

Hospitality



Providing the Next “Wow”

An Interview with Offer Nissenbaum,
Managing Director, The Peninsula Beverly Hills



The Peninsula Suite living area (left); a seven-wheel family adventure assembling at The Peninsula Beverly Hills entrance (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Offer Nissenbaum has held his current post since December 2007. Prior to joining Peninsula, he was Regional Vice President of Operations for Omni Hotels, based in New York City, overseeing eight properties on the East Coast. He concurrently served as Omni's corporate liaison to the Global Hotel Alliance, which includes international luxury brands like Kempinski, Pan Pacific, Dusit, and Leela. Nissenbaum received the coveted "Hotelier of the Year" Award by Virtuoso, the prestigious global organization of luxury travel specialists.



Offer Nissenbaum

PROPERTY BRIEF Having celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2011, The Peninsula Beverly Hills (peninsula.com/beverlyhills) is the only AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five Star-rated hotel in Southern California for 21 consecutive years. The iconic luxury hotel offers 194 elegantly appointed rooms, including 38 suites and 16 private villas, nestled among lush tropical gardens in the heart of Beverly Hills. The property is home to The Belvedere, the only AAA Five Diamond-rated restaurant in Los Angeles for 19 consecutive years, and also features The Living Room, where the legendary Peninsula Afternoon Tea is served daily, as well as The Roof Garden for alfresco dining and The Peninsula Spa.

How do you define what makes this property so special?

We differentiate ourselves from the competition by providing services that are completely unique in our category.

For example, we do not have a check-in or check-out time – it's completely flexible. Our guests see this as a luxury with extraordinary value, especially for those who arrive on the red-eye from Europe or Australia, or have to take late flights to Europe.

Our monogrammed pillowcases, exclusively for our repeat guests (70 percent of our clientele) and VIPs, convey the message that they are special and extremely important to us.

I also have a dedicated team of guest services specialists that research in great detail what the guest likes before he or she arrives.

The Peninsula is the only hotel in Los Angeles with a concierge team at the airport, so when you arrive, we meet you at the gate, take you to retrieve

your luggage, and then notify the driver to pick you up.

A room service menu is kept in the car so you can call in your order and it will be waiting in your accommodations when you arrive.

For our repeat clientele, we offer them the opportunity to store their clothing and personal belongings with us, especially if the guest is traveling back and forth frequently throughout the year, and we launder their garments and place them in their guest room upon their return.

This year has been particularly full of recognition because we have earned the perfect storm of awards: we were named number one hotel in the U.S. by *Travel + Leisure*; number one by *Conde Nast Traveler*; number one by *Global Traveler* magazine; and number one by *Harper's Hideaway*. And each year we have achieved our Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond awards.

So our esteemed customers and clients recognize our hotel, particularly our staff, as exceptional – not just different and better.

How do you offer those services while balancing the cost to remain competitive?

There is certainly added expense to our array of guest services and delivering such a high level of personal attention, but the value of securing the loyalty of repeat guests and the return on investment far outweighs the cost.

We're also the leader in average rate and occupancy in the L.A. marketplace. We're not shy about asking for high rates – we're the rate leader in the market – but in doing so, we must provide extraordinary value to the customer.

Are you happy with where the product is today? Are there changes on the horizon?

Over the past year and a half, we have completely redone the hotel – case goods and soft goods, as well as technology, so we have a brand new product.

We will be making upgrades to our technology in the guest rooms in the coming year, and we are focusing on repositioning The Belvedere restaurant for 2014. It's the only Five Diamond restaurant in a hotel in Southern California, but we want to rejuvenate and look at a change of concept for The Belvedere. We will be evolving it from its core, from menu redesign to achieving a whole different feel for the restaurant.

How have you been successful with the food and beverage product?

We're one of the only restaurants left in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles where you can have a comfortable, quiet conversation with people since the tables are spaced far enough apart and the background music is not overwhelming. Guests are looking for that. Cool and unique places with a lot of buzz are fun, but we have stuck with the concept of fine dining – it's why we have a loyal following.

Now we have to move the needle and find a better balance so people can feel they're having fun, and you do that with lighting, mood, and offering appropriate music.

The Roof Garden restaurant has performed beyond our expectations because it's comfortable, casual outdoor dining that takes advantage of the California weather, and is situated next to the pool – it's about the ambiance and the food, and how you can feel comfortable wearing anything to dine.

How do you provide the technology people expect while keeping it user-friendly?

Technology has to be user-friendly, and some offerings have become so high tech that people are frustrated because they can't figure them out.

The sweet spot is technology that is easy to operate, practical, and easy to understand. Peninsula does a great job of not going too far, yet remaining sophisticated – we design our own tablets and bedside panels in-house with the guest in mind, and we test them in the rooms ahead of time.

We keep it simple but very comfortable.

Has the word “luxury” lost its meaning?

Everyone has his or her own definition of luxury, but the guest determines what luxury is, not hotel companies.

It's not about brick-and-mortar anymore. Luxury is how well you deliver the guest experience.

It's about attentive and personalized service, but also maintaining a distance so as not to overwhelm.

Once you're number one, where do you go from there?

Getting there is one thing, but maintaining it is the challenge.

So we have an innovation meeting every two weeks where we talk about providing the next “wow” for the guest. It's not a big, game-changer service – it's a lot of little things that together make the experience unique.

All you can do is create a culture that continuously focuses on improvement. ●