

Japanese-Inspired Hospitality

An Interview with Amir Vahdani, General Manager, Nobu Ryokan Malibu

EDITORS' NOTE *With more than two decades of hospitality experience, Amir Vahdani is the General Manager of Nobu Ryokan Malibu, the exclusive, 16-room luxury retreat nestled between the serene shores of Carbon Beach and the iconic Pacific Coast Highway. Prior to joining Nobu, he spent over 18 years with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, holding pivotal executive roles across the brand's premier West Coast properties. Most recently, as Hotel Manager for the Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills, Vahdani oversaw comprehensive daily operations, set new benchmarks for financial performance and guest satisfaction, and successfully navigated the property through unprecedented pandemic-era challenges. Vahdani's background is rooted in culinary excellence and operational mastery. Throughout his tenure with Four Seasons – spanning key properties in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Vancouver – he spearheaded high-profile food and beverage concepts, drove substantial revenue growth, and earned prestigious industry accolades. Notably, he helped pioneer a new casual fine-dining paradigm for the brand at Yew Restaurant & Bar and directed operations at Chartwell Restaurant, one of only three Forbes Five-Star dining destinations in metropolitan Vancouver at the time. Vahdani holds a bachelor's degree in engineering from Istanbul University and a bachelor's degree in hospitality administration and management from Vancouver Community College. He also holds an advanced Level 3 certification from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET).*



Amir Vahdani

experiences allowed me to work within different markets, cultures, and operational environments which helped shape my leadership style and broaden my perspective on luxury hospitality. Before transitioning fully into hotel leadership, I was also the owner and operator of a multi-unit restaurant business in Vancouver, Canada. That experience gave me a strong understanding of entrepreneurship, financial management, team building, and the importance of consistency in guest service.

Over time, my responsibilities expanded into hotel leadership, team development, financial performance, and long-term operational strategy. Today, as General Manager of Nobu Ryokan Malibu, I oversee a highly curated property that combines Japanese-inspired hospitality with the relaxed energy of Malibu. What has always motivated me most is building strong teams and creating an environment where both employees and guests feel genuinely cared for.

Will you provide an overview of Nobu Ryokan Malibu?

Nobu Ryokan Malibu is a small beachfront luxury hotel located on the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu, inspired by the traditional Japanese ryokan experience while blending naturally with the relaxed lifestyle of coastal California. The property was designed to feel private, peaceful, and highly personalized. With a limited number of guestrooms, suites, and beach houses, guests are able to enjoy a more intimate experience that feels closer to a private residence than a traditional hotel. Direct beach access, thoughtful design, wellness-focused amenities, and in-room dining from Nobu Malibu all contribute to that experience.

What makes the Ryokan unique is its understated approach to luxury. The focus is less about formality and more about comfort, privacy, simplicity, and attention to detail. Many of our guests are looking to disconnect, recharge, and enjoy Malibu in a calm and authentic way while still experiencing the level of service and hospitality associated with the Nobu brand.

Will you discuss your career journey?

My career in hospitality began with a passion for creating experiences that feel personal and memorable. I have been fortunate to work with some exceptional teams throughout my career, including many years with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Vancouver, where I developed a strong foundation in luxury operations, food and beverage, and guest experience. In addition to my permanent leadership roles, I also had the opportunity to support several remarkable properties through various task force assignments and operational projects in destinations including Montreal, Punta Mita, Mexico, Napa Valley, and others. Those



Beachfront king room

What do you feel are the keys to the strength and leadership of the property?

I believe the strength of Nobu Ryokan Malibu comes from consistency, authenticity, and the culture we have built within the team. The property was designed to feel intimate, peaceful, and highly personalized, and staying true to that vision has been very important to its success. Our team takes great pride in creating meaningful guest experiences through attention to detail, genuine care, and a hands-on approach to hospitality. Operating in Malibu also requires adaptability and resilience, and I believe strong leadership comes from being present, leading by example, and building trust within the team every day.

How valuable is it for Nobu Ryokan Malibu to have such a strong restaurant offering with Nobu Malibu?

Having Nobu Malibu connected to Nobu Ryokan Malibu is extremely valuable and naturally enhances the overall guest experience. Nobu Malibu is one of the most recognized restaurant destinations in the world, and it gives our guests direct access to an exceptional dining experience while still enjoying the privacy and calm atmosphere of the Ryokan. The balance between the energy of the restaurant and the peaceful, residential feel of the hotel creates something very unique. It allows guests to experience both worlds in a seamless and authentic way.

Will you highlight Nobu Ryokan Malibu's focus on health and wellness?

At Nobu Ryokan Malibu, wellness is really part of the overall experience rather than a single amenity. The property was designed to feel peaceful, private, and connected to nature, which naturally encourages guests to slow down, relax, and recharge. From the oceanfront setting and quiet atmosphere to wellness-focused dining options and personalized service, every detail is intended to create a sense of balance and comfort. Many of our guests come to Malibu looking to disconnect from busy routines and focus on rest, sleep, movement, and overall well-being in a more natural way.

We are also constantly working to improve and evolve the guest experience by introducing thoughtful wellness-focused products, amenities, and experiences that align with the lifestyle and expectations of today's luxury traveler.

What does luxury mean to you in today's hospitality landscape?

Luxury today is less about excess and more about how an experience makes people feel. Guests are looking for authenticity, personalization, privacy, comfort, and meaningful human connection. True luxury is creating an experience that feels effortless, thoughtful, and emotionally memorable.

At Nobu Ryokan Malibu, we follow the philosophy that luxury should feel understated and natural rather than overly formal. That approach has always been very aligned with Nobu Matsuhisa's vision and philosophy around hospitality, food, and lifestyle.



Beachfront suite bathroom

Nobu-san has often said that luxury is not about being complicated, but about quality, simplicity, consistency, and making people feel genuinely cared for. I believe that philosophy resonates strongly with today's travelers. Guests appreciate experiences that feel personal, comfortable, and authentic while still delivering an exceptional level of service and attention to detail.

What has made the hospitality industry so special for you?

What has made the hospitality industry so special for me is the human connection behind it. In today's world, where so much of our daily lives are becoming automated and driven by technology and AI, genuine human interaction has become even more valuable. Hospitality still has the ability to create real emotional connections through personal service, care, empathy, and attention to detail.

What I enjoy most is creating experiences where guests feel welcomed, understood, and genuinely cared for. At the same time, I've always found great fulfillment in building strong teams and mentoring people within the industry.

Technology will continue to improve efficiency and convenience, but I believe the heart of hospitality will always be people taking care of people, and that is what continues to make this industry so meaningful to me.

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

I would encourage young people entering the hospitality industry to stay curious, work hard, and never stop learning. Hospitality is a business built around people, and the ability to communicate well, show empathy, and create genuine human connections will always be valuable no matter how much technology evolves.

I also think it is important to stay open to different experiences and learn every part of the operation. Some of the strongest leaders in hospitality started by understanding the day-to-day challenges of different departments and building relationships with the people around them.

In today's world, where AI and automation continue to grow, the human side of hospitality becomes even more important. Technology can improve efficiency, but genuine care and emotional connection are what truly create memorable experiences. I've always appreciated something Danny Meyer once said: "Business, like life, is all about how you make people feel. It's that simple, and it's that hard." I think that philosophy perfectly captures what great hospitality is really about. ●