Leading by Design

By Sharmila Chand

Rishu Roshan, General Manager, Marasa Sarovar Premiere, Tirupati, has a total of 16 years of international hospitality experience in various roles. Having worked in the UK for the last 14 years with renowned brands like Marriott and IHG, he joined as GM with Marasa Sarovar Premiere, Tirupati, in July 2014. His overall experience in hotel operations and people management skills has been the key to his success. The excerpts of the interview follow:

What is/are the USP of your property?

We wanted to create a unique hospitality concept for the pilgrims. The architecture of the hotel was done by SJK Architects of Mumbai who wanted to design and conceptualise the hotel around the *avtars* of Lord Vishnu, and make this a themed hotel. Its design sets the hotel apart from all others in the market and is our biggest USP. The Marasa Sarovar Premiere at Tirupati is India's first theme hotel inspired by the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Uniquely conceptualised and designed around the *Dasavataras* of Lord Vishnu, the hotel offers a perfect combination of divinity inspired aesthetics that can instantly connect with the soul.

Our location is also one of our strong points. Located at the foothills of Tirumala Hills, we are the closest five-star hotel from the famous Lord Venkateswara Temple. Each room of the hotel offers spectacular views of either the Tirumala Hills or the serene water bodies of the hotel.

What is the marketing strategy you have adopted to promote your property?

Tirupati is one of the most visited pilgrimage destinations in India. We identified a gap in the luxury segment in tourism to Tirupati. We wanted to offer a superior product to the pilgrims who not only want to come for *darshan* but want to make this a wonderful holiday experience as well.

We are targeting domestic individual travellers, families travelling for *darshan*, wedding groups, and corporates for their retreats and meetings.

We have raised awareness about our hotel by organising FAM trips. We have also raised the local awareness of the hotel by use of hoardings, digital signage and organised events and promotions at our restaurants to increase footfall.

We have benefitted tremendously by using social media like Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor, which demonstrates the thinking of the modern travellers.

What according to you is the role of F&B in getting business for a hotel? How much importance do you give to this department?

I believe that F&B plays an extremely critical role in any hotel's business since food leaves a lasting memory in the guests' minds. In a place like Tirupati it is very important that we cater to the taste buds of all the pilgrims who travel to this holy place.

Hence we have to create a perfect balance between the international and local cuisines. At Marasa Sarovar Premiere, Tirupati we have two restaurants — Lotus Cafe, our all day dining restaurant and Krishna, which is our exclusive vegetarian *thali* restaurant.

What would you say is the differentiating factor of your F&B outlets?

The Lotus Cafe, which is our all day dining restaurant, offers a variety of cuisines including Indian and continental. The USP of the Lotus Cafe is not only its finger licking good food but also the concept and the decor. The cafe is located amidst our water body representing the Narsimha *avatar* of Lord Vishnu. The Krishna is our exclusive vegetarian *thali* restaurant. Thus we are able to satisfy a lot of our guests with the variety of F&B options which we have.

Could you reflect on the future plans and new initiatives you wish to undertake at your property?

We are looking at organising food festivals on a regular basis at our restaurants. We are also working with local charities to support the good cause they do. Grooming and developing of internal talents are some of our initiatives.

How do you gauge the present and near future of the Indian hospitality industry?

I believe that 2014 was a challenging year for the Indian hospitality sector with a prolonged supply problem, with projects being abandoned or delayed. I feel 2015 will be a recovery year for the Indian hospitality industry. A strong economic growth is expected to spur more demand for hotels in India, which will ensure that supply and demand are better balanced this year. With the government planning smart cities, I believe this presents unique opportunity for hotels in the country, in the mid-market segments.

What do you enjoy the most about being at the helm of affairs at the hotel?

The day-to-day interaction with guests and staff is the aspect that I most enjoy in my present capacity. Here every day is a new challenge and a new learning opportunity for me, and it gives me immense satisfaction when the guests leave the hotel with a 10/10 experience.

What do you think make for a good GM in a hotel?

She/he should have a clear and strong strategy for the business and the staff. The ability to maintain and develop a healthy working relationship with the owner/s is also necessary. She/he should ensure that the staff is happy and understand its role and importance in the big picture.

What is your strength, professionally?

I think it is my international hospitality experience; the exposure of working with different cultures and people from different walks of life.