

PGP BHARAT

India's first travel-based
business immersion programme



MASTERS' UNION × LEMON TREE HOTELS

Post-Read

The Hundred Small Decisions Behind an Effortless Stay

PGP Bharat C2 Immersions | Lemon Tree Hotels

Why This Immersion Matters

Hospitality is easy to experience and hard to see. A guest notices a clean room, a warm greeting, a problem solved quietly, but almost never the system of checks, standards, and daily decisions that made all of it happen at once, every day, without fail. The session with Mr. Ramesh Babu Maloth at Lemon Tree Hotel, Electronics City, Bengaluru, pulled that system into view, showing students that what looks effortless to a guest is, from the inside, one of the most operationally disciplined businesses they will encounter on this immersion.

About Lemon Tree Hotels: Scaling a Mid-Market Brand

Lemon Tree Hotels was founded in 2002 by Patu Keswani and has grown into India's largest hotel chain in the mid-priced segment, now operating more than 130 hotels and over 11,700 rooms across more than 80 cities in India, Bhutan, and Nepal. The company runs seven brands spanning different price points, from Aurika Hotels and Resorts and Lemon Tree Premier at the upper end to Lemon Tree Hotels, Red Fox, and the Keys brands (Prima, Select, and Lite) further down the scale, the last added through its 2019 acquisition of Berggruen Hotels. Lemon Tree has been publicly listed on the NSE and BSE since 2018, which means the operational discipline students saw on the ground is also, ultimately, what investors are watching.

PGP BHARAT

India's first travel-based
business immersion programme



Meeting Mr. Ramesh Babu Maloth

Mr. Maloth has spent over 22 years in hospitality, the last 11 of them as a General Manager, a career that took him through Hotel Taj Krishna and Hotel NKM's Grand in Hyderabad, operational roles in Doha with Savy Hospitality, leadership positions with Continental Hotels & Resorts in Chennai, GM roles at Chancery Hotels, and most recently Katriya Hotel & Towers in Hyderabad, before he took charge of Lemon Tree's 175-room Electronics City property in Bengaluru in June 2025. He holds an MBA in Hospitality Management from Jaipur National University and has been nominated for India's 50 Best General Managers 2026, recognised for revenue growth, operational leadership, and long-term business management. As he told students himself, hospitality was not even his original plan. It became his career through exposure, hard work, and a clear sense of what he wanted to build, a detail worth sitting with for a room full of students still deciding what theirs will be.

The Discipline Behind an Effortless Stay

What stood out most to students was how much structure sits underneath something that is designed to feel effortless. Room inspections, security rounds, fire-safety checks, and guest-data audits run alongside dynamic pricing reviews, food-waste tracking, revenue reviews, and complaint handling, and almost none of it is informal. Each activity has a standard operating procedure, a reporting structure, and a way of verifying that it actually happened, not just that it was supposed to happen. A hotel, seen this way, is less a single guest experience and more a continuously running system of small, auditable decisions.

One Brand, Many Markets: Standardisation Versus Localisation

One of the sharper ideas Mr. Maloth offered was how Lemon Tree decides what to standardise and what to leave flexible across its properties. Core processes, check-in, complaint handling, communication, and service standards, stay consistent everywhere, so a guest knows what to

PGP BHARAT

India's first travel-based
business immersion programme



expect regardless of which city they are in. Other areas, regional food being the clearest example, are deliberately left open to local variation. The result is a brand that holds one identity nationally while still feeling native to wherever a property actually sits, a balance that is much easier to describe than to execute well.

Hospitality Is a People Business

The session's discussion of people management was, by the cohort's account, one of its most valuable threads. Lemon Tree hires for attitude as a deliberate first filter, and integrates specially abled employees directly into regular operations rather than siloing them into separate roles, a practice with real depth behind it: the company's inclusive hiring program dates back to 2007 and includes "Expressions," a mandatory sign-language training initiative for new staff. Beyond this, Mr. Maloth described regular interactions with freshers, informal sessions the team calls Chai Pe Charcha, structured employee recognition, and even giving employees the chance to step into a General Manager's responsibilities for a day. Taken together, these practices made a specific point: a hotel chain's culture is not a slogan on a wall, it is a set of recurring, deliberately designed interactions.

How a Hotel Actually Makes Money

Mr. Maloth walked students through the business side of a property: rooms, food and beverage, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions), memberships, laundry, spa, transport, and wellness services can all contribute to revenue, but the right mix depends heavily on a property's location and the customer segments it serves. His explanation of dynamic room pricing, corporate contracts, and the airline crew business made the underlying economics far more concrete, and his framing of OTAs, useful for reach and visibility, but expensive given the commission they take, gave students a clear-eyed view of a channel every hospitality business depends on and resents in roughly equal measure.

PGP BHARAT

India's first travel-based
business immersion programme



The Parts of Hospitality That Aren't Glamorous

What made the session particularly credible was Mr. Maloth's openness about the industry's harder realities: attrition, staff shortages, demanding guests, long hours, compliance obligations, owner expectations, and the personal sacrifices the role asks for. None of it was dressed up. For students evaluating hospitality, or any guest-facing, operationally intense business, as a career path, this honesty mattered more than any polished highlight reel could have.

Lessons in Leadership

Two lines from the session captured its spirit well enough to be worth repeating directly: "Smile is part of our uniform," and "when things are chaotic, the first person who has to remain calm is the boss." Both point to the same underlying idea, that service businesses run on the composure and consistency of the people leading them, especially when conditions are furthest from ideal.

What Students Take Away

The session's central lesson was simple to state and easy to underestimate: a good hotel experience is not produced by one department or one standout employee. It comes from hundreds of small processes, people, and decisions, SOPs followed consistently, standards held across properties, employees hired and trained deliberately, revenue streams balanced against a property's specific market, working together at the same time, every day.

PGP BHARAT

India's first travel-based
business immersion programme



Questions Worth Sitting With

- Lemon Tree keeps some processes rigidly standardised and others deliberately local. How should a growing business decide which of its own processes belong in each category?
- Mr. Maloth described hiring for attitude over credentials. What are the risks of that approach at scale, and how would a business manage them?
- If OTAs are expensive but necessary, what would it actually take for a hotel brand to reduce its dependence on them without losing the visibility they provide?

Glossary

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)	A documented, repeatable process for performing a specific task consistently, with a clear way of verifying it was completed correctly.
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions, a revenue segment in hospitality distinct from standard room bookings.
OTA (Online Travel Agency)	A third-party platform, such as Booking.com or MakeMyTrip, that lists and sells hotel rooms in exchange for a commission on each booking.
Dynamic pricing	Adjusting room rates in real time based on demand, seasonality, local events, and competitor pricing, rather than charging a fixed rate.
Standardisation versus localisation	The strategic choice a multi-location brand makes between keeping processes identical everywhere and adapting them to local context.
Attrition	The rate at which employees leave an organisation, a persistent operational challenge in hospitality given its demanding hours and guest-facing intensity.
Inclusive hiring	The deliberate practice of employing people with disabilities or from underserved backgrounds into regular operational roles, rather than separate or token positions.