

Service Standards

**An Interview with Maria Razumich-Zec,
Regional Vice President, USA East Coast,
The Peninsula Hotels, General Manager, The Peninsula Chicago**

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming her current post with The Peninsula Hotels in May 2007, Maria Razumich-Zec served as General Manager of The Peninsula Chicago since March 2002. Before joining the property, she served as Managing Director and Hotel Manager at the New York Palace Hotel. Prior to this, she was Resident Manager of the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago. She also held positions at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, the Waldorf=Astoria in New York, and the Hilton at Short Hills (New Jersey). Razumich-Zec holds a B.S. in business management and a B.A. in French from Purdue University.



Maria Razumich-Zec

PROPERTY BRIEF The Peninsula Chicago (www.chicago.peninsula.com) has been recognized as a premier property with both Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001. The property's 339 luxurious guest-rooms and suites are furnished in a contemporary yet classical style and are among the most spacious in the city. In addition to a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center located on the top two floors of the property, the hotel also offers four distinctive restaurants and a bar, as well as 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and seven additional meeting and event rooms. The Peninsula Chicago is managed by The Peninsula Hotels (www.peninsula.com) which operates luxury hotels throughout Asia and the United States.

The travel and tourism industry has been deeply affected by the global economic crisis. How much of an impact have you seen at The Peninsula Chicago, and what is your outlook for the property for 2010?

The travel industry as well as almost every industry has been affected by the global economic crisis. The Peninsula Chicago has not been immune. We have seen a decline in some segments, yet we have experienced significant growth from visitors throughout the Chicagoland area and the Midwest.

Although the economy was challenging in 2009, I am very pleased to say that we did not lay off any staff members. We have become more creative in finding ways to keep our staff working. For example, work that was previously outsourced has been brought into the hotel operation.

We have determined that we can keep up with the service demands of the operation and keep the staff working full time. We are also able to cover open shifts with employees from different departments. This type of flexibility has been instrumental in keeping the morale of our staff at a high level.

We anticipate that 2010 will see some improvement in business, group, and leisure travel, but it will be 2011 before we expect to see significant signs of growth across the board.

Would you highlight some of the projects taking place at the property that guests can expect in the coming years?

At The Peninsula Chicago, we are committed to investing in and constantly updating the hotel so it looks as fresh as the day we opened. In 2009, we completed a renovation of all guest-rooms and suites with the installation of 42- and 50-inch plasma televisions and new armoires with iPod docking stations and memory card readers. We also replaced carpeting and draperies throughout the hotel. In addition, the men's and women's locker rooms in our spa were fully updated.

We have improvement plans in place for 2010 as well. In a continual effort to improve our product and meet the demands of our business travelers, we will install three-in-one fax/printer/scanner machines in guest-rooms and suites. In addition, one of our top suites will undergo a significant renovation.

The Peninsula Hotels are also focused on environmental improvements throughout our properties. These are areas where our guests will not necessarily experience the impact, but it is a part of being a good corporate and environmental citizen.

In such a competitive market, how challenging is it to differentiate the property from your competitors and to show what makes The Peninsula Chicago unique?

Service is key in the hotel industry. The primary reason why a guest returns to our hotel, besides the product, is the service our staff provides. We have to constantly reinvent ourselves so our hotel is exciting and interesting to the customer. We have a new executive chef who has brought new life and interesting concepts to our culinary area, including new menus in all



four of our restaurants and bar, as well as fun, new initiatives like an Oktoberfest feast in our Pierrot Gourmet restaurant.

Guests expect luxury hotels today to have a full service, quality spa/fitness offering and this has been a key focus for The Peninsula Hotels for many years. Would you provide an overview of these facilities and the major focus that you have placed on the spa component of your business?

Spa and fitness facilities are imperative in a luxury hotel, so much so that travelers expect a hotel to offer a health venue with numerous services, treatments, and equipment. Several years ago, The Peninsula Spa in Chicago launched our ESPA partnership with the introduction of new treatments and product line. This past year, we launched our own brand of products, "Simply Peninsula," that are being used in several of our signature 'Ceremonies,' which are two-hour customized treatments created for The Peninsula Hotels. Additionally, our spa is the only hotel spa in Chicago to offer Ayurvedic treatments.

The Peninsula Spa by ESPA is located on the top two floors of the hotel and offers eight treatment rooms and suites. The use of our spa and fitness center is complimentary to all hotel guests. In addition, Pilates, yoga, and strength-conditioning classes – more than 30 complimentary classes per week – are offered, as well as personal trainers. The fitness center in particular features free-motion weight equipment and floor-to-ceiling windows with amazing views of Lake Michigan.

You have achieved great success in the industry and have managed leading hotels throughout your career. Do you feel that the industry offers strong opportunities at senior leadership levels for women, and are women entering the business?

The industry is evolving. Seven years ago, when I arrived in Chicago, there were only two female hotel general managers in the city, and now there are considerably more.

There are great opportunities for women, as in any profession, when you work to excel. You have to focus on education, apply yourself, and stay positive and focused to succeed in any field. You have to work smarter and harder than anyone else. There are some dynamic women who have helped to change the landscape of the hotel industry. ●

The Terrace (left); The Peninsula Chicago (right)