

Hotel Scapes

Discovery of a New Galaxy LEBUA, BANGKOK

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Discovery of a New Galaxy LEBUA, BANGKOK Hotelier Virat Varma Blogs his Views

Being a hotelier I have spent most of my life and money visiting and eating out in various hotels across the world but my experience with Lebuva was really an eye opener.



DEEPAK OHRI

CEO, LEBUA HOTELS AND RESORTS

With his disarming smile and positivity Deepak appeared to be the perfect picture of a man on a mission. He tried to sell me the product, but what excited me more, was his exalted vision, attitude and determination. He was sure that what he had created was the best and was very clear of his journey and direction.

Back in 1999 it was indeed a matter of pride to become the first Indian ever to be approved by Regent Hotels for the post of General Manager of their hotel which they were planning to open in Mumbai – It is besides the point at this juncture that I was then working for the promoters of the Regent property as Chief Operating Officer. The Regent Mumbai when launched was considered as a brand which re-wrote the service standards for the country, and was rated as the Best New Hotel by the Conde' Nest.

All what I say is because I am quite in a position to make such a statement freely and unhesitatingly as I am not only aware of the world service standards but also of various aspects that are involved in developing these services.

My Story about 'Lebuva' begins with a phone call from **Samir Puri** – a very dear friend and owner of Lotus Pond and many other restaurants in Delhi – requesting me to meet a friend of his named **Deepak Ohri** who represents a fairly large and reputed Hotel chain from Bangkok, who were keen to come to India, and whether I could be of any help in the process. This meeting with Deepak Ohri was arranged in Mumbai at Grand Hyatt. As for me, it was more of a courtesy call, simply because Samir wanted me to be present in the meeting for the reasons of my understanding of the hotel industry at macro level and awareness of the dominance of Indian Hospitality Industry by the American Hotel Chains and that the brand world was already crowded – Under such circumstances how viable it would be for a lesser known brand from South East Asia to venture into the Indian market, was the issue.

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a man on a mission. He tried to sell me the product, but what excited me more, was his exalted vision, attitude and determination. He was sure that what he had created was the best (He reminded me of my times when I was setting up the Pizza Chain with Dr. Vijay Malya) and was very clear of his journey and direction. Our fifteen minute meeting lasted for more than two hours as I really wanted to know more and more about this young man and his discovery. To be frank, I was pretty much impressed by him rather than the Brand and I wanted to be a part of what he was doing and also of his future plans.

Convinced with Deepak's presentation, I made up my mind to get him a hotel and as the luck would have it a 400 room property in Dwarka Sec 10 was looking for a brand. As I had a very convincing case, we decided to visit Bangkok to assess the brand and rest is history.

We drove from airport with flashing police escort all the way to the hotel. On arrival Special Ladies escorted each and every guest to their particular room, explaining everything about the Hotel and Bangkok.

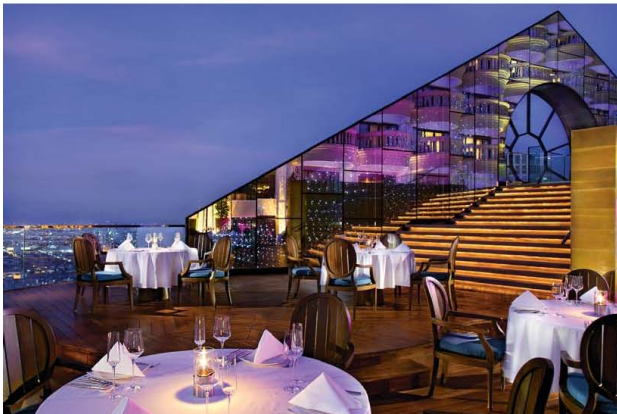
The wondrous 'Lebuva' started hitting us very slowly. The late night flight landed early morning Gaurav (Director in Dwarka Hotel) and I decided to take a little tour of the hotel and have breakfast. The hotel was very busy and bubbling with activity, as expected breakfast room with nearly 175 cover was full. Two smart hostesses were attending to all the guests, trying to accommodate them. One of them – very politely – asked me my room number more as a conversation and with a fleeting look gave some instruction to her associate. Next, we saw the Restaurant Manager, a lady executive was with us in a jiffy she took us to a table about 15yards from where we were standing. I

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could see the guest leaving the table, but before we could reach, the table was cleaned and properly laid out – a lesson in efficiency. The BF buffet was unbelievably the most elaborate spread I had ever seen – and we would not do justice to even one third of it.

Being a hotelier I have spent most of my life and money visiting and eating out in various hotels across the world but my experience with 'Lebua' was really an eye opener. I thought Regent Hotel s were the ultimate, but for me 'Lebua' redefined the service standards. May be it was wonders of Southeast Asia or was it Deepak's vision.

Over a period of time I made several trips to Bangkok and stayed at 'Lebua'. Each of my stay was a unique experience, for one I

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always saw the staffers fully prepared to greet the guests. While dining we never had to call a waiter for pouring water or clearance. They were there but not noticeable. I found them monitoring movement/development of the guest on the table from behind the pillars in a very subtle way.

I never saw the house keeping staff tidy up the room, yet every time I returned, the room was fully serviced. Every staffer, every executive was completely dedicated towards a singular goal to serve the guest.

As for the food, four Michelin star chefs were working in unison to control the quality and presentation of food. I never saw food better presented, their Breakfast Buffet was one of the largest I saw. It reminded me of Sunday brunch at a well-known US hotel resorts. Usually, I avoid making predictions but when I do, God is kind, and they do come true and very confidently I can predict that Deepak Ohri and Lebua hotel is next best thing that will happen to the world of hospitality and soon enough it will make its presence felt and will become a milestone in terms of service, food and hospitality. ■

by ANIL CHAK & VIRAT VARMA

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