

## The Luxury of Truly Being Yourself



The Benjamin

An Interview with Gul Turkmenoglu,  
Regional Vice President – Luxury Collection, Denihan Hospitality Group and General Manager, The Benjamin

**EDITORS' NOTE** Gul Turkmenoglu joined Denihan in December 2016 as General Manager for the owned and managed hotel, The Benjamin. She was subsequently promoted in February 2018 to her current role as Vice President of Operations overseeing Denihan's luxury portfolio. Turkmenoglu started her career with the opening of the Conrad Istanbul, serving in a number of management positions. She was then promoted to Director of Rooms at the Conrad Cairo and thereafter relocated to New York City to join the executive team of the Waldorf Astoria leading various departments for six years. Turkmenoglu served in Executive Leadership roles with the Millennium Group, Highgate and Morgans hotels prior to joining Denihan. Turkmenoglu received her B.S. degree in tourism and hotel management from Çukurova University in Turkey and her M.B.A. from New York University, Stern School of Business.



Gul Turkmenoglu

**Has The Benjamin experienced growth this year and what are your views on the state of the New York City hospitality market?**

Our strategy for 2017 was a double-digit growth in RevPAR by focusing on gaining market share in occupancy. We have maintained our occupancy levels in 2018 while continuing to grow our market with an aggressive rate strategy.

In 2019, we're looking for a more balanced mix of rates and occupancy on par with New York City market forecasts.

**How do you define the value that Denihan brings as an owner?**

The biggest strength of Denihan is that they are close to their operations and consistently care about three things: what guests value the most, their product offering and their people. These are fulfilled through constant training, creating growth opportunities for the team members and offering true work/life balance. They also invest a lot into their hotels.

Our brands are very much related. The strength of Denihan as a company is shown by the way they pay attention to details, and that is a great reflection of what The Benjamin does itself.

**How critical is it to have a strong suite offering to appeal to the top clientele you service?**

The suite product provides an important value for our customers. Service is also a top differentiator, however, having our spacious one-bedroom suites with galleys is significant. We also emphasize on the upkeep of our room accommodations; our last full renovation was in 2012 and we still have great feedback from our clientele. The quality of product is important, especially to our guests, as many are from financial, legal and high-end hedge funds and they need to have space and privacy. We provide them with a unique suite product that is homey and welcoming.

**The Benjamin has a strong partnership with Geoffrey Zakarian for The National Bar & Dining Rooms. What are the keys to being successful in food and beverage and what has made this relationship work so well?**

Everyone wants to have a profitable operation and we have one. In New York, it is a fact that many luxury and full-service hotels keep their outlets as an amenity. We are fortunate to run a profitable operation in partnership with

the Zakarian Group. Having a healthy business that falls through to the bottom line, strengthens our partnership with Geoffrey Zakarian. Geoffrey assists us with menu creation and is also excellent at maintaining quality assurance. We look forward to enhancing our relationship further in coming years.

Another success factor is making sure that we have a good foundation and strong teams, be it in the kitchen or at the front of the house and having a strong partner who brings us the creativity and quality has led to this success story.

**With shortening booking windows, is it possible to forecast for the business and how hard is it to project accurately?**

Forecasting is easier for the large conference hotels; however, it's a different story for smaller and boutique hotels like The Benjamin. It can be challenging during low demand periods.

We are going after group business like our competitors, and in 2018 we found out that the business is becoming increasingly last minute. We constantly monitor and activate additional channels ahead of need periods to maintain our balance of RevPAR and occupancy.

**For a property like The Benjamin with its size and intimate feel, is there an advantage in being able to personalize the luxury experience and more deeply understand guest preferences?**

We are a small boutique hotel with 209 rooms and make the guest experience unique and intimate. We are fortunate to have many repeat customers who select our unique offering over the branded hotels. Our dedicated staff is exceptionally trained to serve our frequent customers, especially the housekeeping and front desk team members. It's a tremendous strength because retaining guests is becoming more difficult due to all of the new supply and constant hotel renovations in New York City.

I believe there are two types of luxury in the market. One is the classic, five-star product that offers an expected level of sophistication and the one we offer, which provides the luxury of truly being yourself and enjoying luxury as if it were in your own home.

We provide five-star service. Design-wise, we are a bit more eclectic. Technology is also very important for the luxury hotels because everyone has all sorts of technology in their home. Luxury hotels must keep up with that. It's not a differentiation point anymore, but an essential and expected part of the product. ●

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated at the crossroads of culture and commerce, The Benjamin's ([thebenjamin.com](http://thebenjamin.com)) Midtown East location makes for easy access to New York City's top attractions, including Fifth Avenue, Grand Central Terminal, MoMA, Rockefeller Center, Park Avenue businesses and more. The hotel boasts a distinctly residential feel and a large array of spacious luxuriously appointed suites, inspiring guests to select the hotel as their personal pied-à-terre. The Benjamin is home to The National Bar & Dining Rooms, the award-winning grand café by leading culinary figure and celebrity Chef Geoffrey Zakarian. The luxury hotel is widely recognized for its innovative science-backed sleep program, offered in partnership with author and sleep medicine expert Dr. Rebecca Robbins, Ph.D., the hotel's Official Sleep Consultant. The Benjamin has recently been awarded the honor of NYC landmark status. Designed by famed architect Emery Roth, the neo-Romanesque building is considered one of the premier properties of "hotel alley" – a stretch of hotels just north of Grand Central Terminal – and one of Roth's most recognizable and successful works. The hotel opened in 1927 as the Hotel Beverly and it was purchased by Denihan in 1997 and named in homage to Denihan's founder, Benjamin "Bud" Denihan, Sr.