



A standard guest room at The Peninsula Chicago

Midwestern Hospitality Combined with Eastern Graciousness

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

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



Maria Zec

PROPERTY BRIEF The Peninsula Chicago (chicago.peninsula.com) has been recognized as a premier property with Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001. The property boasts 339 luxurious guest rooms and suites furnished in a contemporary yet classical style and offers a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, as well as four distinctive restaurants and a bar, 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and seven additional meeting and event rooms. The Peninsula Chicago is managed by The Peninsula Hotels (peninsula.com), which operates luxury properties throughout Asia and the United States.

The Peninsula Chicago is consistently recognized as one of the world's best hotels. What makes the property so special?

It's our staff and the personalized service they provide to our guests. A number of our staff have been with the hotel for many years – 60 percent of our employees have been at The Peninsula Chicago for five or more years and 30 percent have been at the hotel for 10 years or longer. Our staff have developed personal relationships with our guests over the years and really strive to create memorable experiences for them.

We describe our service style as "Midwestern Hospitality combined with Eastern Graciousness." This is experienced through the warm, genuine and friendly nature found in the Midwest paired with the very gracious service you find in Asia.

What can guests expect from the upcoming rooms renovation?

This is the most significant and comprehensive rooms renovation at The Peninsula Chicago since the hotel opened 14 years ago. The change will be dramatic in terms of the overall feeling of the rooms.

The new Peninsula Chicago guest-room is a step forward in the brand's standard of immersive luxury experience. The design's effect of enlarging the proportions of the room through a re-working layout and the use of high-quality built-in elements creates a more spacious guest room. Stunning city views become more prominent. Opportunities to delight the guest are present throughout, from the beauty of a silk floral art piece that is a focal point in every guest room and suite to an unmatched variety of amenities and comforts, and thoughtful and intuitive technology.

There will be two Samsung tablets in each room (and three in the suites). This tablet technology, which can convert to 11 languages, will allow the guest the ability to operate various features of the guestroom, i.e. temperature and lighting, as well as hotel services, room service, local attractions, etc., all with one touch. Telephones will include VOIP for complimentary long distance and international calls, and there will be a multi-charger station located bedside. Televisions will be 55-inch in guest rooms and 65-inch in suites.

We look forward to introducing our guests to the new room product starting in the second quarter of 2015.

Would you highlight your suite offering and how do those suites help differentiate the property?

We have 339 guestrooms, including 83 suites, of which we have seven different suite options.

Guests like the variety of suite options at The Peninsula Chicago, as well as the number of suites we have in the most popular categories. The Junior and Deluxe Suites are perfect for families with pull-out sofas. Executive Suites are ideal for couples or single travelers. Guests love the corner location with beautiful, natural light.

The one-of-a-kind Peninsula Suite is 3,645 square feet with stunning views of Lake Michigan, and Chicago and Michigan Avenues. This one-bedroom suite, which can be converted to a three-bedroom suite, features a large entry foyer, generous formal living room with a baby grand piano and fireplace, large marble bathroom with picture window over the whirlpool bathtub, a private workout room, additional powder room, dressing area, formal dining room with seating for 10, an office, and a pantry kitchen with private entrance for staff, as well as a family room with a wet bar, 60-inch television, DVD player, and a casual dining

table for four, which is ideal for intimate gatherings. The Peninsula Suite offers a private 2,000-square-foot terrace with amazing Chicago skyline views and an outdoor Jacuzzi. There is a private entrance/exit from the bedroom of The Peninsula Suite. This luxuriously appointed and finely decorated suite is complete with state-of-the-art electronic equipment.

We have two Grand Suites, which are two-bedroom suites with a large entry foyer, large living area showcasing stunning views, two marble bathrooms, one with a whirlpool bathtub, an additional powder room, two dressing areas, dining room for six guests, study, and kitchen. These 2,561-square-foot suites feature a home theatre and stereo in the master bedroom and parlor with views overlooking Michigan Avenue, Lake Michigan, and the historic Water Tower Park.

What makes your food and beverage offerings work so well and how important is it to engage the local community?

Each food and beverage offering is a unique concept and our options appeal to the local community in addition to hotel guests; 80 percent of our restaurant business comes from the local market, which maintains more than a solid customer base for our dining venues. It's critical to involve and appeal to the local community for a restaurant to be successful.

Would you provide an overview of your spa facilities at The Peninsula Chicago?

The Peninsula Spa is located on the top two floors of the hotel with great views of the city and lakefront, and offers eight treatment rooms and suites, and a half-Olympic indoor swimming pool and outdoor sun terrace. The use of our spa and fitness center is complimentary to all hotel guests. In addition, Pilates, yoga, and strength-conditioning classes are offered, as well as personal trainers. The fitness center in particular features numerous free-motion weight equipment and floor-to-ceiling windows with amazing views of Lake Michigan so the view is quite inspiring for those early morning workouts.

What do you look for when hiring talent?

We look for people who take a genuine interest in the comfort and care of others. They have to think on their feet, problem solve, anticipate needs, and work well in a team setting. We look for people who smile, have good eye contact, and are warm, friendly, and caring individuals. While education and previous experience is a plus, personality is more important. We can teach the standards and position requirements, but we can't teach the innate ability to genuinely care for others. ●