



Istanbul Luxury

An Interview with Nicolas Kipper,
General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul



The Büyükkada meeting room (left);
a Premium Bosphorus View Room (above)

EDITOR'S NOTE Nicolas Kipper has led successful projects and received awards in the field of rebranding and positioning of the hotels and restaurants under the structure of Marriott International. Prior to his current position, he was the General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Budapest after having served as the General Manager at Marriott Moscow Tverskaya, Marriott Moscow Grand and London Marriott Park Lane. Kipper started his professional career



Nicolas Kipper

at Hyatt Regency Cancún, Mexico in 1990 and assumed important positions in the food and beverage departments of international chain hotels such as Hyatt Regency Guadalajara, Hyatt La Manga Club Resort, Spain, Hyatt Regency Belgrade, Grand Hyatt Istanbul, Hyatt Regency Taba Heights, Egypt, Hyatt Regency Warsaw, Poland and Hyatt Regency Casablanca. He received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Strasbourg University.

PROPERTY BRIEF The opulence, culture and tradition of the Ottoman Empire is given a modern twist at The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul (ritzcarlton.com/istanbul). Set along the Bosphorus in the upscale Dolmabahçe district, the hotel has 243 luxury accommodations, including 23 suites, and overlooks the waterway from nearly every vantage point. It offers an enticing collection of five-star amenities, including the Spa at The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul with locally inspired treatments including a Turkish Hammam, the city's first outdoor spa, an indoor swimming pool and fitness center. The Atelier Real Food restaurant features farm-to-table dishes and a showcase cellar with 150 local and international wines. Mediterranean-inspired snacks, mixologist-crafted cocktails and views overlooking the city and the Bosphorus are available at Bleu Lounge. The property has nearly 26,000 square feet of conference space with state-of-the-art audiovisual expertise, custom catering and other meeting services. The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul is a complete wedding destination with venues overlooking the Bosphorus, a dedicated wedding planner, custom catering, packages and other services.

How has the hotel business fared for Istanbul and what are the key markets for growth for The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul?

The business has progressed particularly well this past year. We have seen a major increase in business. It varies dramatically from

one category of hotel to another, and traditionally luxury properties are the ones that benefit last, but we did benefit as well.

Our dominant market is the Middle Eastern market, but we are diversifying and making a concerted effort to visit and foster other markets in the Far East and Latin America that are developing. We are expecting 2019 to be fantastic.

Will you highlight the state of the property and the recently completed renovation?

This past year, we have just finished a full-scale hard renovation of the property. All of the rooms are brand new and very contemporary. There is a great evolution of Ritz-Carlton standards that lead to more modernity but that retain the traditional feel of Istanbul and its hospitality.

The investment has been done and the business is coming back as well, so this should be a great opportunity to develop the business.

How important is it to have a strong suite offering and will you discuss the strength of your renovated suites?

There are different major standout points of the hotel and one is definitely the suites. The building is a tower and 80 percent of our rooms have views of the Bosphorus, which is a big advantage.

Most of our suites have both a living room and a bedroom. During the renovation, we mixed materials with wood floors in the living rooms, carpets in the bedrooms and marble in the bathrooms to help guests feel a sense of home when they stay in one of our suites.

We also have our two signature suites. The Presidential Suite has a huge terrace in excess of 200 square meters that is bigger than the interior area of the suite and that features a Jacuzzi overlooking the Bosphorus.

Recently, we started operating The Ritz-Carlton Suite, which is located on the 14th floor of our building with floor-to-ceiling windows providing breathtaking views of the Bosphorus.

Will you discuss your food and beverage offerings and what are the keys to being successful as a hotel restaurant in a city like Istanbul?

Istanbul offers a variety of elaborate foods. We have a restaurant that serves some of the best hotel food I have ever had in my life. It

offers Turkish food but also a wide variety of international offerings.

Our key feature is our brunch offering, which is successful both with hotel guests and with locals. We serve Turkish food and help international travelers discover it. This has had a very good impact on us and our business.

We also have a very successful rooftop bar with a retractable roof. It's a lovely place overlooking the Bosphorus that hosts many parties and has live music. We have enjoyed great success with this venue over the past summer.

How important is the spa offering at The Ritz-Carlton, Istanbul and do you look at the spa as an amenity?

Spas are becoming increasingly important everywhere and people tend to use them more often today, even if it's only for a massage or to work out. In a destination like Istanbul with language barriers in the city, guests tend to use our spa rather than going to one outside of the hotel.

We have the largest indoor swimming pool in town, as well as an outdoor swimming pool. We have more than 12 treatment rooms, which includes the traditional Turkish Hammam and offers everything from full body massages to facials.

We do not view this as an amenity – we are driving revenue and profit. We offer some limited memberships for local clientele, but mainly generate revenue through the treatments and the promotions we have.

With all the financial pressures in running a hotel today, is the role of the general manager still about hospitality or more of a business role?

It is a complex equation. With companies going public, it's becoming more and more financially driven. On the luxury side, it is even more critical to find a good balance.

I tend to always consider that we should be profitable at everything we do; otherwise, there is no point in doing it. However, I try to leave a certain margin where we must incorporate the unexpected for the customer, to create an experience and something for them to talk about.

It's about what we provide to customers that they can talk to their friends about. We strive for this every single day and I push our ladies and gentlemen to work towards making each customer experience unique in this regard. ●