



## In the Heart of Mayfair

An Interview with Alvaro Rey, General Manager, InterContinental London Park Lane



Club InterContinental in the InterContinental London Park Lane (left); InterContinental London Park Lane near London's Wellington Arch (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Alvaro Rey undertook his training at Ecole Hôtelière Les Roches, Switzerland and the Hotel Management School of Northwood Institute. He began his career at InterContinental Medellin in his native country of Colombia and has remained with the company ever since. During his time with InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, Rey has held General Manager positions across South and Central America, Middle East, Australia, and Europe. In 2009, Rey brought his expertise as General Manager to the flagship hotel for IHG, InterContinental London Park Lane. He is now Area Manager of InterContinental Hotels & Resorts London & Franchise Hotels Europe.



Alvaro Rey

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated at one of the capital's most prestigious addresses, InterContinental London Park Lane ([parklane.intecontinental.com](http://parklane.intecontinental.com)) presents modern luxury accommodation in the heart of Mayfair. Inspired by its location overlooking the Royal Parks, the hotel delivers elegant natural interiors and award-winning seasonal cuisine. The flagship InterContinental Hotels & Resorts® property combines exemplary service with a Concierge team that brings insider London to life.

**With so much new supply coming into the market, is it hard to find growth in a city like London today?**

While the number of new hotels and properties has increased, London has still been getting stronger and has become an increasingly important city in the world. Many people travel through this city so, despite the number of new hotels, business is booming, independent of the economic situation of certain countries.

I have been seeing growth and I believe it will continue. There are more properties coming to market, but London is strong and I'm completely confident it can handle the influx and that there will be even more visitors this year.

**How is the property positioned within London?**

We are very well-positioned in many different markets. Ten years ago, this hotel was competing only with certain brands but, after we did a refurbishment in 2010, we began competing with a wider selection of hotels. We have since become

very flexible because of our number of rooms and suites, and because of our wonderful location.

When it comes to events, we offer a large meeting space so we can compete with hotels like the Hyatts; in terms of suites, we can compete with the Four Seasons; and in terms of corporate business, we can compete with the Sheratons.

The hotel caters to the high, high-end with a great variety of rooms, but also to all different types of markets, which is not true of all London properties.

**How important is the suite product for this property?**

London is an international city, and there is a large market for suites. We have created an interesting suite menu, and we offer a great variety of suites that cater to all markets.

**In London, where there are so many great restaurant offerings, how much of an emphasis do you put on food and beverage for the property?**

In the hotel world of 30 years ago, F&B was a great component. Then hoteliers decided it was not that important. However, over the past five years, people are coming to realize that it is important again. They're realizing that restaurants bring in the local crowd.

I market the restaurant as an independent property. We have an Italian restaurant with Theo Randall, a famous chef, and we are bringing in Martha Ortiz, a world-renowned Mexican chef to InterContinental London Park Lane in May. Cuisine in this city has grown so much with the growth of ethnic food, like Japanese or Peruvian. Gastronomy is growing so much that hoteliers are now seeing it as an opportunity.

We are not afraid of the local restaurants – we are learning from what they have done, and we see the chance to do something great on our end.

**How do you offer the technology for those who want it but make sure that the personal touch doesn't get lost?**

I do appreciate technology and many people ask for it, but the personal touch cannot be lost. In a city like this, offering that personal touch and one-on-one contact is necessary for survival. People require help from the concierge, that special attention. I am a believer that one will never eliminate that need. People want to feel like they are home when they stay with a property.

**How hard is it to budget long term when it comes to how the business has evolved today and the type of booking timeframe that has emerged?**

We focus not just on day-by-day but hour-by-hour. The timing and booking window now is very short.

**In bringing in talent, is it more important that they have the necessary training to do a particular job or is it more about their personality and culture fit?**

The base is very important, but so is the passion for the business. In a city like London, we have 67 nationalities working at this property, and we find all kinds of people passing through. We try to find individuals who want to grow within the hotel industry. This business requires certain things like language skills, mobility, and the desire to work long hours and often on holidays.

It's not easy always to attract the best, but if we give them confidence that they can grow in our company, the commitment comes about rather easily.

**How important is it for those entering the industry to take the time to really get to know and understand the industry and what the role entails before becoming a successful GM?**

It's extremely important. To learn about all areas of the hotel is highly valuable, and we encourage that at this hotel. One wanting to be a GM should know how to serve a dish and make a bed, for instance, in order to really understand each facet of running a property.

**Does the GM role today require more of a financial focus or a hospitality focus?**

There must be an adequate focus on numbers, but if one doesn't have coffee with the guests and doesn't spend that important time in the lobby, he or she will not make a great general manager. Guests expect this kind of attention today.

**Did you think that you would still be at this property seven years after arriving?**

I saw what they wanted to achieve with this hotel, and I found it to be very interesting. I made a 10-year plan for this property. I knew I was going to be here longer because the amount of work and changes would require it. We have been doing absolutely everything we could together, and it has been great. I would like to stay here longer. I have more responsibilities right now apart from managing this hotel, so I will be here a bit longer. ●