

# Maldives to Marriott Chennai

By Anjali Alappat

At first glance, Ankush Sharma is easy to pin as a man with a plan. A conversation with the new General Manager of the Courtyard by Marriott, Chennai, makes it clear that he has a vision for the hotel. 2012 could well be the year of change that Marriott has been chasing for years.



## How it all Began

Sharma started his foray into hotel management with a degree from IHM Aurangabad. When asked what prompted him to choose the field, he laughed and said that he initially dreamt of being a pilot like his father but being a less than enthusiastic student put those dreams on the backburner. He decided to try his hand at a professional degree and confesses that hotel management was the first field he chanced upon. Despite his less than stellar marks, he resolved to do the best he could. Looking at him, only a few weeks into his new role, it is evident that his best has taken him a long way from his self-professed days of being a rebel without a cause.

Ankush began his training at the Taj Group and has since worked at hotels in Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Bangalore and Hyderabad. He spent 10 years at Universal Resorts in the Maldives before moving back to India.

## Changing It Up

Sharma said that change is the best part of hotel jobs, going on to say that the more you move and travel, the more you

learn from the experience. He believes that the brilliant part of being a GM is that each day on the job allows him to make it more personal and to add to the value of the work being done.

About taking over, all he had to say was that it was about different priorities, after all, each manager has a different style – some prefer to focus on cost management, revenue, service, etc. But he is quick to state that things would never change for the worse saying, “That’s not the plan and it will never happen. Will we go higher? Definitely, that’s the point of me coming.”

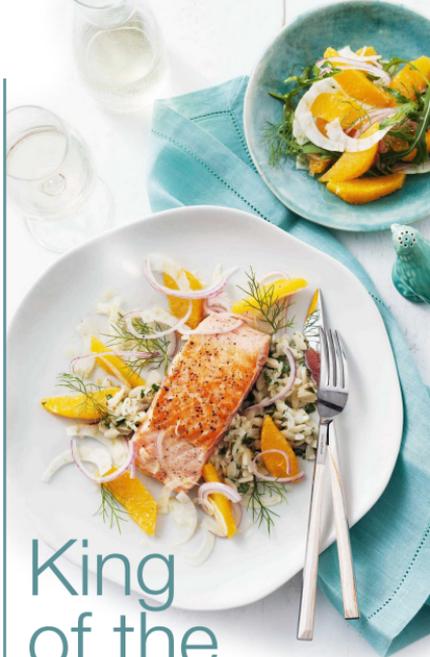
### Food for Thought

With a background in Food and Beverages, Sharma has definite ideas about the cuisine at the Marriot, Chennai. He has high praise for both the Indian and Continental food and plans to offer customers more choices soon. The re-vamp will include changes to the buffet offerings at Paprika. In addition to this, Paprika’s chefs are capable of whipping up 100 different types of biryani, 25 of which are showcased at the restaurant.

Rhapsody, the other restaurant at the Marriot, Chennai, features Italian cuisine, put together by Chef Dev. Ankush says, “Rhapsody speaks for itself. It’s won the Italian Restaurant of the Year award again.” As for the man behind the scenes, Sharma says that a food tasting gave him cause to tell Dev that he was “the only Italian I’ve seen with a very wicked tan.”

A passionate wine lover (though he is quick to say he’s no alcoholic!), he plans to expand Rhapsody’s wine list to include 75 different wines to give visitors an array of international wines to choose from.

When asked about his favorite food, Ankush cited lacchaparathas and andabhurji as his favorites. He vouched for the Marriott’s ability to produce the two and even advised health conscious customers to have their andabhurji made from egg whites like his are. Other than Indian fare, Sharma enjoyed the cuisine in the Maldives, his favorite dish being ‘KukalooMusanmar’, a grilled chicken dish served with curry reduction.



## King of the Kitchen

It isn't surprising that Mr. Sharma loves to cook and claims to make a mean pan seared salmon.

When asked to share his secrets, he enthusiastically describes his technique. He first grills the fish delicately, leaving the skin on to give it a crispy touch. Though he describes it as 'lazy' fare, it sounds delicious! After sautéing it in garlic and butter, he tends to use what is remaining in the pan to give the boiled vegetables some flavor before serving them up. He recommends vegetables such as carrots, peas and broccoli. The vegetables are served alongside the fish, sometimes accompanied by mashed potatoes, the ideal 'lazy' meal at the Sharma household.