19 times they are welcome to business on weekdays as well as when guest demand for staycation rises.71.8% of the respondents are willing to stay for a longer duration if the hotels are ready to give a good discount. When asked about whether they wished to consider this option for the coming New Year 42.5% answered in the affirmative. Hotels need to put more efforts in marketing this concept again a month before New Year to sustain this idea.

Staycations are packed attractively by hotels to sell and include a lot of indoor and outdoor activities. 75.5% of the respondents said it would be a unique way to rediscover their city. The outdoor activities are a little restricted for now and hotels are making sure that all indoor safety and hygiene protocols are being followed. 90.2% of the respondents said that they would enjoy these activities as it gives them a break and opportunity to unwind from routine.

Hotels in Pune are now offering lucrative deals which include Stay, Free WI-FI, discounts on laundry services, Wellness and Food & Beverage, Upgrades, flexible check-in checkout timings, no fees levied for cancellations or amendments in bookings, complimentary city transfers etc. to guests as a part of staycation offers. Earlier such offers were sold to regular or repeat guests along with brand loyalty members of the hotel. Post COVID -19 the hotels need to aggressively market it to corporate sector, general local residents, solo travelers and families. Hotels are promoting Staycations through social media handles, online promotion and use local print media more to attract locals. Suitable advertisements also can promote this concept and pledging the aspect to hygiene and cleanliness through Safe Stays. Winning customer confidence is the key.

95.8% Hotelier respondents are certain that staycation promotion will bring them benefit them as guests would be likely to check-in to gain this unique experience which is right in their city and comes with all safety tags and promises.

69.9% of the respondents said that they would go to staycate with the purpose of relaxation as their prime reason as they will be in the same city and see that as an unforgettable experience. 55% further went on to say that they would like to enjoy this staycation with family as they can spend quality time with their dear ones which indeed is the central idea of a staycation.

### **Limitations**

1. The study was limited to 5 star hotels only.
2. No financial data has been included in this study.
3. The study is relevant to Pune city only.

### **Conclusion**

In retrospect, Staycations are a dependable option to earn revenue. This concept could have been developed and marketed better by hotels in pre pandemic times to reach the common local guests who are an important segment for this marketing tool to be useful. Staycations are strong area of business which hotels are focusing on now. If this concentration and these efforts by hotels on Staycations would have been prior to the pandemic the result would have been an increased number of footfalls in a much more effective manner post COVID-19.

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