

**GURU GYANI** DEEPAK OHRI, CEO of the Bangkok-based Lebua Hotels & Resorts, on the acclaimed luxury hospitality brand's Indian foray starting at Dwarka



# 'We'll serve \$400 per head Indian dinners'

**■ Dwarka is an unusual location for a luxury hotel operator to open its innings in India. Was it your first choice?**

We were asked similar questions when we opened Lebua five years ago in an old part of Bangkok where some of the neighbouring shops are more than a hundred years old. We had two choices when we decided to move into India — start by building a new hotel, or open our account with an existing property. We settled for the second route, so when we located a built-up hotel at Sector 10, Dwarka, we decided to turn it around.

Believe me, if we were given a choice between Connaught Place and Dwarka, we would have still gone to Dwarka. We want to create a new destination and you can't do it at a place with 20 other hotels. Of course, if I got a hotel in Gurgaon, I would have gone for it.

**■ What made you decide to launch your operations in India?**

Lebua gets a lot of Indian guests and I make it a point to interact with them. I find Indians of the travelling, spending class very knowledgeable, very discerning. But they are being underserved. There's a clear gap between their expectations and how the hospitality industry has been serving them.

A research study commissioned by us from the international marketing consultancy BrainJuicer shows that when discerning Indians with spending power are asked to name their five favourite restaurants, no Indian brand ever gets mentioned. Why don't we have a restaurant that well-travelled Indians like to compare with a Per Se or a Hakkasan?

**■ Lebua in Bangkok is famous for its restaurant experience, topped up by the sheer drama of Sirocco, which commands a spectacular view from its perch on the 63rd**

**floor of the State Tower on Silom Road. What are you bringing to the table in our city?**

Our jewel of our crown will be our Indian restaurant that'll serve \$400 per head fixed-menu meals. The restaurant will have 30 covers and be open only for dinner. It will be lit up by 2,000 candles. When we opened Sirocco we called it the greatest show on earth. The Indian restaurant will be our greatest show.

Our other restaurants will be Sirocco 2, where the cuisine will be Italian inspired by New York, and Breeze 2, where the sashimi will be sliced on stone and the menu will have 100 varieties of tea and 30 brands of sake. The per-person spend at these restaurants won't be more than ₹1,800 to ₹2,000. Our experience at Lebua has taught us that people need a little bit of emotion and a little bit of pampering. We'll sell Delhi's diners an experience without making any quality compromises to keep our food costs low.

**■ Do you seriously believe people will pay \$400 for an Indian meal? What will give you your F&B bread and butter?**

Our bread and butter will come from the banqueting business. Fortunately for us, Dwarka is a residential neighbourhood without a quality banqueting destination. We'll fill this gap. As for people's ability to pay, if they can spend as much in Singapore, why not in Delhi? People are ready to pay the right price for a quality experience.

— By Sourish Bhattacharyya



The spectacular view from Sirocco, the upscale Lebua restaurant on the 63rd floor of the State Tower on Silom Road, Bangkok.

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