



The Personal Touch

An Interview with Philip L. Truelove,
General Manager, The Greenwich Hotel



The Greenwich Hotel courtyard (left); and pool (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Philip Truelove began his career as Reception Manager at the Ritz Hotel in London in 1970. He later held managerial positions with the Connaught Hotel, The Ritz-Carlton in Washington, D.C., Chateau Marmont, and The Mercer Hotel. He used to own and operate The Island Inn in Monbegan, Maine. Truelove received his M.B.A. in Hotel Administration in the U.K.



Philip L. Truelove

PROPERTY BRIEF The Greenwich Hotel (thegreenwichhotel.com), located in New York's Tribeca district, has 88 rooms and suites with furnishings from hand-loomed, Tibetan silk rugs to English leather settees. All beds are Duxiana and bathrooms are designed in unique patterns of hand-laid Moroccan tile or Italian Carrara marble. Modern room features include high-definition flat-screen TVs, iPod docking stations, and complimentary wireless Internet. Hotel features include a drawing room and courtyard, Locanda Verde restaurant, Shibui Spa, as well as indoor pool and gym facilities. The Greenwich Hotel is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

Will you talk about your experience in the New York market for this year and is this a challenging time for growth in the city?

We have improved slightly over 2015. We continue to maintain a very good occupancy and a very good average rate, both of which are slightly up from last year.

I'm aware that the supply of hotel rooms has increased dramatically and inevitably, the city as a whole, will take a while to adapt to that. We're fortunate that we're not being affected by it, but we still have to pay attention.

Airbnb is going to have a greater effect on the lower-priced hotels – a vast majority of the population cannot afford the rates and are looking for better deals. Those who come to us can afford the luxury of staying in a hotel and having the service that we provide that can't be provided through Airbnb.

Also, Downtown New York is faring slightly better than Midtown where there are more new properties being developed.

Do you look primarily at location and geography when it comes to the competitive set or is it broader?

We have to compare what is happening both Downtown and in Midtown. It seems the occupancy Downtown is higher than the occupancy Midtown. However, the rates have always been slightly lower.

How do you describe the Greenwich Hotel experience?

We try to be individual and offer a service that can compete with any other five-star hotel in the city, however formal or informal. We do it in a more relaxed manner, which reflects Tribeca and the area we're in. I'm intent at making people feel at home in a safe environment.

It is fortunate that we are able to offer the facilities that we do with our Shibui Spa, which has a great gym and pool; for an 88-room hotel this is a luxury. We also have a beautiful courtyard and drawing room, which are private spaces just for the hotel guests.

You also have a strong suite offering. How valuable has that proven to be?

It's hugely valuable. We do have a range of suites at different rates and we can also provide adjoining accommodations. Although we don't take groups as such, we do have people traveling together. It is nice, for instance, for a family traveling with a number of family members where the matriarch may take the larger accommodation and the family members may take other rooms, but they can gather in the suite. If a production crew is staying with us, the bigger spaces work well for them and can be used for their meetings and as work spaces.

What has made your restaurant, Locanda Verde, work so well and how do you tie it into the property?

Within the property, we work seamlessly from a guest point of view and have a great relationship with each other. They service all our Food and Beverage operations and from that, we benefit greatly from their experience in that field. Equally, the restaurant was set up to service the neighborhood, as well as the hotel, so it has become the go-to for those wonderful people who are our neighbors.

Is a spa and pool essential for your clientele?

Yes. We're fortunate to run the spa so we have complete control over how it operates.

It offers a leisure component, which works well for weekends and holiday periods but anybody who is travelling needs that ability to relax and be taken care of.

How critical is it that the human touch and interaction isn't lost today, especially when there is such a focus on technology?

Hospitality is about that bit of our heart that we can offer to someone coming to stay – the personal touch, the time to talk, the familiarity as well. Many of our staff have been here since the hotel opened and we have formed special relationships with many of our guests.

Technology is essential and we try very hard to maintain the speed and volume of the Internet, which everybody uses. There is a danger however that the human touch will be lost by contact now being offered through social media. We removed ourselves from social media because we found it more intrusive than necessary and we do want to maintain privacy for everyone's sake.

We do, however, have a Greenwich Hotel app, which is available on all devices that will allow our guests to check the weather, read thousands of newspapers and journals from various countries, and order room service online. The more traditional methods will remain by voice for room service or printed material to read the paper.

How important is it to have owners that invest in the property long term?

Everybody is of the mindset that we have to maintain what we have. We have a very diverse design and it's an eclectic mix of old and new pieces, and there is a constant update of the carpets, rugs, furniture, chair covers, and curtains – and technology.

It's great that we're not held to a specific budget, which means we can spend the money needed to keep that high level of quality.

How important is it for young people to take the time to really learn the business before moving up within it?

It is so important. There is always an impatience to get to the top but, ultimately, when it comes to dealing with real people and real situations, practical experience is invaluable. Until real life is experienced they're not equipped to take on a role of responsibility. It's essential to do the basic jobs that are so important to our business to understand how it works and what goes on. ●