

Hospitality

The Passion to Serve

An Interview with Peter C. Borer,
Director and Chief Operating Officer,
The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited



Peninsula Moments : Tai Long Wan, one of Hong Kong's most secluded beaches, accessible by The Peninsula Hong Kong's own helicopter

EDITORS' NOTE Peter Borer joined The Peninsula Group in 1981 as Food and Beverage Manager of The Peninsula Manila. Since that time, he has held various executive and managerial positions within the company in Hong Kong and Bangkok, including General Manager of the flagship The Peninsula Hong Kong, Regional General Manager of Asian properties, and Group General Manager for Asia. He is a graduate of the Lausanne Hotel School (Switzerland).



Peter C. Borer

COMPANY BRIEF Tracing its history back to 1866, The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited, (www.hshgroup.com) owns and operates a portfolio of commercial and residential properties and seven luxury hotels under the Peninsula brand in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, Beijing, New York, Chicago, Beverly Hills, Bangkok, and Manila. A further Peninsula hotel in Paris is due to open in 2013.

How has the travel and tourism industry been impacted by the volatile global economy and what is your outlook for growth for Peninsula Hotels in 2013?

Over the past few years, our hotel operations have been affected by mixed market conditions in the midst of continuing global economic uncertainties, and two major natural disasters in 2011.

We are noticing that clients are looking for extra value – more bang for their buck. In addition, booking patterns are changing with lead times reducing dramatically, often down to 24 hours' notice.

As for the outlook for 2013, we are cautiously optimistic. That said, we are certainly not resting on our laurels. At the strategic level, we are redoubling our focus on quality and attention to detail in all we do, and being more creative in offering more value, like an extra spa treatment or airport transfers to our discerning clients.

We're also continuing our global marketing focus on the markets currently most important to us like the U.S., Central America, Asia, and Europe.

The Peninsula Hotel has solid brand recognition, even though you have a relatively small number of properties. How have you been so successful at building a strong awareness and loyal clientele?

The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels – the parent company of The Peninsula Hotels – differentiates itself from its competitors in many ways. It is Asia's

oldest hotel company with a long and distinguished history spanning over 150 years; also, there is continuity of ownership and it is a family-controlled business. The Kadoorie family has been involved since the inception of The Peninsula Hotels in the 1920s and takes a long-term view of their shareholding. In addition, we think it best to own the hotels we manage – or at least have a significant stake in those hotels – so we do not operate with management contracts.

The prime location of each of our hotels is paramount, in the heart of key international gateway cities, like Shanghai's Bund (the first new building in over 60 years), Chicago's Magnificent Mile, Tokyo's Ginza, and Paris' Arc De Triomphe. We also go the extra mile to create memorable stays for our guests and provide The Peninsula "signatures," like the distinctive lobbies, the Rolls-Royce fleets, and our helipads and aviation lounges. The design of each hotel reflects the local culture while providing spectacular views over the host city.

In addition, every company employee prides himself on offering our guests a unique culture of warmth and genuine service, where they feel as comfortable and relaxed as they would at home. This involves an intuitive understanding of a guest's needs, knowing her preferences, and taking care of her effectively and efficiently without fuss. We also have an exceptionally loyal and long-serving staff.

We are continually honored with consumer and industry awards, which reflect how our customers and industry colleagues perceive us and our brand.

The Peninsula Paris is scheduled to open in 2013. Would you provide an overview of this property and your vision for how it will be a leader in the market?

The Peninsula Paris marks our arrival in Europe and will be our 10th hotel worldwide. It is located on Avenue Kléber, one of the streets leading off the Arc de Triomphe, on the prestigious Champs-Élysées, just one block away from the monument itself.

The building opened in 1908 as a hotel called Le Majestic and George Gershwin wrote *An American in Paris* there in the 1920's. When you walk inside this magnificent building, the sense of history is tangible. All of the exterior facades will remain, but much of the interior will be new, and our design team is working to transform the

building into a truly world-class hotel, which will be international by design but French by inspiration, with all of the Peninsula signatures and state-of-the-art in-room technology. The hotel will have 200 rooms, a large lobby, a Chinese restaurant, a number of banquet rooms, and a rooftop restaurant with iconic views over Paris.

What are your plans for expansion into new markets and are there specific parts of the world on which you are most focused?

We are continually seeking new developments and opportunities with an emphasis on assuming an ownership interest in the properties.

Any future property will have to fit our strategic expansion plan. We are focused on prime locations in key international gateway cities and we are prepared to wait many years in some cases.

We also need to have the right partner in place. Then we need the right building, designed to ensure iconic views of each destination from guest rooms and restaurants. We are obsessed with quality and attention to detail, so we apply incredibly demanding standards to the design and building process. That is why we commission some of the world's top architects and designers coupled with works by leading artists and craftsmen, and use only top-of-the-line fittings and unique in-room technology.

Our global marketing effort continues to focus on the markets that are currently most important to us – the U.S., Asia, and Europe. In addition, we are increasing our efforts with regard to India. We still want to have a property in London, but we also want a presence one day in India and Australia, and we would consider several secondary cities in China.

What makes a successful general manager today and what are the most important traits you look for in hiring your managers?

Direction comes from the top and in any hotel, this is the GM. So the selection of our GMs and senior managers is critical. We want our GMs to personalize and flavor their individual properties and we want our guests to feel the personal touch created by the GM, who will be responsible for delivering the exacting standards of personalized service for which we are renowned.

For that, he or she must be agile and a positive "people" person, as well as able to motivate, engender and gain loyalty, mentor, and effortlessly interact with guests and staff alike. Above all, he must possess the passion to serve and attention to detail for which The Peninsula is renowned. ●