

Tributes as Saveria Founder Rakesh Sardana passes away

It is with sadness that *TRBusiness* reports the passing of travel retail entrepreneur and Sardana Group Founder Rakesh Sardana.



A private funeral service attended by family and close colleagues is understood to have taken place last month.

He is survived by his wife Geetika and two children.

LONG INDUSTRY CAREER

In a career spanning more than 35 years, Sardana founded the eponymous group of companies in Vienna, where his retail journey first began in the 1980s at Vienna International Airport, having emigrated to Austria from his native India.

Sardana secured the duty paid airport retail business at New York JFK Terminal 4 shortly before the fated September 11 2001 tragedy and established Saveria USA in 2002 where he was credited for transforming the luxury brands offering at the terminal.

He went on to operate the business in a joint venture partnership with Aer Rianta International. Sardana held a minority shareholding (30%) with ARI the majority partner (70%). The partners **opened their operations in 2003** with 12 speciality retail stores and added a concession at Boston Logan International Airport after winning a five-year contract in 2007.



Sardana introduced a new wave of luxury stores to New York JFK Terminal 4 after taking over the duty paid retail contract in the year 2002/2003.

When ARI exited the Aer Rianta International Sardana JFK Inc. duty paid joint venture in 2009, Saveria USA took control of the business. In early 2015, it **sold a majority interest in the JV**, which at that point covered 20,000sq ft of retail space at New York JFK Terminal 4, plus its share in the Boston Logan operation to what was then LS Travel Retail (*Lagardère Travel Retail*).

At that point, Saveria USA's portfolio included a tranche of leading luxury brands such as Longchamp, Hugo Boss, Swarovski, Bijoux Ternier and confectionery brand Chocolate and More.



Sardana in his younger years.

TRIBUTES POUR IN

TRBusiness has received a number of tributes to the airport retailer since news of his untimely death emerged.

"I am deeply saddened by the loss of Rakesh, I've not only lost a mentor but a good friend," commented Saveria USA President Claus Kohlenberger. He had a heart bigger than the highest mountain and the Atlantic ocean combined.

I started working for and with Rakesh over 22 years ago and there has never been a dull moment. I have been given the opportunity to learn and take over more responsibility over the years and I have always treated the business as it would be my own. We will keep the spirit of Rakesh going and see where we can take Sardana Group in the future.

Martin Morgan, Director Travel Retail at London-based Harper Dennis Hobbs and a former associate of Sardana said: I am so upset to hear of the sad passing of Rakesh Sardana. I first met Rakesh almost 30 years ago and we worked together on many projects in Europe and the US. He had extensive knowledge of the the travel retail industry and brought charm, loyalty and a great sense of humour. It is a loss to the airport world as well as his family.

Henk Guitjens, former CMO of JFKIAT said: I met Rakesh for the first time in Montreal at an ACI dinner on September 10, 2001. I was the CMO for Terminal 4 at JFK, which opened in May 2001. We were discussing retail opportunities at JFK, when Rakesh asked: any chance for a store at T4? I told him that we had 13 stores available as Nuance cancelled their agreement early in 2001. Within 10 days he submitted an offer and negotiated an agreement. The partnership then began and lasted for 17 years. Rakesh was a strong and straight businessman, very generous and became a dear friend. It is a shock and very sad that he is no longer with us.

Dorothy Brown-Yarru, ACDBE Partner at JFK Airport added: I knew Rakesh for over 14 years and worked with him during that time. I found him to be trustworthy, honest and compassionate, he would put his employees before himself and he wanted them to be happy. Rakesh was a man of great integrity who honoured his word. It is with deep sorrow that I write these words in honour of a great man, a boss, friend and confidant who I developed a relationship of trust. A good person gone too soon. I hope his legacy will continue to live on, especially in the retail world.



Saveria USAs Chocolate & More fascia continues to grow on the continent.

TRBusiness would like to take the opportunity to pass on its condolences and sympathies to Rakesh Sardanas family and close friends during this difficult time.

Saveria USA President Claus Kohlenberger remains the main point of contact and is handling the business affairs of the Sardana Group on behalf of the family.

He can be contacted here: kohlenberger@saveria-usa.com