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PROFILES:

GURUGRAM'S LEMON TREE & RED FOX, SEC 60
Getting into the banquet & MICE market.

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PROFILES LEMON TREE & RED FOX, SECTOR 60, GURUGRAM

MORE THAN JUST A COUPLE OF HOTELS

THE FIRST LEMON TREE HOTEL COMPLEX TO GET EXTENSIVE BANQUETING FACILITY ALSO EMPLOYS 50% SPECIALLY ABLED

BY: **BIKRAMJIT RAY**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY: **RITESH SHARMA**

THE LEMON Tree and Red Fox Hotels which have opened recently at Sector 60, Gurugram have a number of firsts to their credit. The most important one, as far as customers are concerned, is the third building that forms the triumvirate of structures which form the complex, a building dedicated to banqueting and commercial space. You heard it, something I don't think any other Lemon Tree Hotel has, at least not in this scale.

The hotels's themselves try to be more than the mere cookie cutter structure that customers have come to expect from them. They have tried hard to get be individual and of course given the amount of space which they take up, the rooms are bigger and better. It's definitely a bigger bang for your buck.

The Lemon Tree Group as a whole, have always been at the cutting edge of innovation as far as product for customers go. They have understood the genome of the Indian hotel guest and provided a product that ticks all the



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THE COMPLEX HAS 20,000 SQ FT OF BANQUET SPACE IN ONE BUILDING, 250+ ROOMS, AS WELL AS COMMERCIAL SPACE



boxes. The new hotels have the addition of banquet space, something which means a great deal of business for the units, and something which has been missing in many earlier hotels. We guess, when there is space, it makes sense to also build banquet space along with your hotel.

The whole complex is in 3.2 acres and has three buildings, one Lemon Tree, one Red Fox and the third building has four floors of commercial and 20,000 square feet of banqueting. The approximate cost of the project including the land was somewhere in the region of Rs 350 crores. The other surprise was the extremely spacious suites, in fact the one at the Red Fox Hotel is actually larger and priced higher than the suites at Lemon Tree Hotel.

We began by speaking with the man in charge of the whole complex, Kashif Aziz, who also took us around the whole complex. Aziz has been working for the company for more than a decade (10.5 years to be precise), the company was opening their fourth hotel in Pune, with two hotels in Gurgaon, one in Goa and the one in Pune. Aziz was the first employee in their fifth hotel in East Delhi Mall. Today, the company has 42 hotels, but Aziz's journey so far has taken him to Bangalore, to open hotels at Electronic City and Bangalore. Post that, to Jaipur, where he headed the Red Fox, then on the Aerocity to work at the company's flagship property.

The operations team moved into the property in August 2016, Aziz told us, adding that the hotels have been in the project stage for more than a year before. "We finished the project 2017 February-end, immediately after which we began our trials. We first opened Lemon Tree on April



1, 2017 with a 104 rooms and coffee shop. We also have something called Slounge as well as a conference room in this building (the one housing the Lemon Tree Hotel). Then we opened a banqueting space of 20,000 square feet also on April 1, 2017, which is in the third building," he said.

Red fox with 154 rooms, a conference room and one multi-cuisine coffee shop, was opened on May 1, 2017. The company launched Red Fox at Rs 2,999 and Lemon Tree at Rs 3,999 for single occupancy including breakfast and wifi, Aziz added.

The response to the new hotels has been very good,

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he said, "with such a big convention centre we have got a lot of residential queries, because I don't think you have a similar product at our price point anywhere else in the NCR."

One more unique aspect of the property, which Aziz brought up during our conversation was that 50 percent of employees were specially abled, which includes speech and hearing impaired employees, those from economically and socially backward areas. The plan is to go up to 80 percent in the hotel, in fact, they are calling this push Project Sankalp.

The aim is not to retain everyone, but to make these specially abled employees find work elsewhere and move on

with their lives as well, Aziz added. Like all those working in the hotel, he too shows amazing drive.

The hotels are all standard, though certain changes have been done to make the hotels 100 percent accessible, including back of the house. This is possibly the first in India to be so, Aziz felt.

The target area for the hotel according to him, was Golf Course Road and Sohna Road. As I told you, the price point which we are selling at is a nice price, the normal range for our product would be around Rs 5000 or so.

"We are going to to very big on MICE because of

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the availability of the convention centre, our first exclusive facility. In Gurgaon, there is no banquet hall available in this size at our price point. The only ones available are at five star properties.

"We have six hotels in Gurgaon, the reason why this complex has come up is that the rest of the properties are doing over 80 percent occupancy year round, there is an immense potential that we see around this area. What we have fallen behind on here, is our banqueting, so I think that is the need that this hotel fills," he added.

"The target occupancy for this year for these hotels is going to be 80 percent and I think we are going to be achieving it. Right now, in the first month, Lemon Tree was doing 60 percent. The hotel is doing exceptionally well. Going from here, for the hotel, we are going to target the occupancies at the level I mentioned before and aim for around Rs 15.5 crores for the banquet business," Aziz told us. The hotels are looking at Corporates, MICE as well as the wedding market for social functions. As far as pricing goes, banqueting rates depended on the number of people, with capacity going up to a 1000 + if both floors are utilized. The complex also has parking for 450 cars. A good starting point though, is Rs 2,000 plus, going up according to the menu, he added.

"F&B in fact, was very heavily stressed in the hotel, according to Aziz, which is the only property in Lemon Tree to have an in-house bakery with very sophisticated equipment," he said.

Gurgaon has very few options when it comes to weddings, so the target is going to be those people who



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don't want to spend five star rates and are forced to look towards Delhi or in non hotel environments.

The hotels are in the process of hiring a special team for the banquet facilities both for the F&B as well as for sales. As of now, both the hotels have a staff of 140 people, but this is going to be scaled up. The ratio is 1:1 for the Lemon Tree and .8:1 for the Red Fox.

As far as working with people who are specially challenges, Aziz felt it has made him a much more sensitive and better human being.

"I have been working with Lemon Tree for a long time and the company for seven years has been working with people with special abilities, so we were into the process. After coming here, we had to define new rules.

"During the pre-opening of this hotel, we employed people in areas we had not employed them before, in maintenance for example, or in laundry service. We have done a special job mapping and are employing the specially challenged in every part. All the departments have a job mapping done, which then allows us to employ the workforce accordingly," he explained.

This entire project was planned many years ago and was Patu Keswani's dream hotel. He envisioned one day to come up with a hotel which will actually bring about a livelihood to many. The process of recruiting. Identifying talent, figuring out how things would be done, was completed almost two-and-a-half to three years ago. It was merely implemented at this hotel, the plan was always in place, he added.

We also spoke to another old company hand, Perkin Rocha, the Area Director for Haryana and Rajasthan at

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Lemon Tree Hotels, which includes Gurgaon, the city with the largest number of Lemon Tree Hotel rooms. In fact, the largest of any single chain, we were informed.

We asked Rocha about his thoughts about their newest offering. Rocha was very excited about the new hotel which had the most expansive banquet and conference facility ever seen at a Lemon Tree property (he had previously worked at the unit at East Delhi Mall which did have some conference facilities).

Speaking on his current inventory in Gurgaon, the city's largest inventory held by a single hospitality company, according to sources, Rocha was very enthusiastic, "Gurgaon

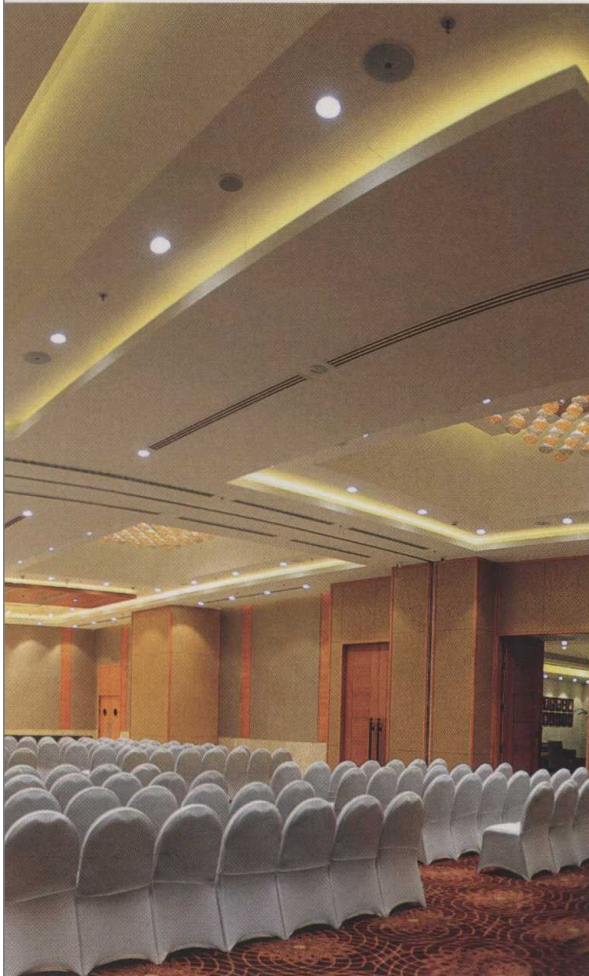
is the key corporate hub, we have a lot of expectations in terms of both financial as well as performance. In Sector 29, we have 50 percent inventory. All the hotels are doing well in the first half of April."

When the sales teams go out and speak about the 20,000 square feet of convention space, most of the customers are amazed and slightly disbelieving that so much space is available, he confessed.

"To sell rooms you can't be corporate only, you have to have a base of MICE and a base of Social. I think it's not a dilution, but a learning from the business that going forward any inventory of around 250 room should have a decent size

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”

banquet and meeting facility,” he added.

“It will make financial sense. It will give me more leeway to tie up with associations and industries and get huge banqueting conventions which is an untapped market for us. Defence will also have its own space. Once we have our liquor license, I have designed six IPs who will be hosted by us so that they can come and experience the place. People are already coming to us. I am speaking to an event management company to tap the wedding market as well,” Rocha concluded.

AUTHOR BIO: Bikramjit Ray is Executive Editor of BW Hotelier.

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**RED FOX HOTEL,
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Phone : +91 124 7151923
Web: www.lemontreehotels.com
General Manager: Kashif Aziz
Owner: Lemon Tree Hotels
Room Rates (Double Room to Suite):
From ₹5,999 ++ to ₹11,999 ++

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