



Selling Service

An Interview with Sven Wiedenbaupt,
General Manager, Four Seasons Resort Nevis



Sven Wiedenbaupt on the Four Seasons Resort Nevis
golf course (left); the resort and pool (above)

EDITORS' NOTE A trilingual hospitality professional and graduate of the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne in Switzerland, Sven Wiedenbaupt brings more than 23 years of luxury hotel management experience in resorts and hotels around the world. Wiedenbaupt began his Four Seasons career in 2004 as the Director of Food & Beverage for Four Seasons Hotel New York. In 2008, Wiedenbaupt was promoted to Hotel Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Doha in Qatar. In 2011, Wiedenbaupt seized the opportunity for a transfer to the Syrian capital, where he was promoted to General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Damascus. Wiedenbaupt attended schools in England and Australia, and ultimately received his hotel management degree in Switzerland. Prior to joining Four Seasons, he worked for major hotel brands including Intercontinental Group and the Marriott Hotels, and for a number of other four- and five-star properties in Arizona, California, and Wisconsin.

PROPERTY BRIEF The five-star Four Seasons Resort Nevis (www.fourseasons.com/nevis) in the West Indies offers 196 spacious rooms and luxury suites just steps from the Nevis shore, canopied by swaying palms and surrounded on three sides by a spectacular golf course. Indulgent amenities include three pools, golf, tennis, a fitness center, business services, and private residence rentals, as well as a variety of dining choices with the Coral Grill, Neve, Cabana, and Mango, and the Library Bar for cocktails. In addition, the spa caters to guests seeking to be pampered and offers several services, including Ayurvedic treatments.

What excited you about the opportunity to take over this property?

It's a dream come true. As an avid golfer and outdoorsman, being able to work in a resort in the Caribbean with year-round outdoor activities as diverse as the location hits the nail on the head.

Being able to get involved in such a diverse product where you have four restaurants, a spa, a fitness center, a golf course, 10 tennis courts, a beach, 196 rooms, 70 residences, 350 acres, and two boats represents the definition of a general manager as opposed to a specialist.

I've also discovered that on a 32-square-mile island, I've been able to impact the local economy by decisions I make as a GM or through the relationships we establish as a

resort and a brand. For example, we have directly worked with airlines and the community to enhance the lift into the island, thereby directly helping to improve the island's tourism industry.

Is the lift meeting the demand?

Lift is improving and will continue to improve. There are various statistics that the Caribbean economy is on a decline or the interest in the Caribbean has stagnated, but we're showing positive trends year-on-year. We're extremely optimistic about the future and the potential in Nevis. We have great partners in the government here and it's a product that continues to evolve and grow, and show its potential.

Are there certain traits that instantly let you know you're at a Four Seasons when you walk into the property, or are they developed to be specific to the local market?

It's a bit of both. Each location has a unique flavor. Every hotel embraces the local destination and brings something unique to the table. That is the beauty of Four Seasons: We mold ourselves to the location successfully.

Parallel to that, you know you're in a Four Seasons because of the warmth of the staff, the inherent standards, and the quality of the product.

What are the strengths of your suite product?

A suite is always important. From a guest standpoint, it allows us to mirror their lifestyle while providing them the space to which they have become accustomed. From a business standpoint, it provides us the ability to drive an average rate. It also adds to the identity of the property. We have 17 suites, all of them ocean view and all of them providing a unique sunset perspective, as well as large living rooms and spacious bathrooms.

But together with the suites, I'm fortunate that we have 70 additional villas, of which 41 are in the rental pool that I would count as part of my suite inventory.

What makes food and beverage work for the property?

It's a challenge, but also an opportunity to practice all of my creative skills and put into place what I've quietly been learning over the past 30 years.

I have four restaurants and I'm going to develop a fifth. It's about taking the time to

understand what was, what is, and what can be; understanding how the restaurants have previously been managed; recognizing my competition; and figuring out what people are eating, what they're saying, and what they're asking for.

In each restaurant, we have identified either a completely new identity or we have amplified the identity and experience. In the case of Mango, I'm enhancing the Caribbean element by bringing in 101 rums and making sure the ingredients and recipes are from the Caribbean. I'm also amplifying the atmosphere with the type of music we're playing, and tweaking the layout a bit, so while it's still Mango, we've turned up the volume and are taking the concept to the next level.

For a restaurant like Cabana, I have identified that we can do dinner in there five nights per week – we're going to a Mediterranean theme, which speaks to a lot of the ingredients we have here, plus the temperature and the sunset.

Do you need to put a heavy focus on the spa concept at a resort property?

Yes. Spa is part of that unwinding, relaxing, qualitative component where you can get your facial, your manis and pedis, and various massages. That area has a little oasis in the center of the footprint of the property.

We have a new director of spa, and we have a vision of what we want to achieve with a focus on Caribbean-themed treatments, indigenous ingredients, and healing remedies inspired by Nevis culture and traditions.

How important has it been that the employees understand your vision in terms of service standards?

Critical. You lead by example. If you inspect what you expect, then you hold people accountable from day one on attention to details, quality of service, and speed and timing – then you're on the right track.

But service is what we're selling. As a result of great service, when people leave, they leave with memories – and hopefully not too many bathrobes.

Do you need to have knowledge in a broad number of areas today to be a GM?

You have to juggle hand-shaking and cocktailing with budgeting and forecasting, and the multitude of components that play a role. But that is what makes this industry so exciting, and it is the people that make it so rewarding. ●