

perspective

the buzz

The New York Times



1 With all the complaints about escalating fees that travellers have to pay, another pricing trend is on the rise that some customers might actually like: paid upgrades. Hotels, airlines and car rentals are promoting the chance to upgrade your room, seat or wheels for a price that is often less than you would have paid if you had reserved that business-class ticket or hotel suite in the first place. Usually, these offers are presented at check-in, but sometimes the upselling begins just after you've booked.

2 theguardian

Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation will be split in half as the mogul hopes to build two new empires out of his vast portfolio of assets. One for entertainments, the other for publishing in what is likely to prove the octogenarian's final major corporate move.

3 DAWN

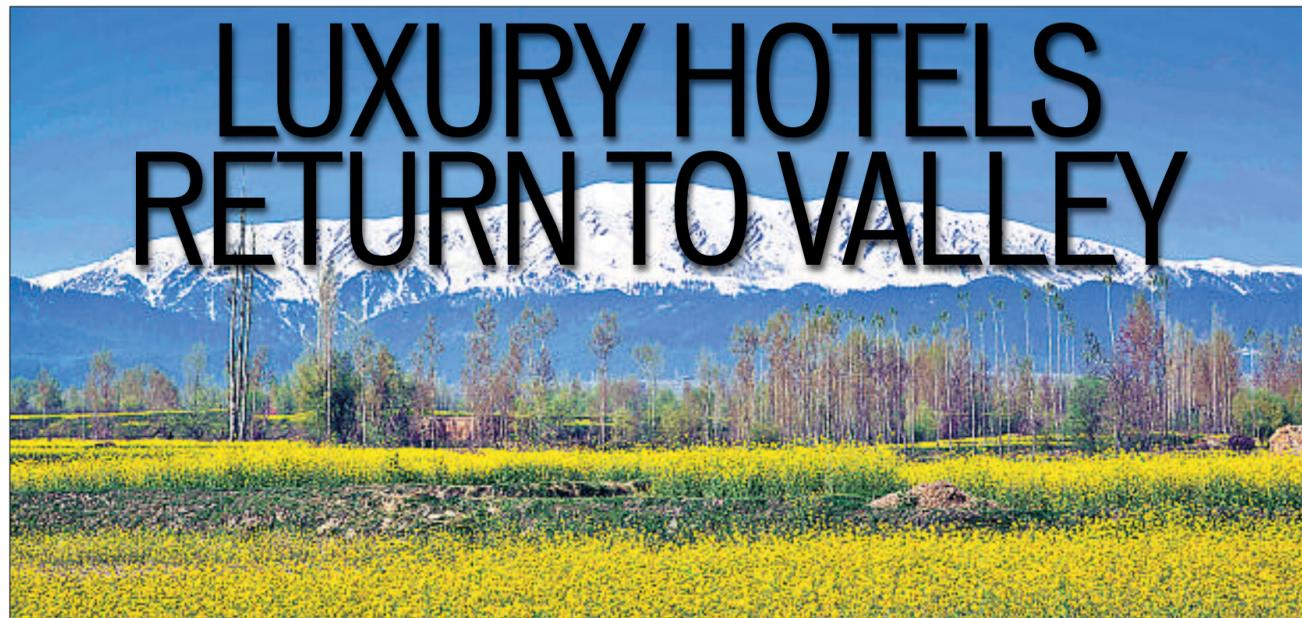
June 12 was Day against Child Labour. It is a shame that we still have to observe such a day. But we must if we have to make our society less insensitive towards children. Though no survey of the sort has been conducted the answers are obvious. Pay is low. They do not protest. Above all, they have no protection.

big picture

A CLOSE LOOK AT ISSUES THAT MATTER

comment

LUXURY HOTELS RETURN TO VALLEY



RESURGENCE Local flourish, entrepreneurial spirit and need to return home are bringing back high-end properties to Kashmir

■ Not bad to wake up to these views (above); The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, Gulmarg OFFICIAL PHOTOS

Sheikh Qayoom

Like a phoenix risen from the ashes, Kashmir has once again got a five-star luxury resort two decades after the only such property in the Valley closed down due to militancy-related issues.

It's a sign of increasing normalcy in a state that has seen a bruising insurgency that only recently has shown signs of abating.

With the beginning of the separatist violence, the state's only five-star heritage hotel, the Oberoi Hotel, functioning in the palace of the erstwhile Dogra maharajas in Srinagar was closed in early 1990s. Other hotels in Srinagar were also either closed or converted into makeshift barracks of the security forces.

The Taj and the Lalit have reopened but they are not five-star hotels.

LOCAL SERVINGS

Spread over seven acres of land amid majestic pine trees over a terraced mountain slope in this ski-lovers' paradise, 50km from summer capital Srinagar, the best part about the 85-room Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa is that 70% of its



staff are locals. Little wonder that its opening season occupancy is a whopping 95%. "It is a challenge to get quality staff and retain them because my competitors at the moment are good resorts both in the country and outside," said Alex Koshy, the resort's general manager.

He said he is delighted at the way things are shaping up at the resort. "For a hotel, reaching 95% occupancy in its first season is an achievement. This standard has to be maintained," Koshy added. The resort, which has some 180 staffers including managers, chefs, waiters, bell boys and security, is owned by Umar Tramboos, who is also its CEO. The Tramboos are a prominent business family of the Valley.

"I have been very particular that the majority of the staff must be from Jammu and Kashmir. You cannot claim Kashmiri hospitality unless the hosts are Kashmiris. Seventy per cent of our staff is from the state," Koshy said.

Asked whether the locals, with little exposure to international standards, are performing well, he said: "Many trained and talented locals are coming back. My chief engineer came back from the Middle East, my front office manager came back from Delhi, my HRD manager came back from Bangalore."

NOT JUST THE VIEWS

Koshy said the local Wazwan cuisine is in big demand at the resort. "We mostly serve the Wazwan to our guests in copper plates known as the 'tramis' with an option of eating in Kashmiri style sitting on the ground or at a table."



"I agree that Wazwan made outside the Valley would definitely not taste the same. You see water and Kashmiri spices make a lot of difference to the taste of this traditional cuisine", executive chef Vivek Kapoor said. Khyber has a mini movie theatre — the Den — that accommodates 15 viewers.

The Igloo is ideal for children to hang-out and to play table tennis and board games, among others. Chaikash, the tea lounge, offers breathtaking views of the Affarwat Peaks and of Gulmarg. Guests are spoilt for choice, what 25 varieties of tea are on offer. The resort's hookah and cigar lounge, the Calabash has some of the World best cigars and flavoured hookahs. The Nouf, one flight up from the lobby is a covered deck with fascinating views in all directions.

"If you star gaze at night or want to catch the Sun's rays by day, just doze or party Nouf is the place for you," said

Waseem Raja, the front office manager.

Raja was previously with Marriott International. "Apart from this, we will have a Presidential Suite with four bedrooms," Raja added. The resort has high-end state-of-the-art facilities while the basic architecture. The resort is in the final stages of starting its spa, which has a gym and separate swimming pools for children and adults. "The spa would also have a steam sauna, a saloon and a massage centre to be run by a professional company," Raja said.

He said he was sure the Khyber would never be short of guests who have the spending power to stay here. "Gulmarg has always been a high-end destination as a ski resort. We have the world's highest golf course here which has never been short of golfers. The Khyber is in fact Kashmir's hospitality history-in-the-making and I am proud to be part of it", Raja said.

Getting a leg up

'Hairy stockings' may help keep molesters at bay but the firm smack of the law is still the best bet

ourtake

For as long as we can remember we have been groping for answers to deal with gropers. And nowhere more so than in India. The classical response of a stinging slap in the face would be appropriate but such is the thick skin of Indian men that they will continue their depredations or slap the offender back. So, more drastic steps have to be taken to fend off these wandering hands. Help comes from a Chinese micro-blogging site which informs us that some bright spark has come up with hairy stockings as a means of warding off lecherous advances. The stockings which leave the feet hairy; is designed to confuse the offender of the gender of the victim. But will this work in India where it takes considerably more to deter the determined molester? So desperate are our marauders that a hairy leg is not likely to put them off. If this fails, we have our homegrown anti-rape lingerie which is wired to give attackers an electric shock.

We have seen how emboldened our men are in both verbal and physical abuse of women. They will probably let a high voltage current pass through them and still return to try their hand at groping women. Perhaps, we need something a little more inventive. There is of course the tried and tested can of mace. The only problem is that by the time you have whipped out the mace, the offender would have made considerable advances. A better bet would be to devise some sort of skunk-like secretion that would cover the offender in a dreadful stink and also some indelible colour. We can bet that the number of highly-coloured men walking around our cities would be too many to count if this were to be used.

It is a shame that women have to adopt ever-inventive measures to keep one step ahead of men. This is not a task that most of us can handle on our own. The best way to knock some sense into would-be molesters is the firm smack of the law. This would dampen their ardour as nothing else will. But while the law-enforcers get around to this, women may well have to cover their legs with hairy stockings and walk around fizzing with electricity.



■ Bassekou Kouyate — a virtuoso on the tiny ngoni, the granddaddy of every rock guitar ever strummed — will serenade Sunday lunchtime at Glastonbury FILE PHOTO

Banned in Mali, starring in Glastonbury this year

Andy Morgan

When it comes to African music, the Glastonbury music festival, in south-west England, stands taller than most A-list rock'n'roll festivals.

Way back in 1982, the percussion wig-out of Nigeria's King Sunny Ade were a revelation to me: music, I realised, didn't have to involve pasty-faced white guys playing guitar, bass and drums. Since then, such heavyweights as Fela Kuti, Amadou and Mariam, Ali Farka Toure, Salif Keita and Oumou Sangare have all graced Glastonbury.

African music-heads will have noticed that most of those acts are from Mali. That's no coincidence: the country is a music powerhouse, fertilised over the centuries by the griots (or bards) with their epic poems and lineages stretching back generations, the dazzling intellectual life of the campuses at Timbuktu and Djenné, the explosion of Cuban and jazz-influenced popular music in the 1950s and 60s, and all the biennales and youth weeks that were designed to build Mali's sense of nationhood after independence in 1960.

That heritage has given everyone a country, like Ireland or Jamaica, famed

for its music. So in September 2012, when all music apart from Quranic chanting was banned by armed jihadi groups in the northern two thirds of Mali, Glastonbury felt compelled to react. "It just seemed like we had to show some solidarity," says Nick Dewey, chief booker for the festival, which starts at the end of June.

The singer-songwriter Rokia Traore, lyrically lucid and musically iconoclastic, will be kicking things off on June 29. "Glastonbury's support goes straight to the heart," Traore says. "But even now that the ban on music has gone, there's still so much to do — to make sure Malian musicians can live off their art and contribute to the renewal and evolution of the country."

Bassekou Kouyate — a virtuoso on the tiny ngoni, the granddaddy of every rock guitar ever strummed — will serenade all those sore Sunday lunchtime heads with a set on the Pyramid stage, dishing out honeyed notes dressed like a potentate in African robes.

"The whole point of the festival," says Dewey, "is to have people from all over the world — every type of music and performer, every age group, from all classes. So it's not a question of us taking a political stance. It's just about saying, 'You might not be able to play music at home, but you can here.'" **GNS**