A Family Legacy Drives Sustainable Hospitality Growth in Kenya

Sentrim Hotels & Lodges combines Kenya's rich heritage with eco-friendly practices, offering immersive hospitality experiences that prioritize community engagement, quality service, and responsible tourism.

Paren Harji Hirani, Managing Director of Sentrim Hotels & Lodges, embodies a legacy of passion, family commitment, and dedication to sustainable growth in Kenya's hospitality industry. Paren's career began humbly, as he worked his way up from kitchen hand, chef, waiter, and barman to banquets and F&B operations before taking over as Group Operations Manager at Sentrim Hotels & Lodges and now the Group Managing Director. He attributes his commitment to hospitality to these formative experiences, particularly an internship at Marriott in the United States, where he distinguished himself from hundreds of applicants. "That experience at Marriott instilled in me a sense of pride and professionalism that I carry forward in Sentrim's mission," Paren says.

PAREN HARJI HIRANI, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF SENTRIM HOTELS & LODGES

HARJI VELJI HIRANI, CHAIRMAN OF SENTRIM HOTELS & LODGES

Under Paren's leadership, Sentrim Hotels & Lodges has pursued an ambitious growth trajectory, evolving to include properties steeped in history, like the Castle Royal Hotel in Mombasa, originally known as the Palace Hotel, established in 1903. This hotel is a striking example of coral architecture and a silent witness to Kenya's complex past. "The Castle Royal Hotel is more than just a building—it is a preserved piece of history," Paren says. The building's preservation is both a challenge and a labor of love for the family, who has maintained its museum-like status. "Despite the upkeep costs, it's something we will continue to uphold as a tribute to our heritage," he adds.

Beyond historical preservation, Paren's vision for Sentrim Hotels & Lodges is anchored on building a formidable team, modernization, sustainability, and growth. The family's ethos is clear: every property should reflect high standards and community values. This approach drives Paren's focus on maintaining a collaborative team environment where roles are respected but titles remain understated. "I avoid titles and prefer decision-making based on mutual respect," he emphasizes. For Paren, humility and shared decision-making are crucial for a cohesive team and effective leadership.

The Sentrim brand, under Paren's guidance, has also made strides in sustainable practices. Recognizing the global shift towards eco-conscious tourism, he has led efforts to transition all properties to solar energy, a move that sets Sentrim apart in Kenya's hospitality sector. "Sustainability is not just a buzzword for us; it's about creating a model that aligns with community needs and environmental responsibility," he explains. This commitment to eco-friendliness extends beyond energy use, as Sentrim also seeks to work with local communities by providing training and employment opportunities. Paren says, "Working with various local communities isn't just about filling roles; it's about educating, training, empowering, and building a future together."

Sentrim's ambitious growth plan includes a new beach hotel and the management of properties that may require professional expertise to enhance their reach within the high-end market segment. This project reflects Paren's philosophy that quality service, rather than high prices, creates sustainable success. He believes that by offering world-class service at a fair price, Sentrim can set a new standard for Kenyan hospitality. "In Kenya, there's a lot of overdevelopment without regulation. But when you focus on quality and cultural integration, you create something enduring," he says.

Family legacy plays a profound role in Paren's journey. His grandfather, who emigrated from India in the 1940's, was instrumental in developing some of Kenya's iconic hotels and forged friendships with notable Kenyan leaders, including His Excellency the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. His father Harji Velji Hirani continued this legacy, and Paren has since taken the baton with the same commitment. "Upholding the family's legacy in hospitality has always been a personal mission. The connection to Kenya is deeply embedded in our work ethic and values," he says.

Beyond infrastructure and regulations, Paren underscores the importance of cultivating a service-oriented culture within the industry. At Sentrim, quality service and cultural appreciation are paramount. The hotels and lodges, which cater to a largely international clientele, provide an authentic Kenyan experience that Paren believes is the key to lasting success.

Paren is optimistic about Sentrim's future. His vision extends beyond financial gains, emphasizing the importance of community and sustainability. As he looks toward 2025, a year he sees as pivotal for Sentrim Hotels & Lodges, Paren's focus remains on nurturing a profitable and people-centric brand. "Success in hospitality isn't about quick profits; it's about building something genuine people can believe in," Paren concludes.

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