



Anticipating Guests' Needs

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



The Capital Suite office (left) and boardroom (above);
InterContinental London Park Lane and the Wellington Arch (below)

EDITORS' NOTE *Alvaro Rey undertook his professional education at Ecole Hôtelière Les Roches, Switzerland. He began his career at InterContinental Medellín 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 North America, the 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 General Manager of InterContinental Hotels & Resorts London & Franchise Hotels Europe.*



Alvaro Rey

needs and desires of our guests. Suite designs are very specific. In our hotel, we have 60 suites, and we have tailored various styles to suit different tastes and markets. In this way, we can cater to almost anyone.

The Capital Suite is special, however. We previously had a few offices in that area and we decided to convert the space into a suite with stunning views. While we were waiting to make the transition, we started selling those

offices and they were very popular because of the privacy they offered. Instead of just creating a beautiful two-bedroom suite, we decided to look at how we could create a totally different product in the market that catered to a specific traveler. We can offer the suite in its entirety or with various configurations; for example, we can sell a one-bedroom suite with an office and a small boardroom or a two-bedroom suite with an additional larger boardroom. There are five or six various configurations which can be adapted for various clients.

PROPERTY BRIEF *Situated at one of the capital's most prestigious addresses, InterContinental London Park Lane (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.*

How strong is the hospitality market in London today and what is your outlook for growth for InterContinental London Park Lane?

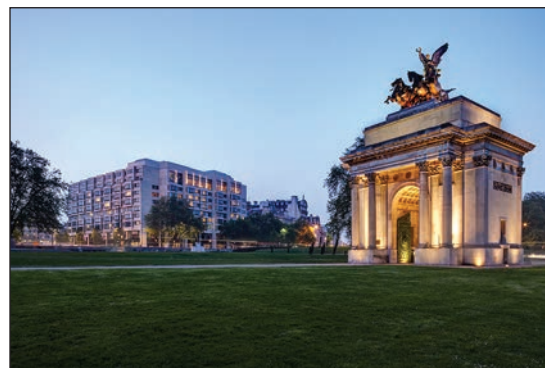
It has been interesting. Over the past seven or eight years, the industry has been growing despite minor setbacks. Last year was a difficult one, affected by security issues across Europe and the Middle East crisis – yet we were able to overcome this and show strong growth.

This year is following a similar path. We had a few tough months due to a slowdown in certain markets, but now we are right on target.

It's looking good for us. The advantage we have is that we are very flexible in dealing with different markets from wide reaching geographical areas, in addition to supporting the needs of every single guest type – leisure, corporate and entertainment.

Will you highlight the Capital Suite and how it will be a differentiator in the London market?

Over the years, we have done many things with the suites in order to accommodate the



The space offers unique flexibility which provides us with many opportunities from a corporate and even a leisure perspective. The suite has also proved popular with families staying over the summer period.

We are very proud of this new suite offering. It doesn't exist in many places, certainly not in London.

What kind of investment has the property made in service?

We have robust training plans for each of our associates. When we have a beautiful product, it's important we offer an elevated level of service, irrespective of the market.

We run cultural awareness training monthly. From the minute someone joins the company, we start training and we never stop. Refresher training is also an essential component to ensuring consistency.

Today, we all have great products; however, the key differentiator will be in how we handle the details. We anticipate our guests' needs by finding out what they enjoy, what their hobbies are and how we can assist them with their free time.

How do you maintain rate integrity when there are so many different channels for booking today?

We rarely face an issue and, if we do, we fix it immediately. However, it's more complicated today. People are always shopping around and looking for something extra.

As long as we provide top-level service, have high-quality standards and take excellent care of our guests, the rest follows. It's about how we welcome guests and treat them while they're staying with us as well as follow-up with them after they leave.

Is it critical for your clientele to offer a restaurant product and what are the keys to driving revenue in this area?

Hotels often forget the importance of having a good restaurant. They concentrate only on the rooms. Restaurants can influence the local community and the local community can also bring guests in.

Twenty years ago, food wasn't that exciting in London; however, this isn't the case today. At our hotel, we have created destination restaurants that in many ways stand alone from the hotel yet compliment the offering beautifully. We have stayed away from a corporate look because people today want a restaurant that feels relaxed yet vibrant with great food, music and service.

How important is it for the next generation coming into the industry to experience all areas of the business in order to build a sustainable career?

Young people today are ambitious, which is fantastic; however, they are also somewhat impatient. In this business, one needs to be patient in order to learn and understand the appropriate service required.

If young people stick to one area, they will struggle to adapt in this industry. Despite the changing times, I believe that a true hotelier must learn and understand why things happen as they do within a hotel. ●