



The Future of Luxury

An Interview with Sase Gjorsovski,
General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach
and The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami



The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami (left); living area of the Presidential Suite of The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to his current post, Sase Gjorsovski was Executive Director and General Manager of Turnberry Ocean Colony. He was also General Manager for Acqualina Resort and Spa and China Grill Management, as well as Director of Operations for Ian Schrager Hotels—Delano. He received his B.A. in Organizational Leadership from St. Thomas University.



Sase Gjorsovski

PROPERTY BRIEFS Located just steps from Ocean Drive and Lincoln Road, a 10-block pedestrian esplanade, The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach (ritzcarlton.com/southbeach) offers an oceanfront infinity pool, the beachfront DiLido Beach Club, the newly opened TATEL Miami, personalized services from the newly reopened Ritz-Carlton Spa, the only hotel VIP Club Lounge in South Beach, and the luxury of strolling to the best restaurants, bars, nightclubs, shopping, and entertainment that give Miami Beach its sizzling vibe. Catering to the most discerning hotel guests, dignitaries, and celebrities, the Miami luxury hotel features 375 luxurious guest rooms, including two poolside lanai wings in the style of early Miami Beach; more than 20,000 total square feet of exceptional South Beach meeting and conference facilities; and a 16,000-square-foot Ritz-Carlton Spa.

Set along pristine, white sand beaches and overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal, The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami (ritzcarlton.com/balharbour) exudes a warm, inviting atmosphere while offering elevated services and amenities. The resort's location in the exclusive Bal Harbour Village neighborhood offers easy access to boutique shopping, exciting nightlife, outdoor adventure, and a thriving art scene. Guests will discover that everything they desire is accessible, from South Florida's finest flavors at the newly opened Artisan Beach House to Core Fusion and Yoga classes at Exbale Bal Harbour Spa. The beach beckons from floor-to-ceiling windows in each guest room and suite, while a European-edged outdoor heated pool offers a worthy alternative to the Atlantic.

Would you provide an overview of Ritz-Carlton's properties in South Beach and Bal Harbour?

We are fortunate that we have the most pristine location in South Beach – being on Lincoln Road really makes us cutting edge, not only because of the brand, but the location allows us to offer great opportunities to the guest.

That said, from 2004 when we reopened the hotel until now, we have continuously enhanced the site. Most recently, we partnered with TATEL, a restaurant group based in Madrid. It's their first venture in the United States since opening in late March.

In addition, we recently reopened our spa. We invested \$3.5 million in the facility, adding a beautiful hair salon and some interesting spa features. Now, along with the brand and ownership, we are able to offer an enhanced experience.

We also know that one of the most important features in the hotel is our Club Lounge, which gives us a competitive edge in the market. We've emphasized revamping that facility. We have seen positive impact on the guest experience and positive feedback from the guests as a result. This has helped us keep the hotel even more vibrant and new.

We have been running our Bal Harbour property for two years. We recently partnered with Seth Greenberg, an entrepreneur with many restaurants in the Boston area, who is in the nightlife business. We opened Artisan Beach House with him, which has a beach feeling throughout the whole design. The concept behind it was around Miami in the '50s through '70s. Seth understands that period of Miami Beach since he's from the area.

What are the keys to being successful on the restaurant side of the business?

It's an ever-changing business. One day, we have a celebrity chef and that works well for a bit, but then it doesn't. We can drive revenue through food and beverage focusing on the local business. Without partners, we feel that we have to nurture the relationship with the locals.

TATEL's exposure to Rafael Nadal through their partnership as well as with Enrique Iglesias will help them with the Latin community.

Building that business, we have to target certain clientele and nurture those relationships, bringing them a great hotel component and a great client to enhance and further the restaurant business.

In addition to our hotel guests, we can create a successful environment for locals.

Do you worry about oversupply in South Beach?

Every hotelier in Miami Beach is worried about how we're competing with each other. I believe the brands that stay true to themselves will succeed, as will those that emphasize the guest experience, as we do and our ladies and gentlemen do. This makes a difference in how we will be perceived in the future.

Competition is healthy and makes us change our ways of doing business every day, so I truly believe that although it's challenging, it's healthy because we can always reinvent and create new and better experiences for our guests.

On the accommodation side, how important is it to have a broad suite offering?

Very important, because Miami has become more of a luxury destination. At our Bal Harbour property, we have a pristine location that caters to that luxury component and, in South Beach, there are new hotels that are catering to this level. Sustaining and building that luxury component and taking care of that type of client requires a great suite product.

We need to enhance our suite product, which is why we're engaging in our renovation at Bal Harbour.

Many hoteliers talk about how short the booking window is today. How hard is it to forecast from a rate point of view?

We have to make sure we're implementing all of the platforms out there that are useful for forecasting; utilizing those helps a lot. We have to innovate and be creative in that area all the time. Our team has done a great job and, with The Ritz-Carlton and Marriott platforms, we have even better capabilities to forecast.

How do you find the balance between offering the guests technology while still providing the human touch?

That's the most challenging thing for the luxury segment. We definitely look at new platforms for all of the systems. Marriott, as a company, is also creative in that way. We recently went to a show that presented how the new Marriott brands are running a seamless check-in process without having the human touch. We can't go that route in the luxury segment, but it's about utilizing that concept while still keeping our ladies and gentlemen engaged with the clients. That is the key to the future of luxury. ●