

## **Somnath Mukherjee- Area Director- Karnataka and General Manager- Taj West End, Bengaluru**

My journey of 25 years with IHCL is a sum of experiences - from learning to manage myself to operating and managing nine hotels across Karnataka.

### **My birth in the hospitality industry**

I started with Taj Bengal straight out of hotel management school as an F&B Trainee in 1992. The 13 year stint at the hotel has been the cornerstone of my career for the strong foundation it laid and the path it paved for my future. The organisation recognised my innate ability to manage crises and pop-up novel ideas in crucial situations. This led to my promotion as F&B Director of the iconic - Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur.

The Palace was the backdrop for two of the most distinguished events of the decade - Elizabeth Hurley's wedding and the launch of the India Edition of Vogue. The emphatic success of these events catapulted me to the position of Executive Assistant Manager and within a year to the General Manager of the Gateway Hotel Ganges, Varanasi with a special responsibility of opening Nadesar Palace. In less than a year, we had scripted a turnaround story with robust growth in revenues, guest satisfaction and employee engagement. This led me to the historic Rambagh Palace, Jaipur in 2012.

In 2013, I took over the mantle of the 130 year old Taj West End, Bengaluru- a sprawling 20 acre oasis in the heart of the city. My experience at Taj West End has been challenging and enriching in equal measure.

### **Business Performance**

The hotel has grown over 35% in revenues from 2013-14 to achieve the INR 1 billion milestone in 2017-18 and increase in EBITDA margins to the tune of 92% in the same period. Occupancy levels have moved from 60% in 2013-14 to 75% last financial year and RevPar has touched 14.16% in 2017-18.

This was a result of a concerted, well planned effort which included a strategic GDS media campaign that reaped a return of 1:8 on investment and a pay-per click campaign on prominent travel sites that enhanced digital penetration and also achieved ROI of 1:8.

### **Guest Centricity**

The last 3 years have seen a renewed focus on guest delight through inventiveness in engagement with specially curated signature experiences including the Heritage Walk- reminiscing our colonial heritage and Breakfast under the Raintree- a classic hyper local experience complete with regional cuisine. The results have seen a massive improvement- NPS of the hotel has gone up from 59% in 2013-14 to 73% in 2018-19.

A host of comprehensive, measurable processes outlined through Key Process Indicators such as Business Excellence Managers and Process Improvement Teams (PITs) have been put in place and are reviewed periodically. This is reflective in our LQA scores which has improved year on year to give us the No.1 rank amongst competition hotels in the city, 3 times in a row.

### **Employee Engagement**

Our open-door policy and transparency in communication through initiatives such as town halls and skip-level meetings have been hugely successful. NEST - the new crèche for young mothers and Bronson's Café - the renovated Associate Dining Room have been received by associates with much fanfare.

STARS - the Special Thanks and Recognition System based on guest comments, employee suggestions and colleague recognition has been used effectively to reward outstanding performers across the hierarchy.

### **Community Development**

My discovery of the Ghats (Banks of River Ganges) in Varanasi, brought to fore my passion for community development. The hotel adopted Munshi Ghat at the Ganges and pledged to turn it around into the model Ghat of the city.

Recently, flooding and landslides in Coorg wreaked havoc in the hill station in August 2018. More than 60 associates from the hotel came together for relief work involving evacuation and relocation of guests and associates from our hotel in Madikeri and residents of Coorg. Over 200 families and 500 individuals in relief camps were benefitted by the herculean rescue effort.

The hotel is also involved in skill building initiatives such as the Golden Threshold Programme and Taj Tata Strive. Through the Swach Bharath Abhiyan, the hotel has been able to create awareness amongst more than 1500 people educating them on the need for garbage segregation, cleanliness and hygiene

### **Accolades & Affiliations**

In the last two years, our consolidated endeavor towards excellence has been recognized at the coveted National Tourism Award by the Government of India which conferred Taj West End with the Best 5-star Luxury Hotel in the country. I was also adjudged the Best General Manager of the year 2017-18 by FHRAI and the Best General Manager - Luxury Hotels 2017-18 by BW Hotelier Awards.

My affiliations with prominent industry bodies include Skal International and Hotel Association of India among others.