



Trump Standards

An Interview with Suzie Mills,
General Manager, Trump International
Hotel & Tower New York



Views of Central Park from a two-bedroom Park View suite (left); entrance (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Suzie Mills has served on the management team of the award-winning Trump International Hotel & Tower New York since pre-opening in 1996. Mills was promoted to General Manager in 2006, becoming the youngest GM in New York City. Beginning her hospitality career working at her parents' hotel in Wales at the age of 10, she has been honored as one of Crain's New York's prestigious "40 Under 40" and earned her property the AAA Five Diamond Award and the Forbes Travel Guide Five Star Award.



Suzie Mills

PROPERTY BRIEF The first property in what is now the iconic Trump Hotels brand, Trump International Hotel & Tower New York (trumphotels.com/central-park) is the only Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond hotel with a Five-Star, Five-Diamond (and also Michelin Three-Star and New York Times Four-Star) Restaurant, Jean-Georges. Located where Central Park meets Columbus Circle, and just steps from the Time Warner Center and Lincoln Center, the 52-story structure features 176 luxurious guest rooms and suites, complete with European-style kitchens, marble bathrooms, and exceptional views of Central Park and the Manhattan skyline.

Where do you see the New York market and is this a challenging time for growth?

It's definitely a challenging time for the New York City hotel industry. Airbnb has been a disrupter in the hospitality market overall, and its future is yet to be seen with recent regulations. As always, the first quarter is challenging for most New York hotels, especially as we factor in the new supply to the city.

We're very lucky with our repeat guests. People might try the new hotels, but they come back because they want the recognition, the service, and the comfort of being in familiar surroundings.

Has the industry worked together effectively to address Airbnb?

The industry is working on a very strong case against Airbnb, and the recent regulations enforce fines of \$7,500 for illegal use. The industry will continue to see impacts as the laws evolve.

How important is it to have ownership that wants to invest and be the best?

We are very lucky with our ownership. They have invested a lot of money into this property and they want it to be the best. Also, our owners travel a great deal and they know the competition

out there, and want to make sure their investment is in the best shape possible.

We recently completed a massive upgrade to all televisions in the building to ensure we're up-to-date with our technology. We are also continually executing soft goods upgrades, be it changing out pillows or recovering chairs or changing carpets – that is ongoing and a task we consider part of our everyday operation.

Are there commonalities among the different Trump properties or is each hotel specific to the market?

As far as structure goes, it's very specific to the location, which I love about Trump hotels. Each property is very unique to the city it's in.

The common thread is unwavering service levels with the attention to details as well as common elements, such as our brand-wide Trump Attache guest services department and signature programs: Trump Kids, Trump Pets, and Trump Wellness.

How much of a differentiator is your suite offering?

When we first opened the hotel 20 years ago, we were unique in that we were a hotel featuring mostly suites. We now see that many of our competitors are starting to turn their standard rooms into suites to meet the increasing demand, which is a product we already offer. Our suites feature full kitchens, which is a unique selling point to the market, and fantastic for long-stay guests or those traveling with families. Additionally, our Park View suites feature unobstructed views of Central Park, which is not something many hotels can offer.

Are consumers right to think that waiting to book helps with rate?

For our property, no, it is almost always the reverse of what many travelers think. What we're seeing more on the hotel side is people are offering more competitive rates further out. Many hotels are having the pre-paid, non-cancellable rates available for a longer booking window, but closer to the arrival day it is more likely rates will go up because of compression in the city. While there is always a chance for a last-minute deal during need periods, generally the special promotions are best taken advantage of in advance.

How important is the family feeling for this property?

We have almost an equal balance of leisure to business guests, and looking at the traveler these days, many people travel with their families.

On the weekends, we have numerous family-oriented guests with Central Park right across the street, and we offer suites that can accommodate larger families and feature full kitchens, as well as our indoor pool.

Our signature Trump Kids programs differentiate us from other hotels, with age-appropriate custom amenities, availability to have a baking gift basket in the suite as an activity for the family, and our special offerings like Glamping.

How has the property balanced offering express check-in/check-out on TV and other technology while maintaining the personal touch?

Guests want the efficiency when it's convenient for them, though in the luxury sector they will always want the personal interaction -- someone to greet them by name, to be recognized when they come back to the hotel, and to be thanked for staying. Our guests like to be asked how their day is going and how their family is doing. With a loyal employee group, many who have been with us since opening 20 years ago, combined with a high repeat guest percentage, many of our team members know the guests personally, so it's natural for them to ask about their family or business when they see them arriving or departing.

Will you talk about the value the food & beverage component provides to the property?

We have an incredible partnership with Jean-Georges, an iconic world-renowned chef who also has the right combination of product himself. The formal dining room provides the three-Michelin star experience and the tasting menus for a special occasion, and we also offer Nougatine by Jean-Georges, which is a bit more casual. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are always full.

The atmosphere in both rooms is incredible; the formal dining room is stunning by design, but not stuffy where guests feel they have to whisper.

For a GM today, is the focus still on the guest relationship or more about the financial side of the business?

The day that we forget about our guests, we're going to be in a tough position. It should always be about the guest, but we have a fiduciary responsibility to our owners as well that includes smart buying decisions.

One can still be smart on the financial side but still make sure the guest, and the associates, aren't suffering. ●