

Service And Spirit

An Interview with Khaled Hashem, President, White Elephant Resorts

EDITORS' NOTE Khaled Hashem's favorite aspect of his job is that he loves taking care of the White Elephant Resorts' team and to be able to see them progress in their careers and live a comfortable life. He is always excited to interact with guests and hear their feedback as he believes that is highly important as many guests end up being great friends. He loves visiting the company's unique properties weekly, enjoys meals in their restaurants, and going fishing with his friends and colleagues. A favorite pastime is spending an afternoon on a Hinckley and enjoying the water. He also likes to spend as much time as possible with his family at the beach having cookouts. In the off season, Hashem visits White Elephant Resorts' winter properties and focuses on completing capital projects. It is very important to him to spend time traveling with his family, enjoying different countries, and learning about various cultures.



Khaled Hashem

How do you describe White Elephant Resorts' culture?

It's not complicated: take care of your people, and they take care of your guests. We have 550 employees today, and many have been with us for 20 or 30 years. That's the real proof, not anything we could put on a poster. You can't fake caring about people. Employees know the difference right away.

We try to pay fairly, provide real benefits and create opportunities for people to build careers with us. We invest heavily in training, but also in bringing people together – cookouts, painting classes, employee appreciation days and other things that create a sense of community. Many of our current managers and senior leaders have been promoted from within, which says a lot about the culture and the opportunities we can create. In November 2025, we were named to *The Boston Globe's* "Top Places to Work" for the 12th consecutive year. That means a lot to me because it comes directly from our own people. I also believe culture is a business model, not

simply an employee benefit. When you take care of your people, they stay, and they take care of your guests. Guests come back – 30 to 40 percent of our business in Nantucket and Palm Beach is repeat, and we expect Aspen to follow the same pattern – and they tell their friends. The business performs, ownership continues to invest, and that allows us to keep getting better.

Our ownership is a huge part of that. Steve Karp and his family take a long-term view. They're not chasing a quarterly number; they think in decades and continually reinvest in the properties. Doug Karp and his wife, Kyle, are very involved as well; they're the ones who found our Aspen site. Having owners who trust their management team, support their people and give us the resources to do things properly is a big reason I've stayed for more than 20 years. Every property is 100 percent owned and managed by our company, with everything from sales and HR to finance and development in-house. That's unusual in luxury hospitality, and it gives us tremendous consistency and control over both the employee and guest experience.

Will you discuss your career journey?

I was born in Cairo, Egypt, and after taking a flight to Beirut when I was 11, I knew hospitality was what I wanted to do. My family moved to Dallas, Texas, when I was 16, and two years later I started as a room service busboy at a 400-room hotel in Dallas. I earned my marketing degree from the University of Texas at Dallas in 1986, the same year I became a controller for Marriott. At the time, Marriott had 100 hotels; today, they have 10,000. Marriott was where I learned discipline: systems, procedures, consistency, and the importance of running a hotel as a business. From there, my career took me to San Francisco, Mexico and Times Square, where I was Director of Operations for the Renaissance, followed by seven years with Four Seasons in Chicago, Philadelphia and Amman, Jordan, where I opened the hotel. Four Seasons taught me another side of the business: culture, luxury, service and brand integrity. I learned that great hospitality is as much about how you make people feel as it is about consistency and execution. Eventually, that path brought me to White Elephant Resorts. When I first heard about an opportunity at one of their hotels on Nantucket, I didn't even know where Nantucket was. It was still a relatively sleepy island then. More than 20 years later, I'm still here.



White Elephant Nantucket lobby



White Elephant Aspen (above); White Elephant Palm Beach (below)

Will you highlight the portfolio, and where you see opportunities for growth?

We started 40 years ago with The Wauwinet, a Relais & Châteaux property and home to TOPPER'S, whose wine program has received the *Wine Spectator* Grand Award for 30 consecutive years. Thirty years ago, we added White Elephant itself. Today, our Nantucket portfolio includes White Elephant, White Elephant Inn and Residences, The Cottages at the Boat Basin, Nantucket Boat Basin, Jared Coffin House and The Wauwinet, totaling 227 rooms, suites, cottages and residences. Brant Point Grill is our main restaurant at White Elephant, where we can also host major corporate events and weddings. We've invested continually in those properties, and Nantucket itself has evolved tremendously. We run approximately 95 percent occupancy in season and around 80 percent in the shoulder seasons, which is unusual for a seasonal market.

Our expansion strategy grew out of that success. We don't look at a map and ask where we can plant another flag. We look at where our guests are already going. Palm Beach was a natural fit because so many of our Nantucket guests were already traveling back and forth. We acquired and completely renovated a historic 32-key property and opened White Elephant Palm Beach in 2020, during COVID. It exceeded our expectations from the beginning. Aspen followed the same logic. Doug and Kyle knew the market, found the right site, and we opened White Elephant Aspen this past June. Our guests already know Aspen from skiing, the summer festivals and the lifestyle there. We're interested in additional resort destinations in the U.S. and Caribbean, but we're not chasing growth for its own sake. The destination, property and timing all have to make sense, and ideally, it's somewhere our guests already want to be.

What are the key characteristics that define a White Elephant property?

Each property takes on the character of its destination through design, art, local partnerships and experiences so we don't want them all to look or feel the same. What carries across the portfolio is a consistent level of thoughtful luxury, personal service and value. We also believe in being transparent about that value. I am proud that we do not charge resort fees at any of our resorts; amenities such as our BMW courtesy vehicles and Priority Bicycles are simply part of the stay. The Karps are very involved in the details, personally selecting all the art, while Jill Karp chooses the books for the guest rooms and libraries. We also continue



to evolve our food and beverage concepts. Lola 41, for example, began on Nantucket and is now in Palm Beach and Aspen.

Will you discuss White Elephant Resorts' focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

It begins as soon as someone books. A member of our team reaches out to understand what the guest wants from the trip and can help with everything from restaurant reservations and experiences to something as personal as planning a wedding proposal. But real personalization goes beyond fulfilling requests. It's about paying attention, remembering what matters to a guest and using that knowledge when they return. With such a high percentage of repeat guests, our teams can build genuine relationships over many years.

How do you focus your efforts leading White Elephant Resorts?

My focus is our people, our guests and protecting the integrity of the brand. I keep an open door and make a point of spending time with staff at every level. I spend a lot of time in our hotels and with our teams, so those relationships stay real, not occasional. I also spend a great deal of my time mentoring team members at all levels, as well as many friends and colleagues within and outside the industry. I make a lot of decisions every day and tend to move quickly, but experience has also taught me that sometimes the best decision is to wait until you have all the facts. When I hire, I look for attitude as much as experience. You can teach technical skills; curiosity, empathy and a genuine desire to serve people are much harder to teach. I believe in building relationships with our team, guests, suppliers and locals. It always comes back to the same thing: take care of your employees, and they'll take care of your guests.

You have been with White Elephant Resorts for more than 20 years. What has made the experience so special for you?

The people. Watching this grow from a collection of Nantucket hotels into a three-destination brand, without losing what made us who we are, has been incredibly rewarding. I've watched employees build careers here, guests return year after year and bring their families, and the company continue to invest for the long term. I've also been fortunate to work with owners who trust their people and give us the support to do things properly. After more than 20 years, that means a great deal to me.

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

Be curious, have empathy and genuinely want to serve people. You can't fake those qualities, although the technical skills can be taught. But don't forget that hospitality is a business, too. My own path, from the discipline I learned at Marriott to the service culture I learned at Four Seasons, taught me that the best careers, and the best hotels, require both: rigor and warmth. ●