



Supporting Independent Properties



Sonnenalp Hotel in Vail, Colorado (left); Wequassett Resort and Golf Club in Harwich, Massachusetts (above)

**An Interview with Bree Brostko,
Managing Director, Kindred Resorts & Hotels**

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to her current post, Bree Brostko was Vice President - Marketing & Business Development for Resort Hotel Association, and also held the role of Director of Marketing and Member Relations. Before this, she was Director of Communications for Family Service of Roanoke Valley; Assistant Director of Membership for University of Virginia Alumni Association; and Meetings Coordinator for Associated Builders and Contractors. She received her Advanced Certification in Hospitality Marketing from Cornell University School of Hotel Administration and her B.S. from the University of Virginia.



Bree Brostko

COMPANY BRIEF Kindred Resorts & Hotels (meetkindred.com) is a collection of independent hotels and resorts in North America focused exclusively on the group and meetings market. The consortium is a division of the Resort Hotel Association (RHA), which was founded in 1987 by the members of what is now the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHELA) Resort Committee. The decision to form RHA was driven by independent hoteliers deciding to pool their resources and group purchase insurance. Kindred was formed to help those same independent properties, that offer authentic, highly personalized experiences to build awareness and inquiry from the group, meetings, and events markets. The organization also provides meeting and group planners with a robust, user-friendly portal of independent, boutique properties in locations from Hawaii to Florida. Currently all Kindred members must also belong to the Resort Hotel Association (RHA) in order to qualify for membership.

What opportunity did you see in the market for Kindred Resorts & Hotels when you decided to start the company?

Kindred is the brainchild of our parent company, the Resort Hotel Association. RHA is a group of 150 independently owned hotels and resorts that got together about 30 years ago to group purchase insurance.

The Resort Hotel Association, as a nonprofit, continually looks for ways to reinvest in its members and to invest in the independent hospitality experience. About five years ago, the association's board felt they were well positioned to explore how else they could help their properties.

The board looked at several opportunities where they could band together. One issue that kept coming up among independent hoteliers was group business and partnering to attract more leads and bookings.

We worked with our resorts to talk through the top challenges they were seeing in the group space and the four they homed in on were generating more awareness, and competing with other properties via search engine marketing, seasonality, and acquisition costs.

This is why we decided to launch Kindred as a marketing and public relations co-op for these independent properties.

Kindred is fully funded by the RHA, and they do that because they see the offering as such a differentiator in the insurance marketplace. By providing marketing and outreach services to the hospitality sector, RHA is serving not only as an insurance partner but also as a revenue driver – directing group business back to the properties. No one else in the hospitality insurance marketplace is doing anything like this.

How much growth potential is there for the collection, and do you see it coming from certain markets or is it based on the individual property profile?

It's more based on the profile, with the core determinate being if the property is independent. Many of our members partner with other organizations, be it Historic Hotels of America or Preferred. We're another marketing channel to get the word out.

Kindred collection properties really vary in terms of size and the markets in which they exist. They are all over the spectrum in terms of location, rates, and amenities, so we have properties that address all needs. There's something for everyone – the common thread is the independent experience.

Will the focus remain solely within the U.S.?

For now, we're definitely focusing on the U.S. – we have a lot of growth potential here. International might become a focus down the road.

Is there still a role for the independent hotel?

Absolutely. The role of the independent property is even more advantageous now. When people talked about the end of the independent

property, it was quite some time ago before the Internet and tools like TripAdvisor. Being able to see the actual room product was the great equalizer.

Travelers and meeting attendees have a craving to experience something on a deeper level and this includes a sense of place. Independent properties are uniquely positioned to do just that.

Our challenge is to cut through the clutter and make sure we're getting the word out about our properties.

How important is brand awareness for Kindred?

It's a tricky balancing act. Our number-one focus is our properties, so we definitely want the awareness to be about those; we're not trying to insert ourselves as another soft brand to muddy the message. However, we recognize that there needs to be some brand awareness of Kindred as a collection and that Kindred really speaks to the independent, localized experience.

A key differentiator for Kindred has been that there is no cost for participating properties and all of the revenues go back to the properties. How important is it for properties to fully understand this?

It's a critical differentiator when so many sales and marketing budgets are getting cut, and properties have only so many funds to direct into different channels. Our ability to provide these services free of charge is an incredible benefit.

As we look to grow and expand, I don't know that it will be sustainable in the long run, but right now the RHA is proud to offer this great benefit at no cost.

Is the market for group business strong today?

Another reason we decided to go on this venture is because it's expected that the conventions and special events business is going to grow by 44 percent between 2010 and 2020. That's a huge opportunity for growth.

In describing our properties at Kindred, we emphasize that they are places where coworkers become friends. This speaks to the feel our properties can provide. They often have an environment where some of the layers can come off and connections can be made at a deeper level. This allows people to work more effectively with coworkers, vendors, etc. We really believe that face-to-face meetings are critical and build a sense of camaraderie. ●