

News monitored for: Lemon Tree Hotels

THE SUITE LIFE

For a homely vibe

Serviced residence company Ascott is slowly growing its apart-hotel brands across India



At home, elsewhere

A view of rooms at Citadines, Chennai ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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During this trip to Chennai, it's the peacock that is the dominating motif of my stay. As I enter my apart-hotel – the newly opened Citadines serviced residence near Sholinganallur junction on Old Mahabalipuram Road – an elegant white peacock sculpture greets me. The back of the chairs in the lobby resembles a dancing peacock's feathers. On the wall is a large print of the bird flashing its beautiful train.

Paisleys and peacocks are the overarching theme of this 269-unit property developed by Singapore-based serviced residence firm Ascott, a subsidiary of Southeast Asia's largest real estate company, Capitaland.

Cultural links

I learn that Citadines also has a tie-up with Storytrails, the culture company that takes visitors walking around the Kapaleeshwarar temple at Mylapore, where Shiva was worshipped by Shakti in the form of a peacock. Much like upscale hotels that offer local experiences to their guests, Ascott too has lifestyle offerings. These are themed around culture, wellness, gastronomy or community, and may take the form of yoga classes, football tournaments among long-staying guests, food fests and so on.

Citadines is Ascott's mid-market



The extended stay segment is seeing a lot of buzz and action – even in India

brand, targeted at the young executive – this reflects in its airy, vibrant décor with graphic prints on walls rather than paintings. Though interestingly, in the month since opening, there have been more medical tourists at the property than corporate workers.

Somerset is a more upscale brand targeted at executives with families, and with a classical, elegant décor. It already has an established presence in the city with the 187-unit Somerset Greenways in MRC Nagar. Although Ascott entered India in 2011, it's only now that it is really beginning to scale up. Coming up next is an Ascott, the most luxurious brand in its portfolio, at Ireo City in Gurugram. Three more serviced residences

are under development in Sri City, Hyderabad and Bengaluru, two of which will be Citadines.

Global phenomenon

Globally, Ascott has a couple of other brands – Quest and The Crest Collection. Keeping up with the times, it has just developed a new brand called Lyf, a radical new concept that promotes co-living and co-working – though the first of these will be seen only in 2019. Suddenly, the extended stay segment is seeing a lot of buzz and action – even in India. Just a few months ago, Lemon Tree Hotels made a foray in the segment through its management arm Carnation Hotels, opening a 195-key serviced residence in Noida,

branded Sandal Suites for Asotekh Realty.

While there are plenty of unorganised serviced apartments all over the country, those resemble guest houses more than anything. There are only a handful of big branded players in the segment in the country. Apart from Ascott, there is Oakwood, and Fraser Suites, and now, Sandal Suites has entered the fray. Of course, a lot of hotels have been trying to edge into the same space. For instance, Leela offers residences, as does ITC Chola.

But there's a difference in the hotel offering and a pure play service residence, insists Ajit Koushik, area general manager of Ascott in India. The larger room sizes, the amenities, the service style, and the fact that the model is based on 80% of guests staying long (defined here as at least a month). Since the idea is to make the place seem like a home away from home – the staff is more unobtrusive.

An overnight stay at Citadines reveals the differences. You can opt for either a basic studio room, a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom apartment here. I am staying at a one-bedroom unit, with a separate living room space, a fully-equipped kitchenette, and a lovely little sit-out overlooking a lot of foliage. From large wardrobes to lots of charging points, a big work space, a media hub, washing machines, there's everything that the extended-stay visitor would need. F&B is outsourced.

At Citadines, it is operated by Delhi Highway, and currently only Hola, the 24-hour coffee shop, is open, though an Indian cuisine restaurant will open soon. The space for a bar has been built, but the new highway rule has stalled its opening.

From the rooftop swimming pool, you get a faint glimpse of the coastline. At an introductory price of ₹4,000 for the base unit, including buffet breakfast and WiFi, certainly the serviced residence seems more value for money than a hotel room. Even more so, when you hear from Vijaysekaran that they are throwing in pick-up and drop services to executives of IT firms in the vicinity as well.

(The writer stayed at Citadines as a guest of the property)

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