

atelier

DRY VON TEES
The iconic seductress
on style, intimacy
and India

**OUTDOOR
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LUXE AT HEART

Epitomising a true success story, Deepak Ohri, CEO, Lebua Hotels and Resorts, elaborates the true meaning of hospitality in a tete-a-tete with Priyanka Chakrabarti.



wouldn't work out well. We started looking for interior designers; the building was lying vacant for 10 years and everybody rejected the project, including the local designers. Finally we went to an office-designing firm and it was their first hospitality project. And once the project concluded, there was no looking back," recalls the 45-year-old.

A Punjabi originally from Delhi, Ohri's love affair with Bangkok happened because of his better half, Anita. "I have been married for 12 years now but Anita and I know each other for the last 15 years. We came to Bangkok and Phuket for our honeymoon and she fell in love with the place. She wanted to be here, so I took up a job here," he reminisces.

Speaking about the similarity between the hospitality industry in India and abroad, Ohri says, "Only the spelling of hospitality is the same! India has not understood the meaning of hospitality well. It lacks in infrastructure – this is the reason behind low inbound tourism. Domestic flights are way too expensive and visa laws are also too stringent. Also, the lack of e-visa facility is another issue. India needs to change its infrastructure; only then will we go back to our old days when we took pride in our hospitality. As it goes – *atithi devo bhava*."

When not working, Ohri plays golf, watches movies, and travels – Kashmir and Italy are his favourite destinations. He is also a celebrated speaker on luxury and strategy, and has lectured in universities like NYU, Kellogg's, IIM Bangalore, amongst others. For someone who has painted his life with the colour of his passion, it is no wonder he likes his wine red! ☺

Having been associated for 10 years now with the Lebua Hotels and Resorts group, Deepak Ohri has come a long way from being the project manager for the group to the present day Chief Executive Officer. With an assortment of five-star hotels and fine restaurants in Thailand, New Zealand and India, the charismatic Ohri is now focusing on expanding the brand Lebua to new global heights.

"I look after the business and its expansion endeavours. We are focusing on spreading our wings to Europe and China now. As an organisation, our strategic outlook is very different. We thrive to grow in terms of quality," he elaborates. Explaining deeper the intent of the expansion in India, he says, "Of late, there has been a huge increase in the number of Indian consumers coming to us. So we

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invested in India; we have two properties in Jaipur and one in Udaipur."

Ohri created Bangkok's best culinary destination when he first joined the organisation – The Dome at Lebua in 2004. The Dome houses a collection of stunningly beautiful restaurants and bars such as Sirocco, Mezzaluna, Breeze, Distil and Sky Bar which are of international culinary acclaim and have won countless awards. "When I joined, my boss wanted this project to kick start; however nobody supported her idea because they thought it