

Executive Travel

Service Excellence

An Interview with Michael B. Hoffmann,
Managing Director, The Boulders Resort & Golden Door Spa



EDITORS' NOTE In the aftermath of 9/11, Michael Hoffmann created Hoffmann Hospitality, a consulting company focusing on hotel and resort opening support and service-driven change management. Currently, he oversees all operations at The Boulders Resort & Golden Door Spa, a luxury desert hideaway in Carefree, Arizona. This is his second posting with the Blackstone Hospitality portfolio, having previously served as General Manager at London's prestigious Claridge's, the Mayfair hotel. Earlier, he was the Managing Director for the Carneros Inn in Napa Valley, and was a member of the Smith Management Group at the Sam Houston Hotel in Houston, as well as the Philips Hotel Group at the Shore Club in Miami Beach. Prior to this, Hoffmann's posts include Director of Hotel Operations for Sun International's the Ocean Club in Paradise Island, Bahamas; Vice President and General Manager for the Bacara Resort and Spa in Santa Barbara, California; and Resident Manager for both The Peninsula Hong Kong and The Peninsula New York, as well as General Manager for The Peninsula Group's Quail Lodge Resort & Golf Club. Hoffmann began his career in 1983 with Four Seasons. Fluent in three languages, Hoffmann earned his diploma of hotel administration from the Lausanne Hotel School. He has also served as a Swiss Army Officer in the Swiss Tank Force.



Michael B. Hoffmann

PROPERTY BRIEF Located on 1,300 acres of Sonoran desert, The Boulders Resort & Golden Door Spa (www.theboulders.com) has been rated a AAA Five-Diamond property for 19 consecutive years. Guest accommodations include 160 unique guest casitas, as well as 55 one-, two-, and three-bedroom Pueblo Villas with private patios. The property offers visitors two championship golf courses; a terraced tennis garden with eight courts; four swimming pools, including a heated pool and a lodge pool with a rock waterfall; and six unique restaurants and cafes. In addition, the Golden Door Spa offers guests 24 treatment spaces and a full menu of spa services. Business travelers are also accommodated with over 12,000 square feet of meeting space, as well as professional meeting support and catering services. The hotel is a member of the LXR Luxury Resorts & Hotels collection.

When you look at the strength of the business for The Boulders in 2007, are you been happy with the results, and as you look for 2008, are the trends there for continued strong growth?

In 2007, pretty much across the board, we outperformed the expectations of our owners – not only financially, but also on the service front. Our trends, at this point in time, are looking very strong, not only for the first quarter, but also throughout 2008.

When you look at the property today, are you satisfied with where the product is, or do you foresee any major renovations in 2008?

The beauty of this property, but also its "Achilles' heel," is that the people who originally designed this resort did an outstanding job; they built a great resort that has held up well for the past 20 years. It was thoughtfully designed and has stood the test of time. The guest room technology, as well as some of the amenities, now need updating. We're also creating spacious and thoughtfully designed new bathrooms, which will be state of the art. So this will be a challenging year for us until we complete the renovations. The Boulders' reputation, based on its natural desert setting and the exceptional service that the staff of more than 600 delivers, has set the benchmark for where we are today and where we will be going forward. My mission is to ensure we continually improve on our service delivery, maintain the high standards our guests expect, and create new standards of service excellence that our customers will enjoy and that will allow us to set new trends.

What have you done to keep your food and beverage (F&B) operations fresh? Do you feel that there is a benefit in today's trend of bringing in a celebrity chef?

Upon my arrival two and a half years ago, we realized that there was a great potential in F&B. So we brought in a chef who specializes in organic cuisine. At her request, we built an organic garden at the spa, and we have slowly but surely repositioned ourselves in the marketplace as not only a great dining experience, but also one that incorporates the fresh, organic culinary concept. For the future, I would certainly support a celebrity chef style concept – I think there's a lot of benefit to that. But at this point in time, we're very happy with the product, and until we

get to the next step in the development of The Boulders, it's not something we're looking into.

At a resort like The Boulders, how important is the spa offering to your guests?

We're a destination where, once guests arrive, they are in an oasis-like setting where they can find the serenity and relaxation of the Golden Door experience. This year, we are further expanding our organic offerings to include demonstrations on organic gardening and cooking, and have also added new lines of organic treatments. The organic garden has become an integral part of the spa, where guests like to retreat and literally stop to smell the roses. We are also introducing the Carefree Golden Door Getaway, a customized Sonoran version of the classic weeklong Golden Door experience.

You offer guests access to world-class golf courses. Can you give an overview of the golf experience at The Boulders?

We have two 18-hole golf courses, one of which is alternated as a members-only course on a daily basis. So guests staying for multiple days will never play the same course on consecutive days. We're one of only a few resorts in the area that actually has its own golf course. However, there are over 250 golf courses within 50 miles, so there's an abundance of golf to be played and courses to be experienced.

How challenging is it today to retain your staff, and how has The Boulders been so successful in building a culture that retains so many long-time employees?

We have a tremendously caring environment. We care for our customers very strongly and not just our guests; our internal customers as well. When I came here two and a half years ago, I asked those who had been here for many years and knew what made The Boulders great, to tell me what programs they had in the past that really made this property stand out. Their eyes lit up as they described the programs to me, many of which we have now reinstated. We also reenergized some very basic fundamentals, from an employee recognition point of view, that have brought back to life a culture in this hotel that recognizes those who provide exceptional service experiences and create wonderful memories for our customers. That service culture is why and how we retain our talent. Our service scores put us in the top tier for luxury hotels. ●

A glimpse of the Golden Door Spa, through the golden door