

Hospitality

Service in Capital Letters

An Interview with Christoph Schmidinger, Regional Vice President and General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong



Harbour views from a Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong suite

EDITORS' NOTE Before assuming his current post, Christoph Schmidinger was Regional Vice President, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, and General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel New York. Prior to this, he served as the General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton Chicago, a Four Seasons Hotel. Before that, he served as General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta and for eight years in managerial positions at Regent Hotels, Asia, which are also Four Seasons properties.



Christoph Schmidinger

PROPERTY BRIEF Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong (fourseasons.com/hongkong) is a five-star hotel property ideally situated in Hong Kong Central. It is a 45-story building with 399 rooms, of which 54 are suites, plus 519 residential units in the adjacent Four Seasons Place. Fine-dining facilities include the three-Michelin-starred restaurant Lung King Heen as well as the two Michelin-starred restaurant Caprice and the Caprice Bar. The hotel offers an Executive Lounge with breathtaking views, and has two swimming pools, both of which feature underwater speakers, with telephones and wireless Internet access around the pool area. Other facilities includes a 24-hour fitness center with training equipment for cardiovascular and weight-training, and a business center with computers and meeting space with wireless internet access. The property also boasts a first-rate spa offering massages, facials, manicures, and pedicures, plus two ballrooms and other extensive function facilities.

How is the Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong positioned in the competitive Hong Kong market?

Like the dynamic city swirling around it, Four Seasons Hong Kong is a global crossroads, pulsing 24/7 with confidence and energy. It simply is a fantastic development in an ideal location in the city. Commanding an airy harbor-front location in Hong Kong's powerhouse heart of finance and commerce, the hotel is the pinnacle of high style, creating a sense of theatre where every moment matters and the finest things in life are celebrated with panache.

The hotel itself has 399 rooms and is located right at the Harbor, so more than 50 percent of our rooms face the Harbor; the other 50

percent are facing the peak or the city of Hong Kong, which is particularly interesting at night because of all of the lights. The Executive Lounge on the 45th floor with breathtaking views is the luxury retreat for the guest who prefers breakfast, snacks, and drinks in private.

The hotel's guest rooms are very spacious, as are the suites. What makes this hotel particularly interesting and enjoyable for customers is that it has unbelievable service offerings within the hotel: We have a restaurant

offering authentic Cantonese cuisine as well as a French restaurant, both awarded with Michelin stars. We offer a wonderful lounge with all-day dining serving wonderful local and international specialties for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; The Blue Bar invites guests for cocktails and drinks, specializing in a rare selection of wines by the glass, as well as the highest quality cheese selection one can find in Hong Kong.

A state-of-the-art spa is available for in-house guests and Hong Kong residents. The Four Seasons is one of the very few hotels offering a wonderful pool area and pool restaurant.

For the social and meetings market, the property offers two ballrooms and multiple other function rooms, all with daylight.

We're so well-established in this market that we enjoy an occupancy in excess of 90 percent for the year.

Have you been happy with the investments made in the product and do you foresee changes on the horizon?

The property has already been through a complete refurbishment of the guest rooms, so they are in pristine condition. The soft furnishing update has also been completed.

The public areas, such as the restaurants and the function rooms, are being maintained on a continuous basis.

The spa has already been renovated and it really looks great. We literally just opened a Nail Bar, which is the place to get a manicure and pedicure while enjoying a prime view of the Harbor. People enjoy this experience so much – they can sip Champagne and have some snacks as they're pampered.

We're faced with very active competition but the owners of my hotel, Henderson Land Group and Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd., have managed to keep the hotel on top.

What is the difference in Asia when it comes to service?

Service in Asia is simply spelled with capital letters. It's in their genes. My team doesn't see the work in the hotel simply as a job; they love to extend service. This is true regardless of which position they hold.

What has made the food and beverage component work so well at the property?

It's a bit of a cultural thing. It's pretty common and well-established that often the best restaurants in major cities are in hotels. It has always been like this. For hotels in Asia, it's very common that you have not only one restaurant but a couple of offerings – people very much appreciate that. They love to go to hotel restaurants.

Also, running a restaurant operation in Asia in a hotel is profitable versus in New York, where it's very difficult to make the numbers work.

Over the years, it's simply easier to evolve a product, which gives you financial rewards.

What is the key market for the property and where are opportunities to build clientele?

The main market of Hong Kong is mainland China. The majority of all of our guests are customers from mainland China.

The second largest market is customers who live in Asia, and the rest is a healthy mix between Americans and Europeans.

How difficult is it to make sure that you maintain your edge when you're doing well and could easily become complacent?

You always have to reshape and coach the team to evolve within product and service. When you're constantly running at 90 percent, people stay alert – they get used to it. My hotel in Hong Kong has always run this kind of occupancy and the staff is accustomed to it. It's a pleasure to be able to always put your attention on service and to personalize that service. People here are switched on. The staff in Hong Kong are very hard working – they work long hours, but they are very appreciative of their jobs. They are focused on the execution of their jobs. It's been a real pleasure to work with them.

A devotion to excellence includes service that is authentically Hong Kong, incredibly efficient yet rooted in familial warmth, helpfulness, and support. ●