

# Hospitality

## Fairmont's Future

An Interview with  
Jennifer Fox, President, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts



A bush buffet at the Fairmont Mt. Kenya Safari Club where the hotel funds a micro-farming project run by local women

**EDITORS' NOTE** Jennifer Fox assumed her current post in 2011. Prior to joining Fairmont, she spent 10 years at InterContinental Hotels Group where she was Chief Operating Officer, Europe. She also served as Senior Vice President-Global Brand Management for InterContinental Hotels & Resorts. Previously, Fox spent 13 years at Starwood/Sheraton where she held several senior management, General Manager, and marketing positions including Vice President Global Brand Manager for the Sheraton brand. She holds a doctorate in Business Administration from the International School of Management in Paris, France and an M.B.A. from Baylor University.



Jennifer Fox

**COMPANY BRIEF** Fairmont Hotels & Resorts ([www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com)) is a celebrated collection of more than 60 luxury properties around the globe, including Shanghai's Fairmont Peace Hotel, The Plaza in New York, and Makkah Clock Royal Tower in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Fairmont is recognized internationally for its responsible tourism practices and award-winning Green Partnership program. Fairmont is owned by FRHI Holdings Limited, a leading global hotel company with over 100 hotels under the Fairmont, Raffles, and Swissôtel brands.

### What made you feel that Fairmont was the right fit and that your role offered a strong opportunity to impact the brand?

I had not paid a lot of attention to Fairmont because I had perceived it as predominantly a North American company. But over the past three or four years, every time I was in Europe, I heard the Fairmont name and it started to get real traction in the Middle East and Europe. So I watched what they were doing to become an important competitor in the global market.

I was approached a little over a year ago by the Chairman and CEO. There were few companies I would consider leaving InterContinental for but this seemed like a remarkable brand; it had a strong culture and great brand positioning, as well as one-of-a-kind properties and landmark hotels, and I saw an opportunity to grow the brand globally.

### Is it challenging to bring brand recognition to Fairmont when you're handling properties with such strong individual brand names?

The Savoy and The Plaza are brand names in their own right, so it doesn't make sense for us to

lead with the Fairmont brand when those brands have so much equity behind them; we believe our brand is complementary. In situations like that, we are happy to lead with the heritage name of the asset and incorporate ourselves as Fairmont, a managed hotel, and make sure they have high visibility on everything we do in terms of consumer-related communications.

It's important that the industry and large corporations that book us for meetings know it's a Fairmont-managed property because they value the heritage name but they also want to know they get what

comes with the Fairmont brand, like global distribution, the marketing programs, and the benefits of being part of a large network.

### Are there more growth opportunities within the North American market or in different parts of the world?

We always talk about international growth when we talk about the Fairmont brand, and that is what excited me about joining the company.

But there is still tremendous opportunity in North America. We would like to have another hotel in Los Angeles as well as in New York. We'd also like to take the brand into Miami. We already have a strong presence in California and we recently bought Fairmont Sonoma, but we want to find more resorts in that area.

We have two fabulous hotels in Hawaii, but we'd love to be in Honolulu so that is a key market for us. We don't have a Fairmont hotel in Las Vegas so that is a target for us as well.

We're also working on a new convention hotel, Fairmont Austin, which is slated to open in 2015. This addition will mark our second hotel in Texas.

### How challenging is it to be successful in food and beverage and how do you feel about celebrity chefs and other similar concepts?

I'm a great believer in the value of a branded celebrity chef in the right market with the right strategy behind it.

Fairmont focuses on food and beverage as a core strategy of what we do regarding restaurants, as well as which products and services are delivered in catering.

We need to look at it hotel by hotel because the approaches we take are market driven. You look at the competitive environment, who your customer is, and the opportunity for business from the local community – if you're not considered one of the top restaurants in town by the local community, you will never survive.

Also, in-house, we have programs called Lifestyle Cuisine and Lifestyle Cuisine Plus, which are great for business travelers, as they allow our guests to eat vegan, raw, or macrobiotic meals, for instance. Our in-house guests love being able to stay healthy on the road.

### How important is it to offer that true spa experience today?

Fairmont developed its own spa brand, Willow Stream, 10 years ago; it's core to what we do. We look at the particular location of the property and draw on the essence of the surroundings for the spa – you create the environment that matches the destination you're in.

Our spa product is great for an owner because we already have a proven spa brand and it can be adapted to the local market. However, we will adapt to something else if it's appropriate.

### Why does Fairmont believe sustainability is so critical?

Fairmont started this focus in the early '90s when they did their first green partnership program, which was about reducing the impact on the environment.

So we did a lot of training for the GMs on what sustainability means and we established a commitment to minimizing the hotels' impact on the planet in terms of being a key component of our operating philosophy.

We also have a program called Fairmont Cares, which is a grant program that allows the company to give seed money for initiatives in the local environment and to get involved in the social fabric of the community in which our hotels operate.

For example, at the Fairmont Mount Kenya Safari Club, the hotel oversees a micro-farming project that is run by the local women and the property funds it.

### What service standards have you implemented to define the Fairmont experience?

We have one basic program within Fairmont that ensures we deliver the basics. We start with our 24 Guest Essentials list, which is based on research that we've done with consumers. We also have very good service training programs. In addition, we're launching a leadership program this year.

We're also constantly looking at what branded programs are important to a guest. Fairmont Fit, for instance, offers business travelers the opportunity to have their workout gear waiting at a hotel upon their arrival.

We spend a lot of time trying to build programs that offer convenience and personalization and that make the lives of our guests easier. ●