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MARC FERNANDES

FROM FOOTBALL FIELDS TO REVOLUTIONIZING AFFORDABLE BOUTIQUE STAYS

Shweta Singh | The CEO Magazine

From Football Fields to Boutique Stays: The DIA Hotels & Homes Journey On the sun-drenched shores of Goa, amidst its vibrant culture and coastal charm, Marc Fernandes began his journey not in boardrooms, but on the football field. As a professional footballer, he cultivated discipline, teamwork, and resilience—qualities that would later define his entrepreneurial path. Competitive sport taught him strategy under pressure, quick decision-making, and persistence through setbacks, skills that seamlessly translated when he traded cleats for corporate challenges. Yet Marc's vision extended beyond the game. Recognizing India's growing travel boom and the untapped potential in mid-tier hospitality, he pivoted toward building experiences that were both accessible and aspirational, planting the seeds for what would become DIA Hotels & Homes.

Marc's foray into hospitality began with hands-on experience at global brands. In October 2014, he joined the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) in the Sales & Marketing department, learning the intricacies of revenue management, client engagement, and market positioning. By December 2015, he advanced to Marriott Hotels, managing key accounts, training teams, and sharpening operational expertise. These years exposed him to a crucial gap in India's hospitality landscape: while luxury chains catered to premium travelers, affordable yet stylish accommodations for the growing middle-class explorer were scarce. Budget stays often lacked consistency, modern design, and a personalized experience—a gap Marc was determined to address.



MARC FERNANDES
FOUNDER
THE DIA HOTELS AND HOMES

In 2018, leveraging insights from his corporate stints and driven by ambition, Marc founded DIA Hotels & Homes. Beginning in Goa, he partnered with underperforming boutique properties that had great accessibility but were not optimized to their potential. By blending affordability with modern design, tech-savvy rooms, and approachable service, he transformed these properties into sought-after destinations. Hotels like Hotel Linda by DIA Baga, DIABNB, La Maison by DIA, and Contempo by DIA quickly gained popularity, offering streamlined check-ins, high-speed Wi-Fi, work desks, and modern aesthetics, appealing to young families, couples, and digital nomads alike. Marc's philosophy was simple yet revolutionary: create "affordable-trendy-tech-savvy" accommodations that feel functional, friendly, and stylish without the premium price tag. Inspired by Indian hospitality disruptors like Ritesh Agarwal of OYO, he bootstrapped operations, assembled a lean team, and built strategic partnerships to fuel rapid growth.

The results were remarkable. DIA Hotels & Homes achieved a 300% year-on-year increase in the boutique segment, expanding from a handful of Goan villas to over 400 rooms across 12 cities in India, with 500+ rooms in development for 2026. Marc personally scouts locations, trains staff, and iterates based on guest feedback, ensuring the brand stands out in a competitive market. Today, DIA is a dominant force, with rising occupancy rates and robust revenues, reflecting India's post-pandemic travel surge.

Looking ahead, DIA's expansion is ambitious yet methodical. Projects like 360 by DIA in Goa and Kasauli showcase luxury-meets-accessibility, while ventures in Himachal Pradesh, Karjat, Khufry, and Shimla target the growing demand for trendy, budget-friendly hill escapes. With domestic tourism projected to reach \$100 billion by 2030, Marc envisions DIA as the go-to brand for stylish, accessible stays—akin to how OYO and Airbnb reshaped the hospitality landscape.

Marc Fernandes' journey from footballer to hospitality entrepreneur exemplifies the power of vision, resilience, and strategic execution. DIA Hotels & Homes is not just expanding; it is redefining Indian hospitality by combining affordability, design, and technology. The brand's trajectory offers a blueprint for opportunity in underserved markets, proving that with relentless focus and innovative thinking, dreams can indeed be turned into destinations—one corner suite at a time.