

## GM INTERVIEW: SOMNATH MUKHERJEE

## 'I encourage my team members to believe in themselves'

Somnath Mukherjee, general manager, The Taj West End, Bengaluru, spells out the secret of his success

INTERVIEWED BY FATHIMA ZAHRA ALI

**What are the specific changes that you have implemented at the hotel since you took over?**

The Taj West End is an integral part of the quintessential Bangalore experience and is the city's most iconic business address. This over 127-year-old hotel is a venerable landmark in the city spread across 20 acres. Having inherited a special legacy like this, the immediate steps were to not only preserve but also simultaneously create suitable differentiators and experiences that are unique to the property; that add value to guests in today's age. I am a strong believer of the fact that running a great hotel is about having engaged and empowered colleagues who create delighted customers.

**What are some of the key challenges that you faced, and how did you overcome these?**

As a city grows and develops over time, the hotspots of business tend to move to the outer fringes of the city purely on account of companies scaling up and finding the required volume of commercial spaces required. There are about 10-15 large volume customers in the city and having our hotel in the traditional commercial and business district does pose challenges on account of proximity to their new office spaces. However, these are overcome purely by our commitment to excellence and consistent service standards for which customers are more than willing to travel that extra mile! The other significant challenge over the past 12 months and on the horizon is the growing numbers of new entrants in the market. But I am happy to say that whilst our customers have experimented them in the short run, they have returned back to their own home at The Taj West End!

**What are your revenue-enhancing strategies with the hotel?**

Our focus has been to add value to guests' experience and memories at the hotel and these have been our driving force right through. My mantra is: Happy customers make repeat customers; and have the potential to influence new business through referral. From a sales and revenue management perspective, the necessary tools and reviews are in place to ensure the practicality, measurability and effectiveness of business strategies.

**What is the best part of being a GM?**

I enjoy engaging with people and driving excellence and this role is perfectly suited to fulfill this passion. I have the unique opportunity of interacting with and learning

from people from all walks of life and I find this to be an extremely joyous perk of my job! From my own experience across roles and destinations over the years, I know the importance of teamwork and ensuring that each and every member of my team knows their significance in the top and bottom line of the hotel. It has been my driving force, as general manager, to give the team a sense of belonging and direction.

I try to demonstrate, like my senior leaders at Taj, that with mutual respect, giving authority to associates, building a fearless atmosphere and setting a culture of appreciation one creates the best work environment. My strength is my team, each and every associate at The Taj West End is responsible for who I am today.

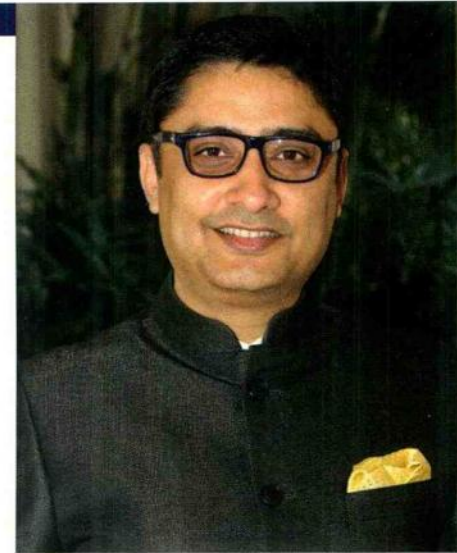
**What has been the turning point in your career?**

Joining the Taj Group at Taj Bengal, Kolkata, straight from my catering school would undoubtedly be the best decision I took as a young aspiring professional. It has been a fantastic 22 years since that time and has been an exciting rollercoaster ride with thrills, spills, lots of learning and opportunity to grow and develop.

I think my first head of department assignment at Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur was a game changer because that allowed me to understand the hotel's business from an overall perspective. From that to my first posting as GM of The Gateway Hotel Ganges and Nadesar Palace, Varanasi too was a different ball game in terms of improvements and results that got us numerous recognition and awards. My posting at Rambagh Palace, Jaipur, taught me the richness and fineness of this industry. I take this opportunity to offer my gratitude to all my mentors across all my roles in the last 22 years at The Taj Group of Hotels.

**What is the one training that you impart to your team?**

Your goal and targets both professional and



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personal should be just out of your reach but never out of your sight. Whatever you want in life, will be found in the effort zone and not in your comfort zone. I encourage my team members to believe in themselves and know that there is nothing to fear when you are devoted to giving your guests the best!

I have expressed myself many times that ever since I joined, every moment I feel that Taj belongs to me and I am born for Taj.

**What is the best way for a hotelier to unwind?**

Irrespective of your work profile, spending time with the family is the perfect way for anyone to unwind! At the end of a long day, going home and seeing my two lovely daughters Somdutta & Devdutta completely recharges me. They just infuse me with a bundle of energy and give me the strength to take on the next day. A long drive with my wife Manidipa and some quiet time with her is the perfect end to any hectic day. 