



Contemporary and Timeless

An Interview with Rebeca Selley-Morales,
General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Buenos Aires



EDITORS' NOTE Born in Mexico City, Rebeca Selley-Morales was first exposed to the Four Seasons brand during a ski trip to Vancouver. She applied as a management trainee and landed a spot in the café at Four Seasons Hotel Mexico, D.F. in 1995. Selley-Morales progressed quickly from Mexico City, moving on to assume several positions with Four Seasons in Chicago; Punta Mita, Mexico; Prague; Costa Rica; Miami; and Buenos Aires before returning to Mexico City. She opened five hotels along the way before returning to Buenos Aires, just as the hotel was being taken over by Four Seasons. Then it was back to Punta Mita and, eventually, Selley-Morales' appointment as General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Mexico, D.F. in 2008. She assumed her current role in 2011. In 2012, Selley-Morales was named one of just five "Hotelier of the Year" finalists by *Virtuoso*. Selley-Morales earned a bachelor's degree in Administration of Institutions from the Universidad Panamericana (ESDAI) in her hometown.



Rebeca Selley-Morales

PROPERTY BRIEF Located in Buenos Aires' La Recoleta district, Four Seasons Hotel Buenos Aires (www.fourseasons.com/buenosaires) features 116 spacious guest rooms and 49 suites, including seven one-of-kind suites in the property's adjacent "La Mansion." A \$46-million renovation has included a thoughtful redesign of the hotel and encompasses the lobby, guest rooms, landscaped grounds, and three new dining concepts. The final renovation phase, a refurbishment of the hotel's meeting and event spaces, is set to be completed in 2013. Luxurious amenities range from an outdoor heated Roman-style pool to a state-of-the-art fitness facility.

How have you been able to maintain the Four Seasons service standards at your property and is that what makes the brand so special?

I have been working with Four Seasons for 18 years and what makes it such a great company and so unique is because of their congruency between what they do and what they say. By that I mean, everybody talks about the need to meet the guests' expectations and even to exceed them. That doesn't mean that everybody always does it, but we are a company that strives for that.

In terms of the employee component, we truly take care of our employees and give them the tools they need to serve our guests. We also constantly strive to give them opportunities to better themselves. Of course, all of our employees want to grow and are constantly striving to be better.

What also makes this property unique is the service we provide, which is a passion for our employees. One of the things I most enjoy about working with this team is that they're extremely passionate, extremely energetic, and willing to create those magical "Wow" moments for our guests – that is what I value from them.

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How have you customized Four Seasons Hotel Buenos Aires for the local market?

We are in the middle of undergoing a comprehensive renovation. I was talking to a guest recently about the new appearance of the property and he said he was surprised that Four Seasons is looking so contemporary compared to its usual traditional look. We have to do a lot of work in making sure we continue to be the preferred choice because of our service, but we also want to evolve our design into something that is contemporary and timeless.

If you walk into this property now, you will feel that you're in Buenos Aires. There are a lot of different touches that help you to understand that. For example, this country has a great passion for horses – it has always been one of the sports of Kings here, and the owner of this hotel is extremely passionate about Polo. This was something we wanted to translate into our design vision. So we have a Polo bar, as well as five sculptures of horses in the fountains at the entrance that welcome guests; in addition, we have accents of blue in the lobby, reminiscent of the Argentine flag. This sense of place was vital to our design vision.

Is the renovation taking place throughout the entire property?

It's a complete and full renovation. Currently, we are up to over \$46 million for a hotel that only has 165 rooms, which is substantial for that number of keys. We have a very unique new suite – 1209 – and it's a beautiful display of Argentinian materials from leather and wood to Alpaca.

The design teams that were hired to do this renovation came to the property multiple times and were completely in tune with the local culture, which ensured that we could convey to guests in a thoughtful way that they are in Argentina.

What concepts have you incorporated to ensure success within your hotel restaurants?

We put a lot of thought, effort, and money into making our concept a reality. We hired interior designers that specialize in food and beverage, because it was important that the restaurant and bar didn't have the look and feel of a hotel restaurant or bar. The local media has supported us in noting that when you visit our Elena restaurant or our Pony Line bar, you feel that you're in the hottest spot in the city but that you're not in a hotel, which is extremely important for attracting locals.

We wanted to create a fun, vibrant atmosphere, where great food is coupled with great service, and where there is also an emotional connectivity with the clients as well, since that is a focus at Four Seasons. Today, you need efficiency combined with an emotional connection with guests.

There are three culinary features for the restaurant: the charcuterie; a rotisserie; and dry-aged. What makes our restaurant very unique is its connection to the kitchen so guests can view the chef in action.

How much of a focus have you put on the spa offering?

It will be an important revenue generator and it's undeniably an amenity you need in a luxury property in today's world. It's also a great thing that the health club and spa have a view of our garden.

We also have an outdoor heated pool – it's important to have an outdoor area for the leisure market. We're in the process of building a new restaurant in the garden as well.

How have you developed the talent that you need at the property?

We have employees who have been here since we took over 10 years ago. We also have some employees that have been here since the building opened 20 years ago. One of the interesting things about Argentinians, which represents the vast majority of employees here, is that they are attached to their country. So in a sense, you can more easily convey the local culture. ●

Four Seasons Hotel Buenos Aires' lobby with Pony Line bar in the background (left); exterior (right)