



Understated Elegance

An Interview with Alex S. Furrer,
General Manager, The Setai, Miami Beach



The Setai, Miami Beach pool (left); a one-bedroom suite (above)

EDITORS' NOTE After beginning his career in the banking industry in Switzerland, Alex Furrer held a number of positions in the hospitality industry in Switzerland before joining The Setai, Miami Beach in 2010. He served in a variety of roles at the property before being named Resident Manager in 2013 and then General Manager in 2015. Furrer completed the General Managers Program, Hospitality Administration/Management, from Cornell University.



Alex S. Furrer

PROPERTY BRIEF Bespoke experiences await guests of The Setai, Miami Beach (thesetaihotel.com). Positioned in the heart of South Beach's historic Art Deco district, The Setai exudes a refreshing blend of simplicity and understated elegance. The Setai, a name inspired by the Babasa Indonesian phrase for "South Beach" inspires a rich heritage of multicultural influences and Far Eastern indulgences. The Setai provides a perfect blend of discreet personalized service, privacy and tranquility. Guests enjoy exclusive access to The Setai beach, three iconic temperature-controlled swimming pools, and The Spa at The Setai. The Setai's exceptional dining experiences by Executive Chef Vijayudu Veena include Jaya, which boasts standout dishes from Thailand, Korea, India, China and Japan. The Ocean Grill offers Mediterranean-inspired dishes and specialty drinks, while The Bar & The Courtyard caters to those who savor light Asian-inspired fare for lunch or simply want to relax with coffee or a cocktail.

What have been the keys to The Setai, Miami Beach maintaining its leadership position in the market?

I'm fortunate to have been here since 2010 and to have worked with the original team and to be able to see and understand their vision. So, although The Setai has gone through ownership and management company changes, we have been able to maintain our roots and our original approach that has driven the property's values. This has helped us remain consistent and successful, and we continue to be the rate leader in the market.

How important is it to have an extensive suite offering at the property?

It's crucial. Our profile would be entirely different without the suite component. We have more than 50 suites in our tower building, including a 10,000-square-foot penthouse. Thanks to this, we are able to offer our Art Deco studio suites at a price point that enhances the overall impression of the value our clients get from their accommodations.

What are the keys to being successful with food and beverage and is culinary more of an amenity or does it drive profit?

Being a leader in the market, it is important for us to offer an attractive food and beverage program especially in a trend-setting city like Miami. We certainly expect our food and beverage program to drive profit as well. Our Executive Chef has been with our property for 10 years, so he knows the roots of this place. Vijayudu Veena was promoted to Executive Chef a year ago after having served as our Executive Sous Chef for the past few years.

He has learned from the best chefs from Asia and Europe. He has a lot of knowledge and experience and keeps us in the loop when it comes to the culinary experience. He has also spearheaded an amazing brunch offering which has reached institutional status in the city.

The Ocean Grill, formerly known as The Pool & Beach Bar, was rebranded two years ago and it is now a hot spot that is packed year-round. It is the only upscale beachfront dining experience in South Beach and very popular.

Jaya is our featured restaurant which we renamed three years ago as a tribute to Jaya Ibrahim, our interior designer, who passed away the same year Jaya opened. The restaurant is the best we have ever seen and includes Pan-Asian dishes inspired by the historical silk and ancient spice trading routes.

With such an emphasis on health and wellness today, has the spa been a major focus?

The Spa, like our hotel, is boutique with four breathtaking treatment rooms overlooking our signature pools. Generally, wellness is important to The Setai and we've placed a focus on creating programming that enhances the guest experience in this area. The Serenity Path on the way from the Courtyard to the pools has a peacefulness to it, with lounges discreetly located and ideal for activities like

meditation. On the weekends, we offer complimentary yoga on the beach for our hotel guests and residents.

Is The Setai's event and banquet space primarily positioned for high-level and intimate events or does it also cater to broader social gatherings?

Our intimate meeting space is best catered to C-level meetings. We host a number of social events throughout the year, although we are particular about the brands we work with and ensuring like-mindedness.

Banquets are not considered a major revenue area because we believe the privacy of our guests and the luxury experience hold the most value, and we purposefully restrict how much business we do in this space.

How much of a strength is The Setai's location?

Much of our success comes from being in a top location and this keeps us strong in our positioning. Being located in South Beach, steps away from Lincoln Road and the convention center, is important for our guests who want to explore restaurants, nightlife, and the scene in the city.

Over the past few years, we have also seen North Beach develop as a fantastic location that we can benefit from.

How strong is the South Beach hotel business today and is the market experiencing growth?

There has been growth over the past 12 months. We are very happy with the development over that period. Many of the new properties that opened made a mistake by dropping rates to drive occupancy. We always held firm on our price strategy which allowed us to attract the top clientele in the city.

How important is The Setai's investment in training and retaining talent?

Very important. Especially in a highly competitive environment, it is crucial to remain an attractive employer for the best talent in the market. This includes a commitment to a strong training program and rewarding loyalty.

With 8 contracted quality assessments a year through LHW and Forbes, we receive constant feedback on areas we can improve, which also allows us to focus our training efforts.

We're cultivating a firm management style which gives our talent confidence and allows them to continue to grow in their goals to be strong leaders in the luxury hospitality industry. ●