

# Executive Travel

## New in San Francisco

An Interview with Peter M. Koehler,  
General Manager, InterContinental San Francisco



**EDITORS' NOTE** Prior to assuming his current post, Peter Koehler served as General Manager at Kimpton Hotel Group's Hotel Palomar San Francisco from 2003 to 2007. Before this, he served as General Manager at Campton Place in San Francisco from 1991 to 1994. He assisted in the opening of The Ritz-Carlton in New York, and has held GM roles at Omni Hotel at Independence Park in Philadelphia, the Mandarin Oriental Mexico City (now the JW Marriott) the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C., Hotel Villa Del Sol in Zibuatanejo, Mexico, and Morgans in New York. Koehler began his career as Assistant Restaurant Manager in South Africa before moving on to assume the position of Assistant Food and Beverage Director for The Carlyle in New York, and later the Director of Food and Beverage at The Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. Koehler received his degree from the Hotel and Restaurant School in Bremen, Germany.



Peter M. Koehler

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The InterContinental San Francisco ([www.intercontinentalsanfrancisco.com](http://www.intercontinentalsanfrancisco.com)) is a translucent glass tower soaring 32 stories above The Moscone Center in the city's South of Market (SoMa) area. The property holds 550 elegantly appointed rooms, 14 of which are spacious suites with standard features including high-speed Internet access, plasma TVs, and fully stocked minibars. The hotel also offers 43,000 square feet of versatile conference space, a 10-room treatment spa, a full-service fitness center with an indoor lap pool, a chef-driven restaurant, and a concept bar.

**Can you give a brief overview of the positioning of the InterContinental San Francisco and the features that make it unique in the market?**

There is a lot of new business moving to this side of town, so it's an exciting time to be in this area. Because we are next to the convention center, a lot of our business will be convention related. We have an upscale restaurant called Luce, which features organic and sustainable California cuisine with influences of Tuscan flavors, and a very upscale spa. Subsequently, we have started going after leisure business as well as corporate business.

**Many hoteliers talk about the challenge of being successful as a hotel restaurant. Is that an area in which you can profit, and do you need to target the local community?**

Luce is a great restaurant concept. We're using Italian cooking methods and combining them with ingredients from California. We can get exposure for the property through our food and beverage offerings and our spa. You can write only so much about a room, so you need to have something else to keep people excited, especially the local community.

**From an events or meetings point of view, is the focus on large events as well as boardroom events?**

Absolutely. The Grand Ballroom is 6,800 square feet, and the InterContinental Ballroom is 5,600 square feet. We have 21 meeting rooms of all different sizes, all with natural light. Our versatile function spaces and our ability to offer natural light in all of them, plus our cutting-edge audiovisual and communications technology, really set us apart.

**Do you envision being successful in both the leisure and the business markets?**

We have a lot of exciting venues nearby. Westfield invested nearly \$500 million to redevelop the 1.5 million-square-foot Westfield San Francisco Centre, which is right next to us. The highly regarded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is close by, and the Contemporary Jewish Museum of San Francisco is opening in June and is going to be great. There is a lot of opportunity in our area. In addition, the aggressive expansion of the InterContinental Hotels Group [IHG] in the western region reinforces our positioning in the market.

**Is there a clear breakdown between rooms and suites? Have you gone more toward suites? For top-level VIPs, is there presidential accommodation?**

We have the Presidential suite, which is a duplex overlooking the city on the 31st and 32nd floors. We have three floors of Club rooms, which offer Club Lounge access and other upgraded amenities, creating a kind of hotel within a hotel. We have 14 suites, and more than 20 junior suites, which are corner units featuring floor-to-ceiling windows offering 180-degree views overlooking the city. These set us apart. We had a focus group in before the design was

completed, and we took suggestions from the group to make the rooms neat, clean, and clutter free, which is what the audience demands. We now offer iPod docks and 42-inch high-definition flat-screen TVs in every room as well as Nortel voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) touch-screen phones. We also think about the little things, like sockets in the lamps next to the bed for charging your cell phone.

**Is it challenging to differentiate in a market like San Francisco? Can a property be unique?**

The architecture itself is already so eye-catching and has created a lot of buzz. We have high ceilings, a lot of air, and a lot of light, and that attracts our clients. We also have a unique bar concept called Bar 888, which specializes in grappa and grappa-based cocktails. Grappa is an Italian digestive, but we also use it as a key ingredient in a lot of interesting cocktails. Because it's a different concept, people want to try it and the press wants to write about it. That's one way we differentiate ourselves.

**Some in this industry say one has a personality either for running a hotel or for opening a hotel. You have done it all. Did you enjoy this whole process?**

Yes. It's my third opening and my smoothest for a lot of reasons, even though we moved into the building three and a half weeks prior to opening. I have a wonderful, committed, and supportive team, and that makes a difference. We were fully booked by day four, with the exception of one suite.

**Over the years, there are people who have worked with you who know you well. If I talked to them without you in the room and asked what it was like working for Peter Koehler, what would they say?**

I would hope that they had a great learning experience, not just from me but from working with the whole team, and that they had an opportunity to grow and advance in their career paths. Whenever you undertake a new venture, a team is created. The team comes together through different synergies, by putting the right people in the right places and by giving employees the opportunity to advance. So if I can take a dishwasher and make him a department head in the future, that's a great achievement and that's what we're striving for. IHG's philosophy is for each and every member of its team to have room to grow. ●

*The InterContinental San Francisco Presidential suite*