

# Hospitality



## Ideally Located in London

An Interview with  
**Alvaro Rey, General Manager,  
InterContinental London Park Lane**



InterContinental London Park Lane entrance (left); Ella Canta restaurant (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Alvaro Rey undertook his professional education at Ecole Hôtelière Les Roches, Switzerland. He began his career at InterContinental Medellín in his native country of Colombia and has remained with the company ever since. During his time with InterContinental Hotels & Resorts, Rey has held General Manager positions across South and North America, Middle East, Australia and Europe. In 2009, Rey brought his expertise as General Manager to the flagship hotel for IHG, InterContinental London Park Lane. He is now Area Manager of InterContinental Hotels & Resorts London & Franchise Hotels Europe.



Alvaro Rey

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated at one of the capital's most prestigious addresses, InterContinental London Park Lane ([parklane.intecontinental.com](http://parklane.intecontinental.com)) presents modern luxury accommodation in the heart of Mayfair. Inspired by its location overlooking the Royal Parks, the hotel delivers elegant natural interiors and award-winning seasonal cuisine. The flagship InterContinental Hotels & Resorts® property combines exemplary service with a concierge team that brings insider London to life.

### Where does the hotel business stand in London and what is your outlook for 2018?

Despite the events of the past year, we have seen an increase in occupancy with room rates remaining strong. We had experienced a challenging summer with various changes in key markets, but it has otherwise been a good year for our business. The outlook for 2018 is overall very positive and we see opportunity to grow the Asian market over the next 12 months.

### Does Airbnb post a challenge for hotels in London?

It has not directly impacted our business. On a number of occasions, we have seen guests leave their Airbnb and check-in with us. In the luxury hospitality sector, guests demand a particular level of service, one that Airbnb does not currently provide.

### How do you position the property and define the advantages it offers?

We are very fortunate in that we have a number of key differentiators which help us stand out in a very competitive market.

Our location is one of London's best. We are located at No. 1 Park Lane, right on the crossroads

where Mayfair, Knightsbridge and Piccadilly all converge.

In addition, we offer visitors and Londoners alike, a food & beverage destination with restaurants and bars that are unique in London; Ella Canta offers upscale Mexican cuisine whilst Theo Randall at the InterContinental offers rustic Italian fare.

Our rooms and suites offer modern luxury accommodation with many rooms boasting views over Hyde Park and Green Park as well as London's iconic skyline.

Despite being a very elegant hotel, we're not stuffy – we're extremely flexible and friendly and one doesn't have to dress up to be welcomed here.

### With London offering so many great stand-alone restaurants, what are the keys to being successful in food and beverage?

One has to be extremely creative and have an awareness of the emerging trends and cuisines around the world. The guest experience is extremely important and we carefully review the design of this experience from entrance right through to departure and of course the online and pre/post-arrival elements.

We opened a new restaurant (Ella Canta) with a separate entrance from the street so that local guests don't have to go through the hotel lobby to reach the restaurant. Our goal was to design a restaurant that didn't look like it was part of the hotel. The addition of this Mexican restaurant was considered a risk to begin with, however the launch has exceeded expectations. I think you also have to acknowledge that risks need to be taken in order to be successful at times.

### What is the importance of the meeting and event capabilities for the property?

It's a significant part of our business. We have dedicated one of 10 floors in the hotel to a purpose-built meetings and events venue comprising 13 rooms spanning 15,000 square feet. Our ballroom can accommodate 750 guests for a gala dinner or 1,000 guests for a reception. This space has also grown in popularity for both local and international weddings and celebrations.

The corporate market is key to our success and having excellent meeting facilities is a prerequisite to attracting this business.

### In a city property, is a spa a key component?

It is important to have a fitness lifestyle component, so we have a good gym. The spa

elements in a city like London is great to have, but it's not essential.

### How valuable is it for you to offer a broad range of suites as well as four signature suites?

Extremely important. We have focused on creating a unique suite offering over the past five years, one that is flexible for our guests. Our suite guests come from across the globe and can use a suite for business meetings or entertaining and sometimes both. Our signature suites are designed with flexibility in mind to connect with additional rooms and adapt layout.

### InterContinental is known to heavily invest in training. What do you look for when it comes to bringing in talent?

Our approach is a combination of schooling and personality. We invest in training so whilst experience is important and depends on the role, I would say we hire for attitude and potential.

Four years ago, we decided to hire differently. Candidates now have to be interviewed by four different people – the department head, human resources, another department head and myself. This is not only to identify the right person, but it also gives the candidate the opportunity to know who we are and if they really want to work with us.

### What constitutes a true luxury hotel experience today?

It's about personalization and customization. The anticipation of guest needs is what sets us apart from competitors. We strive to ensure that our guests have an enjoyable trip, be it for business or leisure. We are the guests' key to a destination and it's our job to help them explore a little more of London whether it's their first or 20th visit. We want to expand our guest's view of London and showcase this wonderful city.

### How critical has it been to have owners with a long-term commitment to the property?

Having owners with a long-term commitment ensures that we are clear on our goals and where there are opportunities to grow the business. We have been able to do everything we felt needed to be done to represent additional income for the property and owner. Once there is trust with the owner, everything constitutes getting to the same point.

### What advice do you give to young people hoping to build careers in this industry?

People are actively trying to move up quickly within the industry and I admire this ambition. However, in this business good leaders need a broad spectrum of experience. Young people need to have patience and learn across the board. ●