

Personalized Service

An Interview with Gul Turkmenoglu, Area General Manager, InterContinental New York Times Square

EDITORS' NOTE In her current role, Gul Turkmenoglu manages all aspects of the InterContinental New York Times Square and its day-to-day operations. Previously, she worked with Denihan as General Manager for their owned and managed hotel, The Benjamin. She was subsequently promoted to Regional Vice President overseeing Denihan's luxury portfolio. Turkmenoglu started her career with the opening of the Conrad Istanbul, serving in a number of management positions. She was then promoted to Director of Rooms at the Conrad Cairo and thereafter relocated to New York City to join the executive team of the Waldorf Astoria leading various departments for six years. Turkmenoglu served in Executive Leadership roles with the Millennium Group, Highgate and Morgans Hotel Group prior to joining Denihan. She received her BS degree in tourism and hotel management from Çukurova University in Turkey and her MBA from NYU Stern School of Business.



Gul Turkmenoglu

Our opening plan had three phases and the occupancy levels drove it. In the beginning, we had 15-30 percent occupancy and rates were below \$200, so we strategically went for high weekend occupancy first and captured the local market. The weekdays came when customers started to travel from other cities and boroughs. We also followed the city guidelines very closely and aligned our openings based on the guidance.

How proud are you to see the strength displayed by your team during this unprecedented time?

I feel so lucky to have such a strong team – the InterContinental Times Square “Brave Team.” Everyone worked together and pursued one goal, to open sensibly and keep building the business so we have a self-sustained hotel that can survive the pandemic and keep growing. Staff and guest safety has been our number one priority.

Our owners were also terrific and have supported us through the pandemic as well as our corporate team. Since we were so lean, they worked as part of our extension – especially the revenue management and marketing teams.

How is InterContinental New York Times Square addressing health and safety concerns due to the pandemic?

We have been following the CDC and NYC guidelines strictly. All our sanitizers are EPA-approved N List chemicals, we use HEPA filters in our vacuums, and have sanitizers on both guest and non-guest areas.

What are the keys to the New York City hospitality industry and hotel business recovering from the pandemic?

First, the city needs a plan where all the parties are aligned. I feel that everyone is trying to do good things, but individually. We have an excellent opportunity to clean NYC streets so let's use it.

Will you discuss InterContinental New York Times Square's focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

We have never stopped providing personalized service to our guests. We reach out to every guest for which we have the means, for example by e-mail or phone, before arrival. We use “Zingle” as a text messaging system to connect with our guests swiftly 24/7. Speed of service is essential for us. I just received a beautiful thank you letter

PROPERTY BRIEF Rising 36 stories above the pulse and pageantry of Times Square, the InterContinental New York Times Square (interconny.com) is a hub of tranquility amid the constant hum of New York City. The LEED-certified property includes 603 guestrooms and luxury suites as well as more than 10,000 square feet of meeting and event space. Its design highlights include a sculpture garden and tree-inspired columns. Guests can sip signature cocktails at The Stinger Cocktail Bar and Kitchen or enjoy the 24-hour fitness center and personalized in-room beauty services.

Will you provide an overview of InterContinental New York Times Square and how the property is positioned in the market?

We opened our doors to the public on October 8, 2020 and have been safely welcoming our guests since then. Our immediate opening positioned us as a market leader from a RevPAR perspective, and although our competitors are back in the game, we have been able to keep our number one position. We recently opened our breakfast with a la carte continental and hot American Breakfast options. Unfortunately, the market is still very soft and rate recovery is slower than the occupancy.

October 2021 will mark InterContinental New York Times Square's one year of re-opening after COVID-19. How has the property adapted the way it works this past year to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?



InterContinental New York Times Square 1,400-square-foot Manhattan Suite

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The 2,100-square-foot bi-level Penthouse Suite (above and below)

from a guest about the responsiveness of our team. They had forgotten their Bose Earbuds in the safe and when they called the hotel, our security team handled this request with a high sense of ownership and speed. The guest received them in the mail the next day.

How critical is it for InterContinental New York Times Square to build a diverse and inclusive workforce to mirror the diversity of the guests it serves?

Extremely critical. The IHG Diversity and Inclusion Board commitments – Listen and Learn, Advocate and Act – are embraced by all the team members. We participated in staff committee activities during the past two years and are on target to have everyone go through the unconscious bias training, which I believe is excellent.

How do you define the role of the general manager and what are the keys to being effective in the role?

My role as a GM is to support my team and help them succeed in achieving our goals. To do that, I feel that being accessible and creating a clear communication line between all parties is extremely important. Therefore, I encourage constant collaboration in decision-making and encourage them to

work together to solve problems. The other key component is to be alert and agile against the ever-changing market conditions. I work with my executive team to develop different strategic plans which we are ready to implement at any time.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

It depends on the leadership level. Unfortunately, despite all the efforts of leading hotel companies, there are many fewer women CEOs or COOs in our industry than others. However, I am happy to see that more women are holding GM and regional positions than before.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in building a career in the hotel industry?

I would advise them to spend the first few years working in different places and learning about other cultures. From a business perspective, while the operations may be similar, the business dynamics are different from region to region. However, in the end, hospitality is all about people management. Whether it's the guest, your colleague, or ownership, understanding, empathizing, and respecting people around you empowers continuous learning through teamwork and collaboration, and brings success. ●

