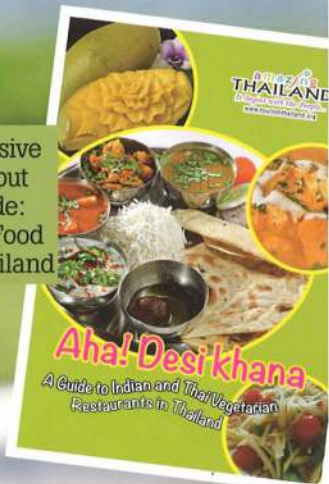


a cross section
publication

GONOW

ALL ABOUT TRAVEL AND TOURISM



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'Experience the local spirit in Coorg and Kabini with Orange County'



If you come to our resort, by Kabini. And you visit Kabini and you visit by Kabini I mean the local spirit in every sense.

What is the experience offered to the guests at Orange County?

The Orange County goal is to preserve the parts of the old culture of this land. This is our mission statement, which means our focus is to build resorts that are inspired by the destination. Our Mission Director is a guidebook. We believe that the local architecture of this place is the key to being here. It is not just the light, there is a place in our spirit. We put in the element of our history and high standard of service with that. So the guests stay in luxury or experience the hotel. We have one of our resorts in Kabini. There we found out about the Sunda villages. These are the tribes who lived inside the forests. So our resort in Kabini is inspired by these tribes. So the resort is made of local stone, and styling and theme as a result has actually been inspired by the Sunda of the Kodanur. We practice the building in all other perspectives. We have two resorts currently and we are building a third one now and we have a fourth one in the works. This is the way of the brand. It is a place that is for the ruins of the Vijayanagara city, the 15th century. There we are building a 15th century style Vijayanagara palace. So the architecture is inspired in the Vijayanagara dynasty. So when you go to see the local architecture and we design the resort according to the location of local architecture. We make our resort to the place we are in.

How was Orange County started?

We started with our first resort in 1994 and we are seven brothers out of which four of us are involved in the hospitality business. Our sense we are originally planners we own plot holders of a hotel and coffee. This is still a big business but us and the rest of the brothers are involved there. Some of us have moved into the hospitality industry. We started the business together. From the time we started we did have my great insight into brand management or the hospitality industry it was absolutely new for us. But in the last seven to eight years, we have done a lot of work on the hotel and managed it with very clear coordination - what the brand is all about and how we have to develop it. All things have been very carefully worked out and that has contributed a lot to the success of the brand.

How is Orange County managed?

What role do the different brothers play?

We are a small business at a moment in time but we have five brothers. There are four of us who are running the small business, they are the core in the sense of the company. But we do have a few other people who are involved in all these, so if we need an attorney, a manager for a restaurant, a manager for a hotel, a general manager, a few people who help us in the day to day work, so we are the architect and planning of our business, we do it. We do not necessarily interfere in the management. It is mostly handled in management in running this sort of. But we, in the end, sales, finance and marketing are handled by us. So the family. In other marketing, my brother Chetan looks after sales, finance, and he is the vice chairman of the group. He is involved in finance, and the brother George Ramachandran is the one who is in charge of all the projects in the designing of the resorts. But the core is not like we have the links of operations and helps in operations as well.

What is the USP of Orange County Resorts?

We are a good capture the local in the sense. That is the local spirit of the area. We capture the spirit of the land in our property. So if you come to Kabini and you visit our resort, you would see the spirit of Kabini. And by Kabini I mean the local Kabini in every sense. From the architecture, everything is inspired by the local spirit. The activities for our guests are also inspired by it. For example, in Kabini we have local car rides, and we have our own elephants, and we have our own rice in the fields and we also arrange visits to the local villages. Everything is locally inspired. We will be doing in the world which is aim to the destination.

How do you incorporate Responsible Tourism?

This is an integral part of our brand itself. So every stage we incorporate it. We have an associate director for Responsible Tourism, who takes care of the local environment, community and other social aspects. During organic food all kinds of areas, controlling recycling of wastes - we go to the great efforts. Recently we had an audit and we were a part of TCFE (Travel for Children for Good). They have given one of the highest ratings to us in India. The environment, local community and society are integral parts of our brand.



What personal touch have you added?

This is where the difference comes between a large and a small group. With a small group like us, we inculcate the personal touch in every part of our hotel and in everything we do. From architecture – even our switches are custom made and designed in-house. So, we go to that extent. We go to great lengths and details, in Kabini the lamp shades are made out of Bottle Gourd. So, it's the details which makes the difference between good and excellent.

What kind of guests do you receive? And how specialised do you get for delivering the perfect experience?

In terms of guests, in India it depends on kind of destination you have your resort in. For our kind of brand, I would classify Coorg as a hill station which is very popular among the Indian clientele. Kabini serves a wildlife experience, which is again hugely popular amongst Indians as well. Next, we

are coming up in Hampi, which is a heritage place. We are expecting a majority of foreigners there. So, it really depends on where we put up the resort. That dictates the kind of clients we will get. But whatever clients we have, they are all high-paying and well travelled worldwide. So, the standards that they expect are high. Especially when both resorts are among the top seven hotels in India on TripAdvisor. So the guests already come with very high expectations. Our operations team has done a great job in continuously raising the benchmark and going a little beyond the high expectations of our customers. Since we are from a large family, we ourselves are very good with people. This is because from the times we were young we had the experience of interacting amongst ourselves and sorting things out. So we have this special skill of dealing with people. We have a very happy team at both the resorts. Ultimately if your employees are pleased with you, it will automatically

reflect in the way they handle the guests.

How do you involve the local community?

Out of all our employees 60 percent are from the local community. We are very big employers as our staff ratio is 4-5 employees to one room. We feel that 60 percent local and 40 percent outside employees is a good ratio. We should have a percentage of outside employees too as the cosmopolitan culture spreads among the locals also. If we include 90 percent of local staff, then these people don't get to learn anything from outside people. When you have somebody from foreign country working alongside you, you get to learn a lot from his lifestyle, his culture and his behaviour. We have two government schools, and appointed teachers on our payroll. We have setup libraries, computer labs and a lot more in these schools.

What are the future plans of Orange County Resorts?

We have our hands full with this property coming up in Hampi right now as the construction is going on in full swing. I think it will be a real iconic property for South India and one of the most beautiful in India. We are hoping to build it to those standards. It will be a big boost for Hampi and our brand too. Our fourth property is still in the pipeline, we have not started with it yet, and we are planning to build it in South of Goa, in a place called Karwar. We have acquired the land. Now the clearance is in process. We are hoping to start construction at this property by early next year, when the clearance is done with. We are also looking at various other locations in India and abroad. **EN**

as told to **NIKITA CHOPRA**



EXPERT SPEAK

Jose Ramapuram
Director Marketing,
Orange County Resorts & Hotels

"The Orange County goal is to preserve the purity of the nature and culture of the land. This is our mission statement, which means our idea is to build resorts that are inspired by the destination."