

Hospitality



Diverse Design



The Greenwich Hotel (left) and its pool (above)

An Interview with Philip L. Truelove,
General Manager, The Greenwich Hotel

EDITORS' NOTE Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Philip Truelove began his career as Reception Manager at the Ritz Hotel in London in 1970. He later held managerial positions with the Connaught Hotel, The Ritz-Carlton in Washington, D.C., Chateau Marmont, and The Mercer Hotel. He used to own and operate The Island Inn in Monbegan, Maine. Truelove received his M.B.A. in Hotel Administration in the U.K.



Philip L. Truelove

PROPERTY BRIEF The Greenwich Hotel (thegreenwichhotel.com), located in New York's Tribeca district, has 88 rooms and suites with furnishings from hand-loomed, Tibetan silk rugs to English leather settees. All beds are Duxiana and bathrooms are designed in unique patterns of hand-laid Moroccan tile or Italian Carrara marble. Modern room features include high-definition flat-screen TVs, iPod docking stations and complimentary wireless Internet. Hotel features include a drawing room and courtyard, Locanda Verde restaurant, Shibui Spa, as well as indoor pool and gym facilities. The Greenwich Hotel is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

Where does the New York City hospitality market stand today and is there growth in the market?

Yes, I do believe a major city like New York will always experience growth in the long run. Having worked in hotels for 40 years, I continually see the pattern when so many new hotel rooms are brought into the market, as there have been over the last few years, with the resulting increase in inventory and therefore a slight decrease in occupancy. However, as the years pass, it always comes back and the occupancies increase.

We have seen a greater number of people coming to New York City over the years. Populations are increasing, more people have the ability to travel, and so these centers of commerce will continue to do well.

Within the New York market, I do believe that incoming visitors, both tourist and business, will increase and these increased numbers will compensate for new bedrooms that have been introduced.

Does Airbnb impact the high-end segment?

I don't think it impacts us or, indeed, the smaller luxury hotels. It may impact the much larger hotels that offer a lower price level. I have no evidence of this but I can only presume it does.

Those looking for Airbnb are generally looking for a less expensive option, but those coming to The Greenwich are looking for service and that is something that Airbnb can't offer.

In the end, competition is good for any market and it will bring more visitors to the city.

Do you consider your competitive set to be citywide or within your specific location?

Generally, it's throughout the city, but it's more marked Downtown now where, previously, there were so few hotels. There are many more hotels that have been introduced to Lower Manhattan and Downtown and these hotels cover all ends of the spectrum, which is great for the area and, because of this, many more people are being introduced to this end of town and are coming to love it as we all do.

How do you define The Greenwich advantage in the market?

When the hotel was developed and designed, the thought process was to make it feel more like a home. The design is very diverse – there are many influences throughout the building from different parts of the world and people find that attractive. However, it's not overly designed, so the senses are not hounded by one specific influence of design.

One may find comfort in the Asian aspect in the pool area or the more European aspect in the lobby area. We want to provide areas where people can relax and not have their senses dulled by over design.

Tribeca is also a wonderful area – quieter than the hectic pace most of Manhattan moves at, but adjacent and easily accessible to business, shopping and tourist areas.

As important are the staff, and many of us have been with The Greenwich since it opened – we provide its heart and we do our best to keep it beating in a loving and constant manner. Hospitality is at the core of our business, and as we get to know our guests and become familiar with their needs, we are able to provide a safe and comfortable place in which to stay.

Is there consistency within your room accommodations?

There is consistency in all of the rooms in their general style. For example, all have wooden floors and similar beds, but each room also has its own identity with different types of carpet on the floors and different colors of leathers and velvets as chair coverings. An interesting example is also in the bathrooms – we have 60 different shapes and colors of Moroccan tile, so there are many different schemes to be found throughout the hotel. We also have rooms with more traditional marble, as well as a beautiful array of colors in Mexican concrete tile.

The three Penthouses, as well, are all quite different and have distinctly individual styles and very much their own identity.

With hospitality being so focused on human interaction, is technology distracting from the personal attention?

When I worked at The Ritz in London in the 1970s, the first computers were introduced into the hotel operation, although in a simple way. Since then, and certainly more so in the last five or 10 years, the possibilities that technology offers have exploded. Much of what is being suggested is in its infancy and needs to be looked at very carefully, but there are many ways it can be used to compliment the way we work. An extreme example is robots to make deliveries to rooms – is The Greenwich ready for it? Absolutely not, but they are being used in certain places and I have no doubt over the next 10 years they will be more accepted and more refined, and they will find their place. The Internet, which none of us can live without and is the backbone of much of this technology, was a mystery not that long ago, but now it needs to be constantly expanded and strengthened to cope with demand.

We recently introduced tablets in the rooms that allow our guests to order room service online. Those same tablets allow people to look at the weather forecast as well as to read thousands of newspapers and publications throughout the world, or book a table at our restaurant or a spa appointment, all without speaking to anyone. I was against this for a long time fearing that it would take away the human interaction, but we introduced it and we have found it to be welcomed and widely used. However, we maintained the traditional method with the printed menu and the ability to order by telephone and voice, and so we use and embrace the technology but also maintain the traditional methods. ●