

THE BALI TIMES

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The Interview

Business in Bali is literally booming. New retail outlets, restaurants, clubs and service-oriented firms are springing up at the rate of mushrooms on a warm spring morning. Does this bold new economic climate signal a return of confidence in Bali's economy? Times Staff Writer Cicik Suciaty spoke to a young entrepreneur, 27-year-old Puneet Malhotra, about his newly opened restaurant in Seminyak, his business views of the island and his Bali-based plans for global expansion.

You own the new Queen's Tandoor restaurant in Seminyak. What was the deciding factor in moving from Jakarta, where your family has other Indian restaurants, and set up in Bali?

We already had restaurants in North, South and Central Jakarta, which belong to my uncle Ramesh; Queen's Tandoor itself has been in existence now for 18 years.

We came to Bali a few months ago, basically because there is a lot of demand for authentic Indian cuisine here.

Bali hadn't had authentic Indian cuisine – there are so many Indian restaurants around that just mix up the food. What we provide is authentic Indian food, like curries. All our spices are imported from India.

Because of the Bali bombings and SARS, were you worried about running a business here?

I didn't feel worried or afraid at all. This is the right market for us because so many Westerners are here: Americans, Australians and some Asians, including Japanese people. They are our market. And also, many people come from Jakarta. We believe in the power of quality. It is true, though, that there's a little bit of effect caused by (the bombing) tragedy; but we have a fixed market.

What do you think of the business climate in Bali now?

I think that the business climate in Bali is good. Bali is a growing place; for the past four years, Bali has been awarded the best island in the world. It has so many prospects.

Bali is very good for any business, not like Jakarta. It's the only place where people from all over come again and again.

Is your business doing as well as expected? At this stage, did you expect worse or better?

So far it is running as well as we expected, and we're promoting the restaurant in various ways.

How did you decide on the location for the restaurant?

This location (Galery Seminyak, Jl. Raya Seminyak) gave me a good offer. Our target was also to open in the Kuta area, but because ... 40 percent of Kuta is made up of discotheques and pubs, I preferred Seminyak; it's a good place to find pure Indian dining with special singing and dancing, which will begin next month. We will have singers and dancers from the Indian Cultural Centre in Renon, where there are people with Indian sentiments, people who were born and grew up here in Indonesia.

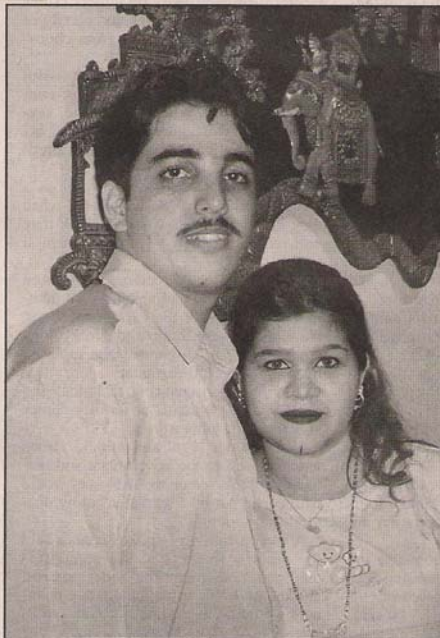
Do Indonesian people generally like Indian food or are your customers mainly foreigners on holiday?

About 10 percent of (our monthly customers are) Balinese people. Most Balinese are Hindu. We don't serve the forbidden meat of some religions, like pork for Muslims or beef for Hindus. We want our customers to feel comfortable and enjoy our food. You know that Bali has some Indian culture, such as Ganesha and Ramayana, and both religions are mainly Hindu; I believe they have the same culture and historical background.

Why did you choose to become involved in the family business?

Actually I first got a degree in computers, and I've worked at Le Meridien and the Hyatt in Jakarta. I was born in New Delhi, India, and have an education background in hotel management in India. I learned from my uncle's life and business.

October 2004 was when I started



Puneet Malhotra with wife Neeta.

open franchise restaurants in Dubai and Hong Kong, run by somebody else there.

What about other parts of Indonesia?

Yes, I plan to have a restaurant in Lombok, after we have one more, in the Sanur area; maybe after two years.

Is Bali your home now?

Yes, my wife and I plan to stay permanently in Bali.

What about the tight competition between the many restaurants in Bali?

We don't have to worry about competition as long as our service is the best. We do have competitors, but so far we haven't felt threatened by the competition in the restaurant business in Bali.

As you know, there are other Indian restaurants in Bali – a total of six – but not one chef is from India, and they use unauthentic ingredients.

Where are your hopes for the future?

I hope we can do our best, that we can give and get the best. A few years ago, the first president of Indonesia and president of India had a very good relationship in promoting the cultures of both countries. Now Indonesia often promotes many cultures, but most of them are of European countries.

I just hope that the Bali government, especially, doesn't forget that Balinese culture is from Indian culture; so I hope the government will do more promotion of Indian culture.

my own business. I am also a member of the Indonesian Food and Beverage Executive Club. Besides all that, I love food; I like eating and I like cooking. So I think it is connected with all of them. Queen's Tandoor Bali is my own business and it purely belongs to me.

Do you plan to start other businesses in the future, or are you satisfied with running your restaurant?

I plan to have my own hotel or villa in the future, with my wife Neeta, who always helps me with marketing, accounting, decoration, advertising and designing. I plan to have a franchise in Manila, just selling the [Queen's Tandoor] brand, with the same quality. By the end of this month, we will have signed a contract to

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