

Hospitality

A Showcase for Marriott

An Interview with Nicolas Kipper,
General Manager, London Marriott Hotel Park Lane



The lobby of the London Marriott Hotel Park Lane

EDITORS' NOTE In November of 2014, Nicolas Kipper was appointed to his current post. He joined from his previous seven-year position as General Manager of the Marriott Moscow Grand. Kipper began his career with Marriott International in February 2004 as Director of Operations. A French national, he graduated from the University and Hotel School of Strasbourg having received a Bachelor's degree in hotel administration.



Nicolas Kipper

PROPERTY BRIEF Originally designed as a stately apartment building, and boasting a central location overlooking Hyde Park and Marble Arch, London Marriott Hotel Park Lane (marriott.com/London) features completely refurbished rooms and suites, brimming with amenities like book-matched marble bathrooms and luxury toiletries. Guests can savor seasonal, contemporary British fare at Lanes of London, their stylish hotel restaurant. With everything from award-winning entertainment in the West End to luxury shopping in Mayfair just moments away from the hotel, guests will have the best of Central London right at their fingertips.

How have you positioned this hotel within the London market and what makes it special?

Marriott and the owners of the property wanted to create something outside of the box with this hotel.

They invested nearly 25 million pounds in the renovation of the London Marriott Hotel Park Lane. They wanted to position the hotel closer to the players down the road on Park Lane like the Dorchester, 45 Park Lane, and the Four Seasons.

Marriott is very proud of this hotel and it has been used as a showcase for future owners, and we did things that are out of the ordinary. London has been a traditional hotel market, but we have lost the ties and we no longer wear name tags. When guests arrive we have desks to welcome them rather than a counter, and each guest receives an amenity upon arrival. We have a residential feeling, helped by the hotel's intimate size.

We have some unique features, such as being the only hotel on Park Lane with a swimming pool. I've seen many properties in London that are following suit and now renovating.

Has it been difficult to get the message out about this property?

It's a challenge to reposition a hotel without changing the name or brand. However, we continue to spread the message about the renovation, and the fact that it has been done in stages has allowed us to maintain momentum. We have had a lot of support from the media, which has resulted in a number of positive reviews internationally. I'm very confident that, once a potential guest experiences our hotel, they will return time and time

again.

Where have the renovations been focused and is the property now where you want it to be?

Absolutely. We have renovated all public areas, all guest rooms, and all of the food and beverage outlets. The renovation of the floors was much more than just cosmetic. We ripped out everything and changed the pipes and insulation, and put in new AC units, so it has been renovated in depth.

We finished the rooms in June 2015. We've just finished the renovation of The Club at Park Lane, a 342-square-meter health and well-being space, which is the final element in our complete refurbishment, bringing us in line with the rest of the hotel.

How important is the suite component for you?

We chose to reduce our total inventory by five keys from the previous hotel set up to make room for more suites as we do believe that seasonally there is a high demand for suites in the market. We now have an inventory where about 28 percent of our keys are suites.

Have you been successful at driving real revenue in the food and beverage arena?

The renovation of the restaurant was done first. The original concept was not as successful so we have changed it to keep the British flair we have in the property and translate that into the restaurant. We decided to do this ourselves rather than to just bring in a big name chef. We have since seen an increase in regular customers.

We are already driving quite a few people into the bar, where we have live music on the weekends.

How important is it that the technology is available to employees and guests without losing the personal part of the business?

The hotel offers state-of-the-art technology but ultimately what is most important is that it is user-friendly and enhances guests' experience, and makes employees more effective at delivering service.

Guests can use Marriott's first-of-its-kind concept, MeetingsImagined.com. This online platform allows users to design the entire look and feel of their event through image galleries and interactive web tools. In September 2015, London Marriott Hotel Park Lane hosted the launch of VRoom Service, the first in-room virtual reality travel experience – in partnership with Samsung – to bring guests into the process of reimagining the future of travel.

It becomes even more important in this day and age to have a personal touch. Everyone who goes through the lobby must be greeted by an associate. This enables us to create that personal relationship.

It's one thing to talk about engaging customers but another to really make it happen. We have very good results in our guest satisfaction survey as well as on TripAdvisor.

As you went through the renovation, how critical was the communication with the team?

Communication has been key throughout the refurbishment. We had a change in management, but we had very little staff turnover. Everyone says change scares people but when we introduced this and our team saw the investment in a better product and line of conduct, they were proud to be part of it.

What do you tell people coming in who want a career as a GM?

When I was young, I wanted to be GM right away. If one wants to be a successful leader and manager and drive people through the business, one has to gain experience. Schooling is great and gives a great base, but afterwards, nothing beats the experience.

Is the GM role still mainly about hospitality even with all the financial pressures?

It depends on ownership and management. I'm lucky to have fantastic owners who understand investment is needed and allow us to focus on elevating the hospitality experience for guests rather than just balance sheets.

Also, feeling satisfied by what I do means I'm naturally more genuine with the customer, and that translates into positive relationships. ●