



Meet the Manager with...

Waqas Tahir, Ibis Styles Heathrow

On 23rd March, most people not classified as essential or key-workers resided in their homes for the foreseeable future. However, Waqas Tahir, General Manager of Splendid Hospitality Group's Ibis Styles Heathrow, lived in the London hotel over the next 13 weeks.

Ibis Styles Heathrow had - at the time - only recently been launched in January 2020 and opened to the public. The 125-room hotel reflected the Art Deco era of the Golden Mile, with subtle details, clean lines and geometric shapes throughout the building to give a 1920s flair to the contemporary setting of Heathrow, London. The opening was widely celebrated within the Splendid Hospitality Group, until the Government implemented their plans to shut down all hotels, restaurants and bars on 23rd March 2020.

Tahir's commitment to the hotel, even after such a short period of time, sang to us. We had a few questions for Waqas about this time and experiences during lockdown. Here's what he shared with us.

? Looking back, what was it like living in the hotel as opposed to your home during the lockdown?

Hotels mean people, always open and welcoming, the hustle and bustle, experiences, colleagues, the noise and sounds of service. However, this all stopped on 23rd March. It was very unusual to see the hotel without any guests, but during the lockdown we still have to ensure the hotel is maintained for the eventual safe return of our Splendid Family Members and guests.

? Name your biggest high and low point of lockdown

The high and low points were very mixed for me, as one typically came with the other. For one, lock down has changed perceptions and priorities of many people including myself. On one side it was a huge responsibility, looking after the whole hotel site on my own, something I was very proud to be trusted with. On the other side I missed my family. It was also sad to see the hotel closed - we did our grand...

opening in January 2020 after months of preparation. The whole team was very excited to welcome our guests and most of our groups were coming from March for the first-time stay. However from that, a huge positive for me is that now, we will have another chance to show our brand new hotel next year!

I think predominantly the biggest low point was seeing the daily deaths due to Covid-19. It was heart-breaking, as each number is someone's life, family, mother, daughter, son or father, husband or wife.

? **If you were to write a diary about your time, what would a typical day look like for you?**

The daily shift time was different than my normal routine. I started at 7am in the morning and would do my first security walk. It was very strange in the beginning to walk towards dark corridors in pin-drop silence as the light sensors take 2-3 seconds to switch on the lights. Then there were routine Health & Safety tasks which kept me busy during this time. I am not used to eating alone so this was something new which I had to get used to. Sometimes I would use delivery service for lunch for a change! During my down-time, I also kept in touch with other colleagues who were working during the lockdown and we shared our experiences. The talks included questions, such as 'when is it going to be normal again?' I'm still wondering what the answer is!

? **What did you do to remain positive during lockdown?**

"I spoke with my other colleagues who were working similar shifts in our other hotels. This provided us a platform to remain positive. We also had our weekly newsletter from our CEO with updates which was also really helpful. Our Managing Director was frequently in touch with us to make sure we are fine during this time. The lockdown also provided more time to speak with some family members who live outside the UK, as everyone in the world was essentially in the same boat.

The biggest beacon of hope is our team now have the opportunity for 'second opening' within a very short period. I'm really looking forward to seeing all my Splendid Family Members once again.

? **Lastly, what life lesson have you taken from this experience?**

We should appreciate what we have more, such as our life, our freedom and our family. At the same time we need to be more compassionate towards others and make a positive difference in their lives. In the end it will be about 'how do you want to be remembered?'

Waqas Tahir is finally on his way to adopting his usual routine again, after 13 long weeks of lockdown. His genuine positive attitude towards his work and the global circumstances shone through the landscape of fear and uncertainty, and hasn't gone unnoticed by our Splendid family. We want to extend a very warm 'thank you' to Waqas, and all the staff supporting him at Ibis Styles Heathrow. We wish you the best of luck at your second grand opening!

Watch this space for the next installment of our series of Meet the Manager within the Splendid Hospitality Group's family.