

New in Beverly Hills

An Interview with Ali Kasikci,
Managing Director, Montage Beverly Hills

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining Montage Beverly Hills in September 2007 and for the previous 16 years, Ali Kasikci helmed The Peninsula Beverly Hills and his work there earned him HOTELS magazine's 2004 Hotelier of the World award. A 30-year veteran of the hospitality industry, Kasikci has introduced such revolutionary concepts as the "24 hour Check-In/Check-Out" and the "Personalized Guest Services Program." Following his apprenticeship at Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich, Germany, he held several senior management positions with leading hotels in Germany and with casino resorts in South Africa. Kasikci spent five years managing the Four Seasons Hotel in Newport Beach, California before joining The Peninsula Beverly Hills. Kasikci is a Certified Hotel Administrator (CHA) and a member of the Cornell Hotel Society and teaches a variety of senior Hospitality Management courses as the Deans Distinguished Lecturer at Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. He holds an M.B.A. degree from the Peter F. Drucker and Masatoshi Ito Graduate School of Management at Claremont Graduate University in California.



Ali Kasikci

PROPERTY BRIEF Located steps from Rodeo Drive in the heart of Beverly Hills' Golden Triangle, Montage Beverly Hills features 201 well-appointed guestrooms, including 55 suites. Harkening back to the golden age of Hollywood, enriched by modern day luxury, guests and residents are provided with convenient access to magnificent retailers and exquisite dining. Montage Beverly Hills (www.montagebeverlyhills.com) is managed by ultra-luxury hotel and resort management company, Montage Hotels & Resorts.

In Beverly Hills, there are a number of high-end luxury properties going after a very similar clientele. How is Montage being positioned, and how challenging is it to differentiate from the competition?

The biggest mistake we could have made was to try to mirror what was offered at some of the well-established properties in Beverly Hills. Instead, we decided to focus on what was not being offered in the marketplace that the customer might be looking for. We looked at many ancillary services, but realized above



all, most guests seek lots of space, a great gym, extensive spa facilities, and a variety of food and beverage facilities, as well as certain traditional services that always existed in hotels, like a classic barbershop and a flower shop. When looking at some of the major hotels in the area, added together, they make a fairly good package, but individually, they lack certain services. So we sought to come up with those services and implement them from the very beginning.

Beverly Hills is a market with very good stand-alone restaurant offerings. What is your philosophy about the food and beverage product, and is it challenging to be successful in that aspect of a hotel?

Definitely. Hotels forego handling food and beverage for two reasons: one is, it's not profitable so they want to give it to someone else to do; and two, someone else can do a better job than they can. When we have someone like Wolfgang Puck right across the street, and Thomas Keller bringing in Bouchon next door to us, we are not seeking to create an internal competition; it's more about collaboration. If our guests would like to stay in the hotel to dine, which is often a convenience factor, they have something comparable to what they will find around the area. And they have many choices in the hotel, from light and casual rooftop dining at The Conservatory Grill to really approachable dishes served at Parq, to a more formal and private environment at Muse. You will also find that all of our food and beverage outlets use some of the finest produce and ingredients, 80 percent of them are organic and sourced from a variety of farmer's markets from the area. However, we recognize that many people may also want to have that dining experience outside the hotel, and we are well situated for that too.

In the five-star segment today, do you need to offer an extensive spa, and for Montage Beverly Hills, is that a key component?

The spa is definitely a key component, but regardless of the star ranking, you need to have those lifestyle components and offerings that guests are looking for. Spa Montage Beverly Hills is as much for the guests of the hotel as for the community. We purpose-built a 20,000-square-foot spa, that includes a gym of

more than 5,000 square feet. There will also be a membership for the local community at some point, if we determine a demand for it.

On the accommodation side, you have a wide offering of suites. Is there a relatively consistent look to those suites or have you tried to offer a broad range of styles?

There is broad range of style, size, and location, and our combination and inventory of available room products is what differentiates us in this market. We have 55 suites that make up more than 25 percent of our inventory. You won't find any hotel in the Beverly Hills area that has that large ratio of suites to guest rooms. And among those suites, there is an enormous amount of diversity. Technically, we don't sell a suite type; we sell a suite number. So it may be the same category of a suite, but it might be a completely different layout. Most of the suites in the hotel are purposely designed with one and a half bathrooms, and access to the half bathroom is always through the living room area so guests don't have to go through the bedroom to use it. Also, most suites have balconies or patios, because when you do business in Los Angeles, you want to enjoy the climate. One of my most favorite suites is the entry-level Garden Suite, of which we have 15. This is really ideal for those who are seeking space and separate work/living areas, but who have a more limited suite budget. We also provide additional value to our suite offerings whereby guests who reserve a corner suite or higher category receive their choice of a top of the line Mercedes-Benz to use during their stay.

What advice would you give the next generation of hospitality leaders to promote their success?

There is no good in working hard and becoming successful in something you don't enjoy doing. So it's best to determine if your personality, ambition, and entire behavior are aligned with what the industry you're working in requires. In addition, there are no shortcuts in this business. You have to focus on what is required of you to be successful. I'm also a big believer in committing yourself to education. But my soundest advice for people seeking a leadership position in the hospitality industry is to commit yourselves to a balanced life – seek to do what is good for you and good for the organization at the same time. ●

The exterior and the lobby of Montage Beverly Hills