



Forward-Thinking

An Interview with Peter C. Borer,
Chief Operating Officer, The Hongkong
and Shanghai Hotels, Limited



The lobby of The Peninsula Hong Kong (left);
the exterior of The Peninsula Paris (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Peter Borer joined The Peninsula Hotels in 1981 as Food and Beverage Manager of The Peninsula Manila. Since that time, he has held various executive and managerial positions within the company in Hong Kong and Bangkok, including General Manager of the flagship The Peninsula Hong Kong, Regional General Manager of Asian properties, and Group General Manager for Asia. He is a graduate of the Lausanne Hotel School (Switzerland).



Peter C. Borer

COMPANY BRIEF Incorporated in 1866 and listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, with a diverse portfolio of HK\$45 billion in assets, The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited (hsbgroup.com; HSH) is the owner and operator of a small number of the world's finest luxury hotels under The Peninsula brand, as well as a number of strategic real estate and tourism assets including The Repulse Bay, The Peak Tower, and The Peak Tram, one of Hong Kong's most popular tourism attractions.

Where do you see the global travel business today and what is your outlook for growth for Peninsula Hotels?

We are in interesting global times and 2016 was certainly a typical "Year of the Monkey" bringing with it many unexpected surprises, but I am happy with how our company weathered these. We have a diverse range of assets from hotels to properties in 10 countries around the world so it is unrealistic to think one will experience buoyant times in all markets at all times. Our operations are all performing well given their respective markets and we are fortunate to own and operate a portfolio of very special hotels. Our growth outlook is very positive and we are busy developing three magnificent hotels in London, Istanbul, and Yangon.

Peninsula is a brand known for quality and service, and is an industry leader. What are the keys to Peninsula's consistent strength and leadership?

The parent company of The Peninsula Hotels, The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited, celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2016 and so we have a long heritage of

hospitality. We have a deep understanding of our brand and what it represents. This is vitally important – to know who we are and what we stand for. We have the great fortune of having a Chairman, Sir Michael Kadoorie, whose family has been involved with the company since its inception. He constantly strives for perfection and reminds us every day that we must be true to our heritage while continuing to improve upon it, but remain humble.

Would you provide an overview of Peninsula's footprint and how you define the characteristics of a Peninsula hotel?

While there are some consistent themes that run among all of our hotels, our goal is to bring to a city a hotel that is relevant to it. This starts with the architecture of the building and the interior design of it and comes down to the elements of service and how they are presented. We will always have the foundation of our Asian heritage but this will be enhanced by the local culture in a genuine way. One should walk in to a Peninsula Hotel and immediately be at ease: feeling warm, welcomed, and safe.

Have you been happy with the way that Peninsula Paris has been received in the market?

We were very fortunate to be able to acquire, along with our partners, Katara Hospitality, such a stunning building that provided us with a beautiful canvas on which to create what we believe is a magnificent hotel. Our guests have provided us with very positive feedback since we opened, which has been extremely gratifying to the hardworking team who are providing these memorable experiences.

Peninsula London is under development. Would you provide an overview of what guests should expect from this new property?

They should expect a stunning property. London is a very important city and we have been searching for a hotel site there for over 25 years so when this opportunity presented itself, we were very enthusiastic. While we are still a few years away from opening our doors to the first guests, our team is now working full-time to create a new dimension

in Peninsula hospitality. There will be many of the features that one has come to expect from Peninsula, such as bespoke technology, a beautifully crafted grand lobby, and highly personalized service. These will be enhanced with several new and exciting elements, though it's a bit soon to speak about them. Besides offering some of the largest hotel rooms in London, we will also be providing the city with approximately 24 exceptionally customized residences.

Peninsula has a strong presence in North America with your properties in New York, Chicago, and Beverly Hills. Do you anticipate additional opportunities for growth in the North American market?

We first entered the United States in 1988 with the opening of The Peninsula New York, which gave us the confidence to explore new continents, and we have certainly never looked back. American travelers make up a significant portion of our guests globally and having these three hotels has been instrumental in this. The entrepreneurial spirit that one finds in America is still inspirational to the rest of the world and we certainly are open to the right opportunities for continued expansion within North America. We have a few cities on our wish list, but for the immediate future, we are very busy with our upcoming hotels in London, Istanbul, and Yangon.

As you look to 2017, what are the key priorities that you are focused on for Peninsula in order to make sure that you keep your leadership position in the industry?

One can never rest on one's laurels and while we are frequently recognized as an industry leader, we must continue to be forward-thinking. There are many challenges facing the world today and we need to adapt to them. What was important to a guest a few years ago is very different nowadays, whether that is the rise of technology, big data and the like, or some of the more basic human needs, such as safety and security, which are now at the forefront of our minds. At the same time, our employees are also changing and we must adapt to their needs and desires too. We are constantly looking at how to attract and retain new talent in ways that were very different to when I started my career with Peninsula 36 years ago. ●