



The Del Way

An Interview with Andre Zotoff,
Vice President and General Manager,
Hotel del Coronado



Hotel del Coronado beach spin class (left); exterior with the pool (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Andrew Zotoff has held his current post since July 2013. Prior to this, he was General Manager for Fairmont Hotel Vancouver and Fairmont Hotel Chicago.

PROPERTY BRIEF The legendary Hotel del Coronado (hoteldel.com) is located on 28 oceanfront acres on Coronado Island. Built in 1888 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1977, Hotel del Coronado is an American treasure with over 128 years of stories to tell. Rated one of the top 10 hotels in the world by USA Today, The Del continues to maintain its rich history while offering contemporary conveniences such as unique beachfront dining experiences, an award-winning spa, upscale shopping, a variety of recreational activities, and the luxurious cottages and villas at Beach Village at The Del.



Andre Zotoff

With ownership that continues to invest in the property, how do you find the balance between being relevant today while making sure the history and heritage of the property is maintained?

Being retro and historic is really cool, but having a perception of being old is not. There is a very fine line in between.

Our owners invested a lot of money during a room renovation on our Victorian building a few years ago, and they did an excellent job. The bed frame has a 1960s feel, with a modernized nightstand for function. It has a complete retro feel but maintains a historic and rich look.

In 2017, we're renovating the guest-room corridors. We hired a designer who came up with paintings of beach umbrellas with stripes on them, similar to what one would have seen in the 1950s. The carpet will give a feeling of being on sand, so when guests walk down the hallway, they will feel as if they are on the beach.

Another example is our hotel car, a four-door red Porsche. It's a very classy car that crosses generations, but there is also an edge to it. VIP customers are very impressed when we pick them up at the airport in that car. We're working hard to make these points of conversation.

In addition to making things clean and current, it's also about our offerings. Spinning is really trendy right now so we came up with Beach Spin, where we have spin bikes and a state-of-the-art sound system using Beats by Dre headphones. It's really about listening to today's customer and giving them what they want in order to stay fit, but doing it in The Del way.

We also introduced Mermaid Fitness in summer 2016, where guests put on mermaid tails in the pool and go through an exercise routine set to music. The class was sold out several weeks in advance for the entire summer, and we've decided to offer it year-round because of its tremendous success.

How do you offer technology to the guests who want it but make sure that you don't lose that personal touch?

When it comes to hotels, technology is a very important component but it's still a hospitality business and a people business. People still go to the front desk and check-in, but we also have a technology option that allows us to communicate with customers via text message if they choose.

Once we find out what their interests are, we send out offerings via that channel. With the spa, for example, we text customers about last-minute openings where they can receive a discount. People react very positively to this, as it is tailored to them.

We can balance both well by using technology for convenience, without losing the human touch.

Technology is the minimum expectation but people still want the human connection. It's powerful to have both.

Where are the key markets for the property and how global is your focus when it comes to driving business?

We look in two major market segmentations: we have our leisure customer and our group customer.

With the leisure customer, we see it as three different hotels: we look at our non-ocean-view rooms, all premium ocean-view rooms, and our rooms at Beach Village, which are our luxurious villas and cottages.

For all three subdivisions of the hotel, we target different markets. When it comes

to mid- to high-level customers, we get much out of the drive-market area with people coming out for the weekend.

The great thing with The Del is we are lucky because we are such a natural search term on the Internet. We don't have to buy as many key words as branded hotels because so many people already look us up. That gives us tremendous exposure.

In the Asian and European markets, we work wholesalers and travel agencies to go after specifically targeted markets. Many Asian and European customers come to California and plan a longer trip so we offer them a good value proposition to stay midweek.

On the Beach Village side, our average rate is \$1,500 per night, which appeals to a very specific customer, so globally we're going to target geographically and by income.

We have the most beautiful beach in America and people don't always realize how stunning our beaches are in Coronado. Because we own part of the beach, we can offer full food and beverage on the sand, one of our distinct competitive advantages.

The other 65 percent of our business is corporate and incentive groups. We get groups worldwide from Asia, Europe, and the United States.

Groups are able to come 350 days per year non-seasonal, which is great for us when leisure business is slower.

These guests also fill the non-view rooms of the hotel because they are in meetings all day. This allows us to create compression for our leisure customer in our premium rooms. It's a successful strategy for us to target those two major markets in different ways.

Did you know early on hospitality was where you wanted to be?

I started my career originally as a chef, but I really love this business. I love coming to the hotel and making people happy. I'm really passionate about it. I tend to get bored easily and this is an industry where one constantly gets to experience new and different things.

I also believe that if someone likes what they do, they are really good at it. Many people do work because it pays well or it's something they fell into, and some of those people would rather do something else. I'm lucky as I get to do what I really love. ●