TEETING OFF FOR BIG SUCCESS

LEMON TREE HOTEL’S FIRST RESORT IN NORTH INDIA OPENS WITH AN AIM TO GET A SLICE OF THE EXTREMELY COMPETITIVE AND LUCRATIVE LEISURE AND RESORT TOURISM MARKET.
THE LEMON TREE HOTELS’ first resort in north India is just off the beaten path, near Gurgaon, in the small hamlet of Tarudhan, which has a few other resorts near it. The 72-acre property is made up of villas—most under private ownership—a nine-hole golf course and of course all the luxuries which you would find in any golf resort worth its salt. The resort is the first step in a larger expansion plan which we learned from Vikramjit Singh, President and Chief Revenue Officer of the group. “It is something we are seriously and aggressively pursuing,” began Singh. The themes which the company wants to follow are broadly: wildlife, pilgrimage, golf and hills. “We are building our own resort in Udaipur, we are building Shimla, while in Katra, a pilgrimage venture, we took the management route,” he added. The property in Tarudhan, Manesar, is their first foray into golf tourism.

Singh also clarified that though properties like the resort in Tarudhan were on a management contract--

“Lemon Tree is also aggressively looking at investing in this portfolio. There are places we are looking at buying land and building, there are places we are looking at acquiring resort as well.” The aim was to add at least 10 resorts to the leisure portfolio.

One of the best things about Lemon Tree Tarudhan resort is its proximity to Delhi and Gurgaon. Lemon Tree Hotels, who took over management of the resort and reopened it on March 5, 2016, have already done a thorough upgrading of all the facilities and brought in their sense of style to the 70 rooms and villas which is manages and runs. The base category rooms are all adjacent to the front of the resort and near its swimming pool (the whole facility has two, one of which is only for villa owners). The villas which have the studio rooms all look on the peaceful setting of the golf course and have beautiful balconies. They also have access to the roof, which in winter, will be an added
THE WEEKEND TRAVELLER FROM THE NCR IS ONE OF THE MAIN TARGET GROUP FOR THE RESORT, BUT THEY WANT TO EXPAND.

plus point. The Studio rooms, the resorts, highest category of accommodation are 900 sq feet and have their own kitchen set up, though I can’t see many people using this facility with the room service menu already in place.

We got to speak with Abhishek Bairagi, Hotel General Manager, Gurgaon Region, who also looks after the Tarudhan Property along with Lemon Tree’s Leisure Valley Gurgaon property. Bairagi has been with the company for a number of years and has worked in their leisure property at Aurangabad as well.

“Lemon Tree took over the management of the facility last year. We did major renovation of the facilities. We changed the flooring, the furnishing and some structural changes were also done. Everything inside the rooms that you now see have been changed,” he told us.

“We have Executive Rooms, Studio Rooms and Deluxe rooms—70 in total. Our 18 villas are categorised as studios, while the rest are divided into 12 executive and 40 deluxe rooms,” he said. The hotel, rooms and banqueting facilities which are managed by Lemon Tree amount to about five acres. When we asked who the core customers were for the resort, Bairagi explained, “Mostly we target the weekend market. We get a lot of people coming in from Gurgaon and Delhi to spend the weekends. MICE is also a major segment. We have 86,000 sq feet of banqueting facilities, consisting of a lawn, three halls and a boardroom. The Alexander Hall is our largest and can accommodate 120 people and the lawn can accommodate between 500 and 700 people depending on the set up”.

Overall, the resort, since opening has seen a rise in occupancy levels, Bairagi shared, “We opened on the 5th of March and we have done around 60 per cent occupancy in the first month itself. April around the same, about 55 per cent”, he said.

“Initially no hotel starts off with such a boom. March was pretty good for us. We were not expecting occupancies to pick up so fast. We got groups and MICE business which has made a difference,” Bairagi added.

The resort already has a few event planners associated with them so everything from corporate events to weddings and even product launches can be organised, he added.

With the season still a few months away, Bairagi sounded confident about his hotel’s performance in the coming season. Though traditionally, May-June-July are supposed to be low periods for hotel occupancy, the weekend crowds are really going to make a difference. With family’s going on holidays which are on average not more...
than 10 days, at least a couple of weekends are open for short trips, he reasoned.

The resort is still slowly building up its business during the week, he told us, but the weekends is a very busy. "The feedback from customers is very positive. People who have visited earlier are very excited about the change. We didn’t have a problem of introducing the product itself, because people already knew about it," he said, adding that the changes implemented by Lemon Tree has gone a long way to increase the profile and visibility of the property.

With the main chunk of the business focussed weekends and family groups, Lemon Tree has upgraded both the multi cuisine restaurant and the well-stocked bar, which serves both the resort as well as villa owners. They have also set up a kids zone which we is essential for our weekend family groups and added activities like an archery zone near the swimming pool area. The swimming pool itself
News monitored for: Lemon Tree Hotels
serves a limited menu of food and soft beverages sourced from the main restaurant. There is also a spa—which sits in the same modular complex which houses the restaurant, bar and kids zone—operated by Tattva which was in the resort from before Lemon Tree took over.

Vinod Kumar Shah, Executive Sous Chef, with the hotel told us that the biggest challenge was to match the food with the ambience of the resort. “When I took over, the existing menu was very standard. I decided to change the whole outlook of the food. While we still serve the favourites like matar paneer and butter chicken, we also give it a dish like serving the matar paneer as a roulade, for instance,” he said. The menu also has a large continental and Chinese section by popular demand.

With so much space around them, it is inevitable that the chef and the team are also thinking of having more farm to table experience, once the weather gets a little better.

The team at the resort are very confident of reaching their first year targets, “we have set a target of doing better than what the resort used to do before we took over. It would do roughly around Rs 6 crores. We have set a target for around Rs 8 crores and we should be able to achieve that,” Bairyagi said.

A second phase of development has been planned after a year which also includes a specialty restaurant. Staff strength is also slated to increase from 87 people to around 90 by the end of the year, Bairyagi added.

“In line with all other Lemon Trees, we are also going to be recruiting differently-abled individuals from October onwards once operations stabilise. We have already got EcoSoc so people from far flung, economically deprived areas of the country are already employed by us at the resort,” he said.

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Owner: Silvergiades Managed by Lemon Tree Hotels
Room Rates (Double Room): ₹10,000 – ₹12,000 depending on room category / ₹15,000 – Studios