

Hospitality

A Living, Breathing, Piece of History

An Interview with
Markus Platzer, General Manager,
Willard InterContinental Washington, D.C.



Willard InterContinental Washington, D.C. entrance (above); Jefferson Suite living area (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Markus Platzer began his career as a night auditor at the Park Hilton in Munich, Germany, and eventually earned a role as Sales Manager at Hilton International's hotel in Vienna, Austria. In 1992, he joined the IHG team at the InterContinental Hotel Abu Dhabi, and in a few short years became the Regional Manager, Travel Trade Development, for the United Arab Emirates, working from the company's hotel in Dubai. He returned to Europe in 2001 as Director of Sales & Marketing for InterContinental Hotel Prague, the hotel where he first led operations as Resident Manager before beginning a seven-year stint in Bangkok, Thailand, overseeing four hotels in that country. More recently, he has served as Area General Manager for IHG in Japan, based at the ANA InterContinental Tokyo. Platzer earned bachelor's degrees in international tourism and hotel management at the Tourism School Bad Gleichenberg and in business and commerce at Handelsakademie Feldbach, both in Austria.



Markus Platzer

PROPERTY BRIEF A celebrated historic hotel, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Willard InterContinental Washington D.C. (washington.intercontinental.com) first opened its doors as a two-story rowhouse in 1818. Offering 335 guestrooms and suites, Willard InterContinental remains an integral part of Washington, D.C., and is regarded as a world-class destination. Located in the heart of the nation's capital, the property is within walking distance to many of the city's most notable attractions including The White House and the National Mall. Nicknamed the "Residence of Presidents" for its long-standing reputation of hosting the world's political and social elite, Willard InterContinental exudes contemporary luxury and historic charm.

What is the state of the hotel business in Washington, DC and is there growth in the market?

The Washington, D.C. market is evolving and ever-growing. Last year, Washington, D.C. welcomed a record-breaking number of visitors to the city – 24 million, which was a 5.3 percent increase from 2017. At the moment, hotel room inventory continues to grow with 18 additional

hotels to open in the coming years. The strengthening global economy is a huge driver of this growth and as a result we continue to find ways to be innovative to remain competitive, exploring new market segments including China, the Middle East and Europe.

How is Willard InterContinental Washington, D.C. positioned in the market and what differentiates the property?

Here at the Willard, we take tremendous pride in the history and uniqueness of our property, recognizing the significant contributions that this legendary hotel has made, and continues to make, in this nation's history. For 200 years, the Willard has welcomed U.S. presidents, foreign dignitaries and celebrities, as well as has been the site of many historic moments. The Willard is more than a hotel. It's a living, breathing, piece of history. It's an iconic institution. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne said in 1862, "it's the center of Washington."

We know that we can't rest on our laurels. It's important to utilize our heritage as the basis for serving the next generation of customers and guests at the property. Remaining relevant means keeping true to who you are, while being innovative. While our history will remain the centerpiece and the most important part of the hotel, we must evolve to remain competitive in the market and to attract the next generation of luxury travelers.

Will you provide an overview of the suite offering at Willard InterContinental Washington, D.C.?

Here at the Willard we boast some of the largest hotel rooms in the city. We have 41 suites that are very residential in feel, each with their own identity and unique attributes. The Willard sets a distinct standard for the ultimate luxury experience for our clientele.

Will you highlight the property's restaurant/food and beverage product and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

I look at our F&B program as a way to create exceptional experiences for our guests. While it is a necessary amenity and driver of revenue, our culinary offerings, whether in our restaurant, bar, private dining or banquet spaces, is one facet of our business that allows our personality to shine through our rich diversity of cuisine.

How broad are the Willard InterContinental Washington, D.C.'s meeting and event capabilities?

With more than 22,000 square feet of event space, the Willard offers 19 function rooms, including three ballrooms. We can accommodate groups as small as 5 to as many as 600 people. Similar to our suite product, our function spaces have their own identity and unique attributes and some have quite the storied past, such as our Crystal Ballroom or Willard Room. Our hotel is known for the many historic moments that have taken place



here over the last 200 years. You will experience history in these rooms and in the hotel. It's a strength that definitely helps set our product apart.

How has the role of the general manager evolved and is it still about hospitality?

Hospitality will always be at the forefront. That is the heart and soul of the business. The role of a GM is a delicate balance between maximizing profitability, managing employee expectations and delivering the most memorable experience for our guests. ●