

# Hospitality

## Contemporary with Japanese Accents



The Peninsula Tokyo and its fleet of Rolls Royce and BMW automobiles

An Interview with  
Sonja Vodusek, General Manager, The Peninsula Tokyo

**EDITORS' NOTE** Sonja Vodusek assumed her current post in December of 2015. Prior to this, she was General Manager of The Peninsula Manila. Vodusek joined The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited (holding company of The Peninsula Hotels) as Hotel Manager at The Peninsula New York in 2010. She relocated to Manila seven months later as General Manager in 2011. Prior to joining The Peninsula Hotels, she had 16 years of experience holding various executive management positions in the luxury hospitality sector at Four Seasons hotels in the United States, Japan, Ireland, Australia, and the Czech Republic. She received separate diplomas in hotel and business management from the Blue Mountain International Hotel Management School (BMIHMS) in Sydney and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.



Sonja Vodusek

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Opened in September 2007, the award-winning Peninsula hotel has established itself as Tokyo's premier address. Superbly located in the prestigious business district of Marunouchi, opposite the Imperial Palace and Hibiya Park and within minutes' walk of the shopping capital of Ginza, The Peninsula Tokyo ([tokyo.peninsula.com](http://tokyo.peninsula.com)) offers commanding city views, luxurious comfort, sophisticated facilities, extraordinary dining options, and the legendary Peninsula service.

**What has made The Peninsula Tokyo a leader in the market and would you provide an overview of the property?**

When The Peninsula Tokyo opened, it was the first freestanding hotel to be built in more than a decade in Tokyo. This makes the hotel very unique. There is a lot of buzz and this makes the atmosphere enjoyable. Also, the hotel's location is very unique.

Modern and contemporary with Japanese accents, the hotel offers 314 spacious guest rooms, including 47 suites. Each guest room and suite blends traditional Peninsula standards of comfort and innovative technology with elements of Japanese heritage and culture. Taking the design brief "international in design, but Japanese by inspiration," interior designer Yukio Hashimoto intertwined rich earth tone colors, woods, lacquer, marble, and stone with design and functionality to create a luxurious living environment. Completing the hotel's sophisticated facilities are five extraordinary dining options, a modern lounge bar, two ballrooms,

six elegantly designed function rooms, a wedding chapel, a Japanese ceremony room, a fitness center, and the award-winning Peninsula Spa. Most important, however, is the staff – a hotel can offer wonderful facilities, but it is the staff and the guests that makes it come to life.

**Would you highlight some of your specialty suites and how critical they are to the success of the property?**

Our specialty suites are very important to our overall business. The Peninsula Suite at 3,730 square feet is the largest among all international luxury hotels in Tokyo. It offers impeccable views of the Imperial Palace, Imperial Palace Gardens, Hibiya Park, and Tokyo's skyline. A traditional Japanese tatami (bamboo) mat area to conduct Japanese tea ceremonies is located in the bedroom area. The Peninsula Suite living room ceiling panels are painted gold over Japanese washi paper with sakura (cherry blossoms) patterns. The Peninsula Suite offers a private mini-gymnasium, outdoor terrace, grand piano, and 24-hour butler service.

**What are the keys to being successful as a hotel restaurant in a market such as Tokyo?**

The Japanese people enjoy seasonal foods and are particular about quality, region, and safety. These are important factors to succeed in the hotel restaurant market in addition to personalized service. We focus on each of these aspects whether at our grill restaurant, Peter, located on the 24th floor with unobstructed views of the Imperial Palace, or at our Cantonese restaurant, Hei Fung Terrace, or The Lobby where one can experience Peninsula's legendary Afternoon Tea.

**How important is the spa and wellness component to The Peninsula Tokyo and would you provide an overview of this product?**

Earlier this year, The Peninsula Hotels around the world launched Peninsula Wellness, a refreshed and reinvigorated spa, wellness, healthy dining, and lifestyle program. Peninsula Wellness recognizes that guests staying in luxurious hotel accommodations with the finest amenities are increasingly looking to relax and rejuvenate mind and body, and escape the stresses of modern living. As a symbol of the revitalized wellness philosophy, the Peninsula Wellness Centre was inaugurated as a global center of spa and wellness excellence at The Peninsula Bangkok. Peninsula Wellness was first launched in 2006 to offer guests a uniquely personalized approach to wellness and healthy living. The new Peninsula Wellness

reinforces this commitment to meet the evolving lifestyles of guests at all Peninsula hotels. Combining the best of Western and Eastern health philosophies with the world's finest spa and beauty treatments delivered by expert therapists, Peninsula Wellness provides the ultimate retreat for mind, body, and spirit. Highlights include the Peninsula Sleep Ceremony, exclusively created by ESPA for stressed travelers, a therapeutic Royal Thai massage in association with the world-famous Wat Pho Temple Massage School in Bangkok, and Sattva by Simply Peninsula Vedic aromatherapy-inspired spa treatments formulated by Australian spa brand Subtle Energies, exclusively for The Peninsula Hotels. Connecting lifestyle, nutrition, and modern dining is a revitalization and refresh of the Naturally Peninsula menus for guests at all Peninsula hotels.

**Would you discuss the service culture at the company and how you are driving this throughout your property?**

At Peninsula, our staff is family. They are our future, not in the sense of relying on them to continue to simply operate the hotel, but the assurance that our philosophy, heritage, and tradition will be carried on for generations to come. We believe that each staff's personality should shine in whatever position they fill at the hotel. We can teach people how to physically do things, but it is difficult to teach people the human touch that sets apart our brand and its service. This must come naturally.

**Do you feel that there are opportunities for women to lead in the industry and what advice would you give young women interested in a career in hospitality?**

There are great opportunities for women to hold positions of influence and leadership in the hospitality industry, and getting the requisite qualifications is the important first step. After that, confidence is required, but this can also be acquired. It's also about hard work, being willing to learn, and always having an open mind. A readiness to be geographically mobile and take any opportunity that arises is an added plus but, most important to me is being able to spot those members of one's teams that are potential leaders. Research shows that women in management roles are necessary because gender diversity in leadership teams leads to better performance and returns on equity. Also, senior women in management are needed to provide positive role models not just for female employees but for everyone. Our company, the Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Ltd., is a good example of diversity at management levels as well as in the boardroom. ●