

The Future of Luxury Travel

An Interview with Tina Edmundson, President, Luxury, Marriott International, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Tina Edmundson is President, Luxury at Marriott International, Inc., the world's largest hospitality company, which includes some of the most iconic brands in travel. In this newly created role, Edmundson is responsible for overseeing all aspects of Marriott International's strategy as it pertains to the company's portfolio of luxury brands, including The Ritz-Carlton, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, BVLGARI Hotels & Resorts, St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, EDITION, The Luxury Collection, JW Marriott, and W Hotels Worldwide. In her previous role as Global Brand & Marketing Officer, Edmundson oversaw the development and execution of all aspects of the company's global brand and marketing strategy, ensuring that a portfolio of 30 diverse hotel brands, in addition to the innovative Marriott Bonvoy travel platform, remained distinct and relevant. She shares her knowledge and expertise through numerous Board appointments, including the Marriott International Luxury Brand Council, Bulgari Hotels JV, Condé Nast Traveler Advisory Board, and Amazon Customer Advisory Board. Edmundson is a graduate of the University of Bombay, India, and earned her MBA in Hotel & Restaurant Administration from the Conrad N. Hilton School at the University of Houston.



Tina Edmundson

operational excellence across our portfolio, thoughtfully growing our brands in relevant destinations, exploring white space opportunities, and continuing to evolve our guest experience. I'm also particularly excited about pursuing creative partnerships and collaborations which can help provide unique moments and opportunities for our guests.

How do you describe Marriott's culture and values?

In just a few words, I would say inclusive, welcoming, and innovative.

These are some of the core values the company was built on and they continue to shape our culture today. We are a company that puts people first, whether it's our associates or our guests, and we really strive to create environments, both on-property and above, that reflect this point of view. I'm also particularly proud of the work our company does when it comes to corporate and social responsibility as well as giving back and bettering the communities in which we operate which is central to our company's DNA.

Will you highlight Marriott's portfolio of luxury brands?



The St. Regis Kanai Resort, Riviera Maya

Spanning all corners of the world, Marriott International's luxury brands portfolio offers a boundless network of nearly 500 landmark hotels and resorts in 67 countries through The Ritz-Carlton, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, BVLGARI Hotels & Resorts, St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, EDITION, The Luxury Collection, JW Marriott, and W Hotels. We also have more than 200 luxury brand hotels in the pipeline. In 2023, we are slated to debut around 35 luxury hotels and resorts – some of our recent openings include The St. Regis Kanai Resort, Riviera Maya; The Ritz-Carlton, Melbourne; JW Marriott Madrid; JW Masai Mara Lodge; W Budapest; and The Rome EDITION. Still to come in 2023 we are slated to open The Ritz-Carlton, Portland, the brand's first hotel in America's Pacific Northwest; debut the St. Regis brand in Saudi Arabia with a property in Riyadh; and unveil a complete transformation of W Union Square in New York, among other openings.

Where so you see the greatest opportunities for growth for Marriott's luxury brands?

There is tremendous opportunity for all of our luxury brands when it comes to growth, and we are always looking for the right opportunities for our individual brands. There are many gateway cities where we might only have one or two of our

COMPANY BRIEF Marriott International, Inc. (marriott.com) is based in Bethesda, Maryland, and encompasses a portfolio of nearly 8,600 properties under 31 leading brands spanning 139 countries and territories. Marriott operates and franchises hotels and licenses vacation ownership resorts all around the world. The company offers Marriott Bonvoy®, its highly awarded travel program.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

I was recently appointed as President of Luxury for Marriott International. This is a newly created role that not only signifies our company's commitment to the luxury sector, but I also think speaks to the strength and bright future of luxury travel overall. In this role, I am overseeing all aspects of Marriott's strategy as it relates to our luxury brands portfolio, which includes The Ritz-Carlton, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, BVLGARI Hotels & Resorts, St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, EDITION, The Luxury Collection, JW Marriott, and W Hotels Worldwide. Top of mind for me is driving



Fig Tree Lounge at JW Marriott Masai Mara Lodge

luxury brands present, so I still see a lot of room for us in some of the world's most iconic locations. For example, we have announced that we will open a St. Regis in London, which is a fantastic fit for St. Regis' distinctive take on modern glamour. We've recently had a bit of a boom in Australia, which is exciting. I was in the country earlier this year for the debut of The Ritz-Carlton, Melbourne and we are set to debut W Sydney later this year. In 2021, we debuted The Tasman, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Hobart, and we are slated to bring The Ritz-Carlton and St. Regis brands to Australia's Gold Coast in 2026. We are also always looking to grow in locations that we believe represent the future of luxury travel. The Ritz-Carlton, Fukuoka, which opened just last month, is a great example where we brought the first luxury hospitality product to a destination that is really poised to take off. Additionally, upcoming debuts such as The St. Regis Belgrade and Freedom Square, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Tbilisi in Georgia are set to spark growth for those markets.

How are Marriott's luxury brands defining the future of travel?

We are continually innovating and looking to give guests new ways to experience and explore the world through our brands, while providing them with exceptional service and opportunities for cultural immersion. This past spring, we debuted our first luxury safari property, JW Marriott Masai Mara Lodge, in Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve. The lodge features 20 private tents and truly draws guests into the local environment and culture. Based on its success, we've already announced JW Marriott Serengeti Lodge, slated to debut in 2026 in Tanzania. In October 2022, we also celebrated the launch of Evrima, our first superyacht from The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection. This intimate-sized vessel gives our guests a whole new way to experience the iconic Ritz-Carlton brand while enjoying a variety of ports and shore

excursions that have specifically been designed to highlight what is unique and special about the destination. We are also expanding The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection fleet with two new superyachts, *Ilma* and *Luminara*, slated to debut in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

What are the keys to providing a true luxury hotel experience today and how critical is personalized service in delivering this experience?

The strength of the luxury product on the market now is incredible, and the guest is winning as the level of design, quality of food and beverage, and amenities offered continue to reach new heights. What this means is that everything I just mentioned – a modern product, a well-appointed guest room, thoughtful programming, and desirable culinary offerings – is tablestakes. The most important differentiator today is anticipatory and highly-personalized service. Even the best product will fall flat if the service provided is subpar. We know that bespoke service is what can truly make a stay memorable and helps create an emotional connection. We have many stories across our brands of the ways our associates have gone above and beyond for our guests, but it's also the little moments that can make a big difference, such as marking the page of an overturned book with a bookmark or knowing how a guest likes their morning coffee.

Will you discuss Marriott's focus on providing its guests with transformative and culturally immersive experiences?

The global luxury traveler is continually evolving, and we know what this traveler wants today are transformative and culturally immersive experiences. This has been brought on by a shifting mindset as a result of the pandemic, as well as by Millennials and Gen Z who desire more experience-driven luxury. We are seeing our guests take a more considered, intentional approach to their travel. They want to foster a deeper connection to

the places they visit, getting to know the people, history, cuisine, and culture. A great example of how we are achieving this is through the recently debuted Rissai Valley, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, located in Jiuzhaigou, China, a valley on the edge of the Tibetan plateau in the country's Southwestern Sichuan province. The Jiuzhaigou Valley is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and World Biosphere Reserve, so as a destination it offers an almost untouched natural environment in addition to a rich culture and history. The Reserve portfolio was specifically designed to provide highly immersive cultural experiences that are rooted in human connection, so at Rissai Valley, guests have a distinct sense of place from the moment they arrive and are welcomed with a Zhaxi Dele Tibetan blessing ceremony. The property also has a team of local Tibetan culturalists, linguist artisans, and healers who seek to bring to life the area's ancient culture, as well as to help create a true connection between guests and the people of Jiuzhaigou. Linking guests to the surrounding villages, the hotel offers Tibetan home visits, incense workshops, nature Yoga and meditation. The destination also informs the hotel's architecture and design, culinary offerings, and spa and wellness programming, all which incorporate the history and traditions of Jiuzhaigou.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women in leadership roles in the hospitality industry?

Female leaders play an incredibly important role across hospitality, and I would say that over the last couple of decades the entire sector has made great strides in this respect. I feel particularly proud that this is an area where Marriott International has long led the charge, having a substantive history of supporting and growing female leaders. For more than 20 years, Marriott has supported a women's leadership development initiative, and in fact, since 2000, the representation of women in senior management roles across our company has tripled. Today, 45 percent of Marriott's global executives are women and 53 percent of our global workforce is female. Additionally, roughly half of our company's senior leadership team is female, which in addition to my role, includes our Chief Financial Officer, Chief Communications Officer, General Counsel, Chief Customer Officer, and our President of Greater China. I do believe that we continue to need more female General Managers, which I am committed to supporting.

You have spent over 25 years in the hospitality industry. What has made the experience so special for you?

I often talk about the fact that we are so fortunate to work in an industry that is focused on creating indelible memories for our guests and helping them celebrate life's most meaningful moments. Besides the opportunity to explore new destinations and engage with different cultures, which I love, the people are really what make hospitality so special and unique. Over the years, I feel lucky to have met so many interesting individuals around the world and it's amazing to feel like you are truly part of a global community focused on elevating experiences. I think that people who work in hospitality at any level are inherently warm, gracious, and caring, and it's been a joy to make friends in all corners of the world. ●