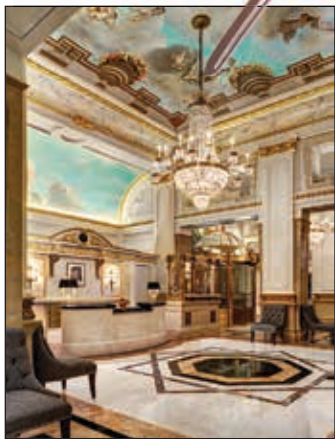


Hospitality



In the Heart of New York City



An Interview with Senih Geray,
General Manager, The St. Regis New York

The St. Regis New York lobby (left); Astor Court (above)

EDITORS' NOTE In December 2016, Senih Geray returned to The St. Regis New York as General Manager. He joins The St. Regis New York from The St. Regis Atlanta where he served as General Manager since 2012. He began his career in the hospitality industry in 1989 as a Guest Service Agent at the Sheraton Grande Torrey Pines in La Jolla, California. After much success, he relocated to New York where he first joined The St. Regis New York team as Financial Controller, a position he held for eight years. Geray has also served as General Manager at the Sheraton Voyager Antalya Hotel, Resort & Spa in Turkey, and The St. Regis Aspen Resort. He attended the United States International University in London where he received his B.S. in business administration. Geray continued his education at the United States International University in San Diego, California, where he studied Hotel and Restaurant Management.



Senih Geray

well-known amenities or some of the products that we offer. We try to send out the message that when one stays at a St. Regis or any other luxury hotel chain, they will experience a consistent level of service with no surprises.

We did have a challenging start to the year as news of travel restrictions made headlines. Online searches and advanced reservations have been negatively impacted by the initial reaction to those policies, especially from the international market.

When looking at growth in challenging times, are you more focused on increasing occupancy or holding rate?

Occupancy is less of a concern because the domestic market, at least for us, has been extremely strong. To put heads into hotel beds is not as much of an issue. What happens during challenging economic times is that some of the premium channels where our international clientele book see a decline, especially when it comes to high-end suites. This has the biggest impact on our average rates.

In terms of the competitive set, are you more focused on the other five-star Midtown luxury properties or do you look at all parts of New York City?

We are proud to say that we are in the heart of the city because Midtown is where everything happens. However, Downtown has become a big attraction as well, and we have some clients that occasionally like to visit the Upper East Side hotels, too. We like to look at our competitive set as the entire island of Manhattan and, to some extent, the surrounding areas, which are becoming more of a factor.

Have you been happy with how the renovated product for The St. Regis New York has been received?

The hotel has always had traditional and classical looks from previous renovations but, on this past one, we were happy how some modern twists were introduced. We still have some legacy pieces onsite, but the way we did the wall paneling and introduced some bright colors have made things more relevant.

What defines a true luxury hotel experience?

It used to depend on the purpose of the trip that the guest is making, be it corporate or leisure. We used to put those arrivals into different buckets, but now, it is not as easy to define.

Today, we need to find out the specific purpose of their visit. As a result, our employees need to be extremely engaged, especially during the reservation phase and arrival process.

How broad are your banquet offerings?

We have 16,000 square feet of meeting space, which is on the second floor and on the 20th floor, where the St. Regis roof and penthouse rest.

From a meeting space to room ratio, we have one of the most lucrative offerings available. This means we can take groups to house for their meetings, and we also have the space to entertain local businesses at the same time.

Would you discuss the lounge/cocktail offering that The St. Regis New York provides its guests?

There are so many great food and beverage options outside of the building, so more hotels are focusing less on this. Guests are more casual as well, making the bar concept more important since people like to spend their time in a more relaxed atmosphere. However, the dining experience remains relevant because everyone still needs to eat and we need to continue offering a full menu. We also offer small bites that can compose a dinner, and this means people can eat in the bar and continue socializing. The soul of the hotel starts in the kitchen, and it is important that we relay this experience to our customers.

How hard is it to maintain the focus on hospitality with the financial pressures of the business?

It is key to limit the fluctuations throughout the year and hold on to a certain occupancy trend. At the same time, we are diversified in our business so that we are not relying on one particular market or segment, which helps whenever there are economic factors that may impact certain markets more than others.

When it comes to hiring talent, is it more about personality or skill set?

Schooling is very important to someone's career, but at the end of the day, the most important thing is their attitude towards service. If someone is not a people person, this is not the industry for them. Anyone who has a genuine interest in helping others and making a stay special can be successful in this industry. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF The St. Regis New York (stregisnewyork.com) offers 238 luxurious guest rooms and suites. Contemporary luxury meets classic sophistication at this iconic hotel, just steps from an exceptional Fifth Avenue shopping experience. Guest rooms and suites are newly renovated and marry original design elements, such as crystal Waterford chandeliers and elegant crown moldings, with beautiful, large-format photographic artwork, vibrant-hued fabrics and stunning beveled mirrors. Rooms feature marble-tiled entryways, rich color schemes, custom furnishings and state-of-the-art technologies. It is the flagship property of St. Regis Hotels and Resorts.

Where does the New York hotel market stand today and, with so much new supply, what is your outlook for growth?

We face more competition today than we have in the past because new hotels are opening on a regular basis, both luxury chain hotels as well as independent hotels that all appeal to our same client base. We are all competing for the same customers.

Price points aside, newer travelers are more likely to go directly to websites like Airbnb. Rather than staying in a luxury chain hotel, they want to have a unique offering by being in someone's home and living their experience through that lens. This is more important to them than