



“Wowing” Guests

An Interview with Zack Zahran,
General Manager, The Kitano Hotel New York



A sampling of Chef Sato's fare at Hakubai restaurant (left);
the dining area of the Tatami Suite (above)

EDITORS' NOTE *Zahran's management career began at The Peninsula New York where he rose through the ranks to Resident Manager. He then assisted in the development of The Gordon Ramsay operation at The London NYC and LA hotels. Zahran also served as General Manager of the Helmsley New York and the Park Lane Hotels where he directed complete renovations of the properties.*



PROPERTY BRIEF *The Kitano Hotel New York (kitano.com) opened its*

doors in 1973 as New York's first Japanese hotel. It remains the first and only Japanese-owned hotel and has become an integral part of Manhattan's historic Murray Hill neighborhood. The 18-story hotel towers over some of New York City's most magnificent turn-of-the-century dwellings, offering spectacular views of city landmarks. The hotel features 150 guestrooms, including 18 contemporary suites, with a one-of-a-kind Japanese Tatami Suite. Known for an acclaimed jazz program, The Kitano is home to Jazz at Kitano, a supper club located in a former Rockefeller town house adjacent to the hotel. The Kitano Hotel New York also offers the critically acclaimed Michelin-rated Hakubai restaurant where traditional Kaiseki delicacies are served. The Kitano Hotel is a member of Preferred Hotel Group's Summit Hotels & Resorts brand.

What is the heritage of this hotel and what makes it so special?

It is with great pride and pleasure that I manage the gracefully elegant Kitano Hotel. Our team offers a richly layered and authentic experience to reflect our style with a safe, warm, and service-oriented environment from which our guests can explore one of the greatest cities in the world. The hotel's presence on Park Avenue has become part of the history of the area, while embracing its rich Japanese tradition. Following a complete multimillion-dollar renovation, it was reopened in 1995 with 150 individually titled rooms. We have 18 grand suites, including three town houses and an authentic Japanese Tatami Suite. Great care has been taken to imbue each room with its own identity through artwork and custom-designed furnishings.

The Kitano Hotel New York continues 42 years later under the care of the president, Mrs. Yoshiko Koike. Her message and our goal are simple: to “wow” our guests at every turn.

At the Kitano, one will find the Hakubai Japanese Restaurant where Executive Chef Sato's interpretation of authentic Japanese cuisine focuses on incorporating the best seasonal ingredients to create unique fare that is pleasing to the eye and palate.

Jazz at Kitano, New York City's most intimate jazz venue, offers the best in world-class Jazz entertainment and features Contemporary American cuisine with a full bar, including rare malt whiskeys, classic cocktails, fine wines, and Champagne to sip while one enjoys

great performances.

No matter what type of gathering, The Kitano Hotel is the ideal setting. Featuring gracious and elegant service and traditional Japanese hospitality, our meeting and event venues take a cue from our hotel's rich Japanese history to produce events of the utmost refinement with views of Manhattan and the Empire State Building.

What is a true luxury experience today?

Luxury is a feeling more than anything else; our guests feel the luxury the minute they enter. It's about how a guest is checked in, how the doorman opens the door for them, and how we walk them to the elevator and to the room they booked. Our check-in and checkout is fast, easy, and discreet. A true luxury hotel will accommodate a guest's request regarding, robes, slippers, high-quality crisp all-cotton sheets, and 100 percent down pillows, or the pillow of their choice. The Kitano Hotel New York offers our guests the unique opportunity to enjoy a traditional Japanese experience without leaving the boundaries of New York City. From its Japanese decor and artwork to rich marble bathrooms with prestigious TOTO washlets, the Kitano fully embraces its legacy and heritage.

How do you offer guests the technology without losing that personal touch?

We strive for perfection. Our guests are more sophisticated about technology in their professional and personal lives and they expect more from hotels when they travel. At The Kitano Hotel New York, we provide our guests with the technology they need to make their lives easier. Our team at the Kitano responds to our guests' technology needs everywhere, in meeting spaces, in the lobby, and at the front desk. Technology advances are improving the guest experience as well as making The Kitano more inviting to younger travelers.

We make it easier for guests who travel with or without devices by providing what they need

when they need it, as technologies have become a necessary perk. We ensure that our guests can use their devices and work efficiently. We work hard to exceed rising expectations and to make every experience even better than the last.

How is the market faring when it comes to the hotel industry?

Right now we are in an “up phase.” Overall, committed occupancy is up; most industry prognosticators are calling for two to three more years of growth. My responsibility is to look after every single revenue line. It's also important to be involved with sales and the revenue managers. At day's end, I am responsible for the bottom line. Our marketing strategy's objective is to communicate the unique set of services that we offer to discerning hotel guests. We always attempt to direct the focus of our guests to the issues of quality and value for the money as opposed to simply the bottom line costs associated with their stay.

Our marketing strategy will allow us to communicate our brand values, develop close working relationships with our customers, and to identify the needs of our guests in an effective manner. Continued differentiation and growth are two goals we have set for ourselves. Growth will take place by targeting new areas of business within both local and national communities.

Whether visiting for business or pleasure, this ideal customer can afford the best any city has to offer. When traveling, this customer feels it is important to have new experiences that demonstrate the status he or she has achieved in life. Our occupancy is excellent and our rate is very good in the city, but when I look at that, I look at RevPAR, and I look at what is important.

What advice do you give young people who want to be in this business?

Hospitality is not a job; it's a religion. It's something you have to believe in and “make every decision based on achieving a higher standard.” Think about working with a good company first – don't think about money or title. Focus on what you can do right now that will be good no matter what the future brings. In a few years, if they do well, they're going to get the title and they're going to get the money. Hospitality is a most sincere business. Find ways to push yourself farther, and don't only look after guests but also your team members. Every member is important because they deliver on the vision and message and, therefore, invest in building a long success and develop passionate, committed people. ●