

Constant Reinvestment

An Interview with
**Maria Zec, Regional Vice President,
 USA East Coast, The Peninsula Hotels;
 General Manager, The Peninsula Chicago**



Deluxe Suite living area (left); the lobby at night (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Since March 2002, Maria Zec has served as General Manager of The Peninsula Chicago and assumed her current post with The Peninsula Hotels in May 2007. Prior to this, she served as Managing Director and Hotel Manager at the New York Palace Hotel. Earlier, she was Resident Manager of the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago and also held positions at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, the Waldorf Astoria in New York, and the Hilton at Short Hills (New Jersey). Zec holds a B.S. in business management and a B.A. in French from Purdue University.



Maria Zec

COMPANY BRIEF The Peninsula Chicago (chicago.peninsula.com) has been recognized as a premier property with Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001. The property boasts 339 luxurious guest rooms and suites furnished in a contemporary yet classical style, and offers a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, as well as three distinctive restaurants and a bar, 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and seven additional meeting and event rooms. The Peninsula Chicago is managed by The Peninsula Hotels (peninsula.com), which operates luxury properties throughout Asia and the United States.

What has been the key to the consistent success and leadership of The Peninsula Chicago?

The Peninsula approach to service has always been to provide warm, genuine, attentive, and anticipatory service. Our brand has a deep heritage and passion for hospitality that ensures both our guests and our colleagues are cared for in ways that exceed their expectations. At The Peninsula Chicago, we describe this as "Eastern graciousness meets Midwestern hospitality."

Leadership in our hotel can be found at many levels and is nurtured to ensure we carry on a successful legacy. We believe in hiring individuals who have genuine empathy and concern for the well-being of others. We can always teach people about standards and service expectations, but we need to hire people who display a passion for service and desire to go above and beyond to make each moment of our guests' stay special.

We just celebrated our 15-year anniversary last year and we had 74 people who celebrated spending 15 years with The Peninsula Chicago as well. In fact, more than a third of our team has been with us for at least 10 years and 60 percent have been with

us longer than five. I think their collective knowledge, passion, and enthusiasm in taking care of our guests has been the key to our success.

Beyond service, our success is maintained by a constant reinvestment in our design and programming approach. This year, The Peninsula Chicago completed a comprehensive guest room redesign that set a new standard for luxury including sophisticated interiors, advanced guest room technology, and bespoke artwork. We have also invested in creating new experiences for our guests

that help create seamless communication, such as Mobile Concierge, and special access to the best of Chicago's destinations, such as our "Keys To The City" program. The Peninsula's personalization of service, luxury design, and unique experiences enhance every guest's stay with ease, elegance, and the ultimate in luxury travel.

How important is the strength of your suite product?

The Peninsula Chicago offers 339 guest rooms, including 83 suites in a variety of configurations, including some with sofa beds, making them ideal for families.

The newly redesigned suites at The Peninsula Chicago showcase a contemporary style complemented by custom artwork influenced by Chicago's rich culture. Each suite features a hand-embroidered silk chrysanthemum art wall, along with hand-painted artisan glass elements by artist Michael Glickman that provide a decidedly chic yet residential feel. A nutrition center and Nespresso coffee amenities are housed in a hand-painted chinoiserie cabinet designed by David Qian.

Our newest redesigned suite, The Grand Suite, offers stunning views of Lake Michigan and the city, and features an impressive design including a private dining area with a beautiful blue wall of hand-painted cherry blossom branches. The entry way is intimate and impressive, welcoming guests with a variety of room options to explore, from the living and dining areas in an open floor plan to a private office, second bedroom, the master bedroom, and more. The floor plan is residential and offers all possible amenities for a high-end residence. The rich blue color throughout the suite is inspired by our connection to Lake Michigan and the Chicago River, and their importance to our city.

Guests that stay in suites at The Peninsula Chicago are entitled to added benefits, including access to the hotel's MINI Cooper chauffeur-driven

car for up to three hours per day complimentary. We have also reserved some exclusive experiences for our suite guests including the new "Hamilton Nights" Broadway show package, featuring a suite, breakfast, parking, and two house seats (best seats in the theater) to this amazing production.

How is technology impacting the hotel industry and how do you ensure that technology does not take away from the personal touch?

With the proliferation of technology in guests' daily lives, it has become an expected attribute when guests travel. Hotels have long been a place where guests expect all of the comforts of home and more, but with the rapid changes in technology, the industry as a whole is trying to keep up.

Peninsula Hotels have always been the leader in in-room technology offerings even before it was available to the average consumer. We were the first to have a bedside control panel in our guest rooms that operates temperature, lights, TV, etc. Our brand continues to be the leader in developing and implementing user-friendly technology for our guests.

Introducing Peninsula's signature technology to the United States for the first time, the new rooms at The Peninsula Chicago feature fully customized, interactive digital bedside and desk tablets preset in one of 11 languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Korean, Japanese, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese). Full control of all in-room functions is just a touch away, enabling control of all guest room lighting, room temperature controls, restaurant information, hotel services, city information, attractions, and TV channels. LED touch-screen wall panels offer weather details, language, and privacy options.

With complimentary long distance, VOIP calls at the touch of a button, bedside charging stations, complimentary WiFi, tablets with 11 languages, 24-hour check in, Press Reader (complimentary access to more than 4,000 international publications), as well as "PenCities," (an up-to-the-moment online city guide), all visitors can feel at home at The Peninsula Chicago.

While incorporating technology into the guest experience, it does not replace our guest interaction; it provides the guest an added option of how they wish to interact with the staff. We offer Mobile Concierge, where guests can communicate directly with a staff member communicating requests conveniently. Our intuitive staff takes pleasure in interacting with guests according to their preferences to ensure a truly personalized experience. ●