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A JOURNEY OF SELF DISCOVERY

At the height of his successful career as a banker, Pawan Malk gave it all up to open a yoga retreat in India. The radical switch found him total fulfillment and happiness within.

Charlotte Robert finds out more.

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*Imagine a world where time melts down to
beautiful moments of tranquillity.
Where luxury and simplicity go hand in hand.
Where you make a new friend for life - Yourself.*

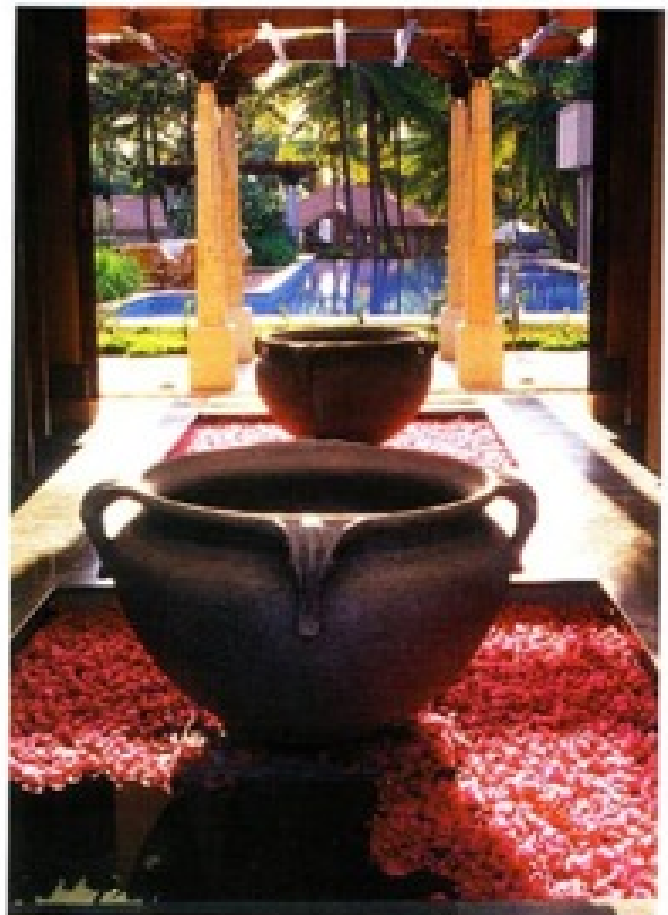
It seems inconceivable that a banker would give up his career at the height of his success in order to open up a yoga retreat in a foreign country. Yet, that is exactly what Pawan Malik did. "Don't get me wrong, I loved banking and still do," he says. "Indeed, I think I was born to be a banker. It wasn't burn-out or a general dissatisfaction with my job either that led me to give up banking. It was really a holiday in India in 2000 that led to it. When I was there, I started reading Indian scriptures and, the more I read, the more interested I became. At the same time, I started practising yoga more. The combination of the scriptures and the holistic way of life that yoga provided made me realise I needed something like this in my life. And, if I needed this, maybe other people needed it as well, which eventually led to the birth of my yoga retreat, Shreyas."

Only 34 when he gave up banking, Malik confesses he had no idea what he was getting into seven years ago. "Clearly, when I look back now to when I first made the change, it must have seemed like a crazy idea to everyone. I even asked myself if I was doing it for all the right reasons. Could I go back to banking if it failed? But I survived," he says matter-of-factly, citing his father and yoga teacher as his biggest supporters.

And so, his mind made up, work began on Shreyas, which means all-round excellence in Sanskrit. Malik wanted a spiritual environment - a retreat where the ambience was comparable with that of a luxury hotel; a place where people could reconnect with themselves. The hunt began across India for the right location to build Shreyas. Malik found that there were too many ashrams already in the Himalayas, while in Delhi, he faced too much scepticism as everyone thought he was in it for the money. Goa, meanwhile, had too much of a holiday atmosphere and Bombay proved too expensive. Finally, the persistent Malik found a 25-acre piece

of land in Nelamangala, Bangalore, which was just perfect. The land was affordable and the weather, more or less, cool all year round. In August 2004, Shreyas was officially up and running.

It was a homecoming of sorts for Malik. Although born in Delhi, Malik's parents, both journalists, moved to London when he was 15. He completed his course in chartered accountancy, got headhunted into banking and





Banker-turned-hoteller
Pawan Malik.



proceeded to work in London, Japan, Singapore and New York. Having travelled extensively, he finally returned to India to set up Shreyas and get married. "Since opening Shreyas, I have learnt so much. I learnt about farming and how nature responds to us when we respond to it. I discovered the beauty of India and found that her greatness lies in her spiritual tradition and her people. Just speaking to the average Joe has taught me so much. These are things you don't learn in a boardroom. One of my greatest rewards, too, is being able to spend time with my four-year-old son," says Malik, adding joyfully that his son is already practising yoga.

Yoga, Malik says, comes naturally to him. He believes in it completely as it has helped him towards his spiritual journey of self-discovery, which he finds empowering. Tall and self-assured, Malik's spiritual journey led him to discover that happiness comes from within. Unhappiness, he claims, begins when you depend on something to make you happy, like a job, a house or even a husband or wife. But it is not the job, house, holiday or spouse that makes you happy, he asserts, because these are all external things. A person's sole source of happiness cannot come from things or people; it has to come from you. "You have to start by thinking you are content and grateful for what you have. When you are distracted by the things of this world, you don't have a chance to be happy. But when you quieten the mind and start to observe the way your thinking process works, you will find something remarkable about yourself. Yoga taught me how to do that. It's a journey of self-discovery and that is what

Shreyas is all about and I want to share that with everyone," declares Malik.

At Shreyas, the emphasis is to live a life of daily yoga, meditation sessions, organic vegetarian food, no alcohol, community service and farming in private, serene and "simply" luxurious accommodation and facilities. Guests can learn to cook, work in the organic agricultural garden and interact with local village children. They can also choose to mingle with like-minded professionals from across the world, or choose to be alone. Malik spends his time at Shreyas teaching, training, reading, studying the scriptures, swimming and being with his family. His day is full, says this humble and straightforward man. His life lacks for nothing, he adds. There is no need for hobbies because it would take time away from his complete life. Malik once asked his yoga teacher what the meaning of life was and was told that it was about discovering yourself. "I totally believe in what he said; you first have to discover what your talents are and then spend time trying to excel in those talents and do justice to it. After that, you spend the rest of your life sharing those gifts and talents with others," says Malik, adding that this is precisely what he is doing now.

"Shreyas has been an incredible journey for me. I have found so much in it. When guests tell me how they found a part of themselves at Shreyas, I am humbled. People always ask me if I am afraid Shreyas might not succeed but I tell them, as far as I am concerned, it has already succeeded because I am happy with myself." **A**