

Meet **Sejal Bhakta**, a graduate from UCR Palm Desert's Executive Master of Business Administration.

Born in Mumbai, India, Bhakta moved to the United States at age 5. Her family lived with her paternal grandfather at an independent motel in Blythe, and that's where she learned firsthand about the motel business.

Bhakta graduated from the University of California Riverside in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Information Systems from the Bourns College of Engineering. After graduation, she interned for Disney Consumer Products in Burbank, then relocated to be with her family.

At that point, her father had moved from Blythe to Palm Desert and built the Hampton Inn and Suites hotel off Cook Street. Bhakta jumped right in to help her father with his hotel business and simultaneously joined the UCR Palm Desert MBA program.

During her first semester in the MBA program, her father passed away from a heart attack. Just 23 years old and attending graduate school, Bhakta inherited two hotels.

Now married, Bhakta and her husband are overseeing construction of their third hotel, a Hampton Inn and Suites in Indio.

**UCR Palm Desert:** What made you decide to pursue your MBA at UCR Palm Desert?

**BHAKTA:** I was living at home with my parents in Palm Desert and this opportunity came up. So I decided to take it. Since my family had their own business, it was a good idea to expand my education into MBA.

**UCRPD:** It must have been incredibly difficult to run two hotels and go to graduate school while grieving your father. What helped you through that time period?

**BHAKTA:** My class at UCR MBA and professors helped me a lot. It was challenging but knowing I was able to go to school and get the support I needed helped me a lot.

**UCRPD:** What were some of the most important skills you learned at UCR Palm Desert that helped you grow your businesses?

**BHAKTA:** Accounting/Finance classes helped me alot. Also, learning about other businesses and how they started and was operating.

**UCRPD:** What's the best piece of advice you received while at UCR Palm Desert?

**BHAKTA:** That people are what make a business.

**UCRPD:** What's one thing the public might not realize about your work?

**BHAKTA:** Having your own business and being at the top doesn't mean you have it easy. You have to work hard no matter what level you are within that business.