

# Hospitality

## A Global Family Hotel Company

An Interview with Dionísio Pestana, Chairman, Pestana Hotel Group



Rooms, minibar, and bathroom at Pestana Park Avenue in Manhattan, Pestana Hotel Group's 100th hotel

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Dionísio Pestana is the owner of Pestana Hotel Group which was founded by his father and is the largest international hotel group of Portuguese origin with 99 properties in 15 countries. In January 2020, Pestana Hotel Group will open its 100th property, Pestana Park Avenue in New York City. Pestana has received several awards in the industry and from the Portuguese government for his achievements. He earned a degree in business management in South Africa.*



Dionísio Pestana

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Pestana Hotel Group (pestana.com/en) is the largest multinational group from Portugal in the tourism sector. It is present in 15 countries, has more than 12,000 rooms under direct management, has a global team of 7,000 professionals and is chosen by more than 3,5 million customers per year. In 2016, Pestana started a partnership with Cristiano Ronaldo, one of the world's best soccer players, that has now built seven lifestyle hotels.*

### What is the history of Pestana Hotel Group?

Originally my dad built the first hotel in Madeira as a family business with his brothers which opened in 1972. There was the revolution in Portugal in 1974 and things went completely haywire.

We had to take the hotel out of bankruptcy and rebuild it again. In those years, we had a management contract with Sheraton because my dad wasn't in the hotel business. I learned a lot about the hotel business through Sheraton and John Kapioltas, who was the president at the time, and he was a great mentor. We decided to go independent, grow our company and build



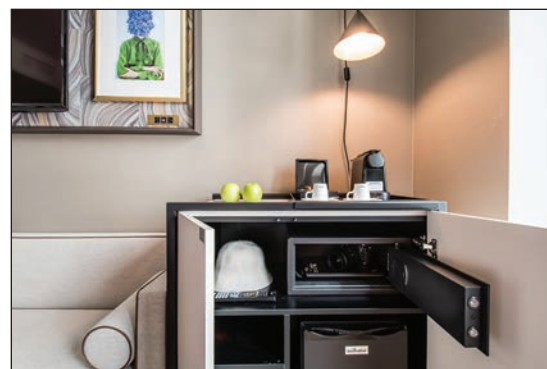
it from there. Today we're celebrating the upcoming opening of our 100th hotel, which will be New York.

### What are the characteristics of a Pestana property?

When we build and train our staff, we focus on service and the Portuguese have this natural hospitality to deliver guest experiences.

That has been a key to our success. We have expanded to two other brands. One is Pousadas de Portugal, which are historical monuments, castles and convents in Portugal with a concession with the government.

More recently, we teamed up with a famous footballer named Cristiano Ronaldo, who is originally from Madeira, and built a brand around CR7, which is his personal brand, so it's Pestana CR7 Lifestyle Hotels. This is more of a younger lifestyle product and has had great success, especially in emerging countries.



### You mentioned service. Will you elaborate on Pestana's commitment to service and training?

We focus on the five- and four-star product only. By doing that, the people that work with us start off knowing that our segment is in the top tier. We do all of our training in-house. We have a very knowledgeable human resource team in Portugal and we are hiring young, talented people. We have a 'Grow Together' program of about 30 youth colleagues that start off with us and slowly build up in the service side of the business. There are two sides to this business. There's the contact with the guests which is the smile, the hospitality, the experience that people touch and feel. Then there is the back-office side which is a different ball game completely because today there is digital marketing

and the world has changed from traditional sales. It's very specific, and for that we try and attract young people out of the industry, not people that have been a part of the hotel business, so we bring in out-of-the-box ideas.



### How do you focus your efforts in leading Pestana Hotel Group?

I think the larger the organization gets, the more decentralized you have to be. You have to make sure that the culture has to reach the entire system, and that's what I focus on. I always want our team to feel my presence physically when I'm at the hotels so that there is a face for them to see as they deliver what we promised and what they have been trained to do.

This is a family hotel company run on family values and we are all one family. This is a feeling that we try to keep and obviously as we go international, it's more difficult because of language and culture differences, but we work at it.

### What do you look for when hiring talent and what advice do you offer young people beginning their careers in the hotel business?

You have to be passionate and dedicated. You've got to come to this business because you love it, because if you give a brief of what the workload is many would immediately give up.

The skills we look for are people that speak two or three languages because that opens their minds to ideas. The other that we encourage is travel. In other words, if somebody says to us, "Look, I'd like to come, but I'm not prepared to travel," we think they are going the wrong way because you need to have those experiences. I think this open-mindedness is very important to be able to surprise themselves and for the company to do things differently. If you are passionate and dedicated and want to travel and try new things, you have a fantastic career ahead of you. ●