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24 COVER STORY

Today the resort is preferably located in an isolated place, but it is also a self-contained commercial establishment that tries to meet most of a vacationer's desires and demands. One may wonder at the difference between a resort and a luxury hotel and which of the two are more preferred and why. The difference between a hotel and a resort lies in their services, their location, and the activities and amenities available on-site.



42 OPERATIONS

Meticulous planning at every stage of a project can ensure cost control and efficiency. This is especially important in a renovation work for hospitality properties, where an already revenue generating hospitality property shuts its doors to re-open in order to provide a better experience.



30 BUSINESS

For hoteliers in post-modern India, digital marketing is proving to be a complex challenge. Now they not only need to service guests, manage rooms' availabilities and

pricing but also compete for guests in new channels and digital communities every day. But this challenge is also pregnant with new opportunities.

48 PROPERTY

The Pilazio Hotel is not your run-of-the-mill hospitality property. In fact, its elegant architecture embodying an unmistakable European influence stands out from the mushrooming concrete jungle of the posh and happening Sector 29 of Gurgaon, which is dotted with several hospitality properties of renown.



36 FEATURE

During the recent years, the hotel lobbies in the realm of Indian hospitality industry have undergone a sea change. They have evolved into active social hubs with cafes, bars, computer stations, and more. They often amalgamate business and fun creatively, and can be treated as revenue earning avenues.



52 SPA

Heavenly Spa by Westin, housed in The Westin Pune Koregaon Park provides the perfect ambience to rejuvenate and renew the jaded spirits. It is truly a retreat with the intimate setting, offering six treatment rooms including a couple spa suite.



40 PROFILE

V Resorts is managing hospitality properties in quaint locales; properties whose construction and the experiences provided for the tourists are in sync with the local culture, environment and ethos. From hills to beaches, from deserts to

wildlife sanctuaries, and from heritage sites to adventure hotspots, the resorts within the purview of V Resorts cater to diversified tourism experiences.

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Cover Pic: Della Villa



Resorts for Business and Leisure

Not so long ago resorts operating in India were mostly just health centres where Ayurvedic treatments were the order of the day. This prevailing concept of resort has now undergone a sea change in the Indian hospitality industry. Today resorts in the country are being patronised by luxury tourists as well as the MICE segment and also by wedding and event management companies in a big way.

The resorts operating in India too now offer luxury stay arrangements, various engaging activities for adults as well as children, besides delectable eating options. They have become regular haunts for luxury as well as business tourists; who are playing their crucial roles in the Indian hospitality industry. **Ashok Malkani** takes a look at the reasons for the resorts' success as well as on their future prospects, in the context of the Indian hospitality industry.



Mention resorts and the many of our minds conjure up images of spas in Kerala and several other places. But these are spa resorts. Today a resort is much more than just Ayurvedic treatments at the spa.

Today the resort is preferably located in an isolated place, but it is also a self-contained commercial establishment that tries to meet most of a vacationer's desires and demands. One may wonder at the difference between a resort and a luxury hotel and which of the two are more preferred and why. The difference between a hotel and a resort lies in their services, their location, and the activities and amenities available on-site. A resort usually has more land area than a hotel of similar size. Resort also offers a range of interesting activities for the guests as compared to a typical hotel.

For Memorable Experiences

Ramesh Gaur, CEO of Bella Vista Resort, Mahabaleshwar, said, "A tourist would generally prefer a resort over a typical hotel for a leisure holiday. However, as far as health resorts are concerned, they are not so popular amongst holiday tourists in the country."

"Luxury tourists, or those seeking adventure, or those looking for peace and contentment are all attracted to resorts, as resorts have a semi formal or informal set up. Luxury hotels on the other hand have a more business like look and feel to them," he added.

"The services provided at resorts are more personalised than they are at luxury hotels and the resorts, on an average, have a higher level of involvement with guests," Gaur affirmed.

Avadhoot Mahimkar, Director- Sales and Marketing, The Resort, Mumbai, averred that resorts in India were now becoming more pocket-friendly with more and more people opting for them. "Many facilities - like spa massages, steam sauna, swimming pool, lawns for activities, gymnasium, beauty salon, yoga meditation center, indoor games, etc. - which were being offered only at luxury resorts in holiday destinations some years back, are now being offered by many a resort in the country. This is because even though an average person's disposable income has increased in urban India, people now give more weightage on value for money. Luxury is a



term that is becoming looser and less defined, and differs from one client to another. Gone are the days where people used to spend heavily on luxury resorts for all those above-mentioned activities. Also with various OTAs coming into the picture, the price wars are becoming more competitive," he elaborated.

"Whereas some guests at resorts just come to relax or experience peace, some come looking for quality family time, whereas some come looking to spend quality time with their loved ones, while some have business meetings at the resort. Also nowadays, people prefer budget resorts over luxury ones as they look for value for money," proffered Mahimkar.

"If the question is why resorts over luxury business hotels are a preference, then in my opinion, a standard business hotel, whether it is luxury or not, tends to be another run of the mill hotel. They generally provide more or less uniformity in terms of rooms, facilities and services across the globe. However, great resorts are conceptualised in a way so that they reflect the feel of the local area. The rooms, amenities and the overall aesthetics differ from resort to resort too," explained Russell Gregory, General Manager, U Tropicana Alibaug. Succinctly, resorts reflect a strong individualistic characteristic, which a standard business hotel mostly



fails to provide.

"A resort, in 99 percent of the times, pampers its guests whilst they stay with it and help them create memories of their vacation, unlike most business hotels. A resort provides a personalised experience unlike most luxury business hotels. And this is the defining factor, when the call is to be taken, on whether the guests would prefer a resort or a luxury business hotel. But then again, it also entirely depends on the reason for travel as well. Resorts focus on creating experiences for consumers. Resorts ensure personalised attention, a distinctive approach to service, keeping guests engaged in activities; they celebrate guests' special occasions, thereby giving them memories to take back. Resorts generally combine a mix of tourism, wellness, adventure and luxury to create a holistic package to attract all types of consumers," he observed further.

"Della Adventure and Resorts has many facets. Within the 46 acre property, there are four different resort facilities. The Camp Della resort area is situated at a hill top crest and provides a luxurious camping experience, the adventure resort rooms are adjoining the adventure park which has 44 rooms, and then there are the Villa Resort rooms which are a part of the Della Villas," elucidated Jimmy Mistry, Principal Designer & Owner at Della Group.

"At Della, we are able to attract different target audiences at the same time and serve each of the clientele preferences. So the guests visiting us include corporates, wedding groups and also couples looking for a tranquil atmosphere close to Mumbai, which does not involve too much travelling," he explained further.

"We have a lot of variation and a plethora of activities happening at the property, which many standard luxury hotels are unable to offer. The luxury resort rooms at the heart of the Della property are on either side of a 200 feet water body with picturesque mountains in the backdrop while Camp Della stay is in a contemporary luxury tent, designed on the edge of a mountain. Such are the variations

one can experience with us, either from holiday to holiday or within the same holiday," explained Mistry.

However, many resorts frequently falter on quality. "Most resort getaways in India, and even internationally, offer very mediocre food and beverage facilities," conceded Mistry while articulating. "At Della Resorts, we have got a combination of restaurants in the adventure park and in the resort area which cater to a wide range of clientele."

More than Weekend Getaways

Normally the belief in the country that resorts primarily serve as weekend getaways for holiday makers is repudiated from the industry at large.

"Earlier people used to see resorts as a weekend getaway or for recreation / picnics, etc. But now we cater to leisure travellers as well as business travellers. Many companies nowadays look for meetings and conference at resorts where after work they can relax or indulge in team building activities. People prefer to be in a natural environment rather than sitting in an enclosed space for 8-10 hours," claimed Mahimkar.

"The concept that resorts are only made for weekend getaways is a myth. At U Tropicana Alibaug, we have had completely sold out days even during the weekdays. It all depends on how well the

hospitality property is marketed. If the resort provides a complete package it works equally well for various purposes," expressed Gregory.

Mistry too didn't agree with the popular but narrow perception of resort in India. "The Della Group does not want to be constrained into one segment. During the course of the week, we have corporate trainings and meets; during the wedding season we have wedding celebrations taking place. So our resort is buzzing with activities practically 6-7 days a week," he disclosed, while adding, "We enjoy impressive occupancy ratios. We have about 65 percent average occupancy in our resort, across the year."

"We attract the MICE segment on weekdays and weekend is for FIT and vacationing



Russell Gregory

crowd while the rest of the week is occupied by weddings and other industry based events. We are quite popular with automobile events. We do large scale customised events for Lamborghini, Ducati and the likes. Each of these brands love doing their events with us because we come with that kind of passion and are able to identify their requirements. As Della Adventure and Resorts has been able to capture more than one segment of guests, it reflects that luxury resorts can be multi-faceted," explained Mistry.

"As a matter of fact most of the resorts operating in India that are into MICE, attract the business / corporate class on weekends only. The leisure tourists, couples and others who can afford weekday leaves, enjoy the much better priced days in the resorts," inferred Gaur.

Thriving on MICE

MICE and weddings seem to be two of the major revenue earners for resorts in India, these days. The moot question would be how much do MICE clientele contributes to the resort's total revenues, on an average, in the context of the Indian hospitality industry.

"The revenue generated would depend upon the fact that how a particular resort pitches itself," said Gaur.

"We are one of India's top outbound training destinations for



Avadhoot Mahimkar

corporates. This segment at least gives us about 50 percent of our revenues. At Della Adventure and Resorts, we handle the segment with lots of care and passion to ensure a memorable experience. While others are in a rat race of getting business by lowering prices, thereby lowering standards, we do not compromise on the quality aspect. Therefore once corporates come to Della and experience our hospitality, they appreciate and understand the difference between our competitors and us," stated Mistry.

"To be frank, MICE plays a very important role in filling up occupancies in resort properties. This segment is growing in India and resorts are the one to give attractive rates. Once we have a good base of MICE business for any particular month, the rates are hiked across all portals to increase

the ARR. We get a good mix of corporate and leisure travellers. For a property like The Resort, Mumbai, more focus is given on corporate travellers during weekdays and leisure travellers during weekend, during long weekends, festive dates, etc. Any budget or midscale resort would be targeting at least 45-55 percent of MICE segment according to their peak and lean seasons," conveyed Mahimkar.

"Definitely, resorts attract a lot of MICE business in the country. Corporate retreats offer a healthy mix of work and fun, and hence

these days the trend of organising corporate retreats at resorts is on the rise. Revenue earned would vary depending on the size, space and features of each individual resort," asserted Gregory.

The Distinctive Edge

Since resorts are becoming the preferred destinations by leisure travellers, MICE and weddings in the context of the Indian hospitality industry, what would be the USP of these places?

"At U Tropicana, Alibaug, we stand out in terms of everything we do. We are different in terms of our offerings. We offer unique private dining experiences for anniversaries, birthdays or honeymoons," offered Gregory.

"We also offer cooking classes – not the ones you are used to. Our cooking classes take you into a local's home and you learn to cook the local cuisine which is Malvani cuisine," he pointed out.

"Furthermore, we offer guest activities – again not the normal ones you might see everywhere. At U Tropicana, we offer bullock cart rides through the village, a heritage walk to a 500-year-old temple, or you can try your hand at pottery in the village. Kids can go on a tree planting spree, watch a movie of their choice, cook with Chefs in our kitchens or even go on a bicycle ride with our activity team. Succinctly, at U Tropicana Alibaug, we try to include a lot of local experiences and elements, which allow guests to immerse themselves in the local culture," Gregory asserted.

"Della Adventure and Resort specialises in Jain and Marwari weddings, which consist of almost 70-80 percent of our wedding business. This is largely credited to the unique cuisine options that the experienced Chefs at Della are able to create for this demographic," disclosed Mistry.

"We also attract professionals and entrepreneurs who are looking for a specific type of getaway or experience. For example, The Villa Lounge attracts enthusiasts who drop by in the evenings specially to enjoy our select collection of cigars and Cognacs while the adventure enthusiasts come for thrilling adventure activities at our adventure park, which is the largest and the first of its kind in India," Mistry elaborated further.

"Our USP is the very personalised services and warm attitude of the team at Bella Vista Resort," stated Gaur.

"One of the main USPs of The Resort, Mumbai is that it is beach facing, and the beach is rather clean I would say. Very few resorts / hotels in Mumbai are having a beach view from their rooms. Moreover, Aksa Beach is very clean and less crowded as compared to other beaches in Mumbai. And to keep it that way, we, the hotel employees do work on it by having a beach cleaning drive organised by the hotel frequently to maintain the natural beauty of Aksa Beach. One unique USP of this property is the location. The Resort gives a perception of being located far from the city, but it is actually within the city. Also a recent addition in our USP would be our adventure zone, 'Gravity,' which got launched this year. It consists of 12 adventure activities like rock climbing, rappelling, Burma bridge, rifle shooting,



Jimmy Mistry

archery, etc. and we are the only resort in Mumbai as on today which have these activities for our guests," claimed Mahimkar.

The Road Ahead

Since more and more guests are being attracted to resorts in India, for various reasons, it would be safe to predict a good future for the resorts, in the context of the Indian hospitality industry. "Future definitely belongs to the resorts. People are likely to prefer staying in the comfort of a resort more. Hotels are comparatively more expensive and have a formal set up. The modern tourist prefers semi formal setup and services of a resort, which a typical hotel cannot afford to provide," expressed Gaur.

"The economic and social trends in India point to a great future for the resort segment. More number of prospective vacationists during the recent years is one such indicator. Moreover, now we have sizeable numbers of people in India with large discretionary incomes. Only two thirds of their incomes go towards necessities, the rest goes into savings and also leaving enough to splurge once in a while. These days, the state highways have made way for national highways, passenger trains have made way for super fast expresses, the old buses have made way for multi-axle luxury coaches and a once costly air ticket has suddenly become easily affordable. These all contribute to the fact that people in India travel more these days. Moreover, more companies in the country are taking serious consideration of their employees, giving importance to work life balance, thereby giving them more leisure time in a week to spend with family. This presents another opportunity for people to travel," elaborated Gregory while analysing why the resorts are expected to do impressive business in the Indian hospitality industry.

Mistry, however, is not so optimistic. "The future of resorts in India is bleak relatively, because the Indian hospitality industry during the last five years has been stagnating. The average five-star hotel rate of 8,500 – 9,000/- has been the same in the country since the last five years. However, during the last five years, salaries have been doubled, electricity rate has been raised by 50 percent, raw materials and food cost has been increased up to 100 percent. So naturally, the industry is bleeding and to stop this only thing they are doing is lower the rates. Even large organisations are suffering and their stock value is a proof of that. Even some international chains are finding it difficult to make ends meet. The only silver lining is the other end of the segment which comprises innovative companies like us who are trying to extend the Indian tourism industry beyond traditional means," he explained.

Yes, introducing various innovations and providing specialised services to guests have facilitated resorts in the country to not only lap luxury and business tourists but also those seeking adventure. The calm serenity and vast open spaces that resorts generally provide has also attracted Wedding and Event Managers in large numbers to celebrate special occasions at these hospitality havens. ■



Ramesh Gaur