

Legendary Service

An Interview with Jan D. Goessing,
General Manager, Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok



EDITORS' NOTE Jan Goessing has spent the past 15 years with Mandarin Oriental in senior management positions throughout Asia and The Americas, including the Group's flagship hotel in Hong Kong. From 1998 to 2006, Goessing was General Manager of the Group's former property in Hawaii, Kahala Mandarin Oriental, and since early 2006, he was General Manager of Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C.



Jan D. Goessing

PROPERTY BRIEF The Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok (www.mandarinoriental.com/bangkok) has been one of the world's most luxurious hotels for more than 130 years. Their Oriental Spa was named "Best City Center Hotel Spa Worldwide" by Luxury Travel Advisor magazine and was a Spa magazine Silver Sage Reader's Choice selection in 2009 for "Favorite Resort/Hotel Spa, Southeast Asia." The property – named "Best Hotel in Asia" for the second straight year in 2009 by the readers of FinanceAsia magazine – is owned by Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, the award-winning owner and operator of some of the world's most prestigious hotels and resorts, which now operates or has under development 41 hotels representing more than 10,000 rooms in 24 countries, including 16 hotels in Asia, 14 in the Americas, and 10 in Europe and North Africa.

How has the global economic downturn affected travel and tourism in Thailand, and what is your outlook for 2010?

It should not come as a surprise that Thailand's travel and tourism business has not been spared from the effects of the worldwide recession. While there are signs of a slow recovery, the international marketplace remains rather fragile. Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok is very fortunate to have "ultra-loyalists" as guests who are faithful to the brand regardless of any shifts in the economic or political environment. This is a clear mandate for us to continue to maintain our high standards, which are setting us apart from the ever increasing number of competitors within the global hospitality industry.

What projects taking place at Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok can guests expect in the coming years?

The term "change" is not what I would associate a legendary property with. The preservation

of traditions in today's ever-changing world is not only a social responsibility but is also brand-defining. With this in mind, it is still important to stay on top of current trends, as well as to focus on upkeep of the product. Recent project activities at the hotel include the complete renovation of the 338 guest rooms located in the River Wing, as well as the introduction of our brand new BMW 7 Series limousine fleet. Our focus in 2010 will be on the development of a highly innovative staff environment, thereby recognizing the unsurpassed

importance of our colleagues.

How do you define what makes Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok unique in its competitive market?

Celebrating its 133rd anniversary this year, Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok is the oldest hotel in Thailand with a history that has filled books, movies, and news stories. The loyalty of its staff is virtually unmatched. On average, more than 1,200 employees have spent 16 years working at this hotel. These two milestones are points of differentiation that cannot easily be challenged. We will continue to be known internationally for our legendary service and world-class reputation as a hotel that strives to achieve perfection in a changing world.

How challenging is it to maintain the success of your restaurants like Le Normandie, especially with so many excellent restaurants in Bangkok?

There is always the challenge of maintaining a successful restaurant regardless of where you are, yet commitment to quality in service and culinary creativity have, over the years, established Le Normandie as more than just a dining venue. One should actually view Le Normandie in conjunction with luxury brands such as Tiffany, Louis Vuitton, or Hermes – all which are legendary institutions that have longevity and are dedicated to serve only the most distinguished clientele.

How much of a focus does the property place on corporate meetings and social events, and would you highlight your facilities in this regard?

Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok can be described as an "urban resort" mainly serving the upscale leisure market. Due to its heritage and long association with the Thai Royal Household, it also serves as the venue for the most distinguished social gatherings Bangkok has to offer.

In addition, selected and exclusive corporate meetings and incentives have called "La Grande Dame" their preferred address for many years. A wide variety of luxurious banquet spaces and restaurants are available to choose from, including the truly grand Royal Ballroom.

Many leading luxury properties today place a major emphasis on high-end spa/fitness facilities. Would you provide an overview of the spa and fitness facilities at the Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok?

The Oriental Spa has the special distinction of being the first spa within a city hotel in Bangkok when it was established in 1993. From then on, we have remained faithful to our leading role in the spa industry by providing internationally acclaimed services and treatments in a setting that is representative of the rich Thai culture. More recently, an Ayurvedic Penthouse facility has been added to the offerings, complimenting a multifaceted health and wellness environment that has been showered with numerous worldwide acclaims and awards since its inception.

When you were presented with the opportunity to become General Manager of Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok, what made you feel it was the right fit, and has it been what you expected?

My appointment as General Manager of Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok has been the culmination of a 25 year love affair. I believe that my diverse background and many years of experience in the hospitality industry across the world have prepared me well for this position. I am excited, to say the least, to be a part of this legendary hotel.

As you look to 2010, which key priorities are you focused on for the property to make sure you maintain your leadership position in the industry?

Our first priority will always be our guests, for it is through them and their loyalty that we may decipher and determine the future of our beloved hotel. Simply put, our "fans" are the reason for our existence as hospitality professionals. The second "first" priority are our colleagues, for they are the ones that we always need to rely on as they use their amazing individual talents to create a memorable guest experience. The rest is up to continuous support from our owners, business partners, and a healthy touch of destiny. ●

The breakfast terrace (upper left); Jim Thompson Suite (upper right); Le Normandie restaurant (bottom)