

Q&A

10 questions for Rosewood Hotel Group's Thuy Tranthi Rieder

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New York's Carlyle Hotel lobby with its art deco interiors and signature yellow sofas and chairs

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

While more attention is lavished on the larger luxury hospitality groups, Hong Kong-based Rosewood Hotels & Resorts is busy expanding its footprint worldwide to develop on its key selling philosophy to guests, "A Sense of Place."

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Tapping the destination's culture and heritage, the chain's more notable properties include the Carlyle Hotel in New York, Htel de Crillon in Paris and Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas, TX. Rosewood currently manages 18 luxury properties in 11 countries, with 18 hotels in development, including seven set to open in the next few months.

"I joined Rosewood in August last year with a mandate to help build this brand that creates desire through exceptional experiences," said Thuy Tranthi Rieder, group vice president of sales and marketing at Rosewood Hotel Group, Hong Kong. "I want to bring its concept to a burgeoning target market."

In this Q&A, Ms. Tranthi Rieder shares **Rosewood's** expansion plans, Asia's potential for luxury tourism, the chain's core point of difference, trends in hospitality and how her background in luxury retail and fashion stints at Lancel, Chlo, Celine, Thomas Pink and Louis Vuitton, as well as Elizabeth Arden and Disney Consumer Products will work to the benefit of the travel and hospitality business.

"One thing the fashion industry does quite well is create desire," Ms. Tranthi Rieder said.



Thuy Tranthi Rieder is group vice president of sales and marketing at Rosewood Hotel Group

Please read on for the full discussion.

Rosewood seems to be expanding in Asia. What's the opportunity there for luxury hospitality?

The potential for luxury hospitality in Asia is huge. This is not only due to the region's increasingly sophisticated luxury consumers, whose number is growing exponentially. It is because a new type of traveler is changing the face of travel worldwide including within and to Asia and creating a global shift in ultra-luxury hospitality.

We call these travelers "affluent explorers." This is a demographic who seek deeper connections, profound authenticity and life-changing insights into the cultures they enter and experience. It is a millennial-driven mindset that is reverberating throughout the upper-tier of the market.

We want Rosewood's new properties in Asia to exquisitely satisfy their desires. This year our Asia portfolio will grow from our flagship Asia hotel in Beijing to openings in Phnom Penh and Sanya, and our first Asia resort in Phuket as well as our first luxury tented villa encampment in Luang Prabang.

We want to continue to create a truly differentiated niche for the brand in Asia, as we have in other international regions where we have already planted our flag.

How is Rosewood positioning itself in the market? What makes a Rosewood hotel such as, say, the Carlyle in New York, different from a Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles?

Since Rosewood's inception, our guiding philosophy has been A Sense of Place, which is a notion that I find really captivating.

We tap into the culture and heritage of the destination as the inspiration for the experience of our properties, and this sets us apart from others.

As we grow the brand, we are extremely thoughtful in our approach so as to stay true to this philosophy and create one-of-a-kind hotels, resorts and experiences that are truly different and authentic.

Who is the typical Rosewood customer?

While travelers of the past have often prioritized traditional and opulent luxury, the Rosewood "affluent explorer" guest is dedicated to discovering a truly local and meaningful experience.

We have used the feedback from our guests to help define and evolve the Rosewood brand and cater to this new mindset.

By creating experiences that allow people to feel connected to the world and the essence of the destination, we remain top of mind for the modern luxury traveler.



The ocean view pool pavilion at Rosewood Phuket in Thailand

What trends are you seeing in the luxury hospitality business?

The deepest and most significant movement is the desire not just for meaningful moments, but actual transformation through travel.

Transformation can come about from an accumulation of revealing discoveries those that heighten one's senses, upend perspective and challenge pre-set notions. I'm not talking about gimmicks or constantly chasing the "new."

True luxury today, in hospitality, can be about creating an environment ripe for life change, to the degree the individual wants to pursue it.

I believe that luxury hospitality players who understand this fundamental desire are best placed to help deliver it to their guests.

As with most new directions, this mindset is being led by millennials, who demand and seek more from the environments they move in. And if they don't find what they're looking for, they quickly move on.

This, of course, is closely aligned to technology as millennials' means of interacting and connecting with the world.

As with many industries, it's impossible to speak to travel trends without touching on technology.

As we become more and more reliant on technology in every facet of our lives, it's important for the luxury hospitality industry to find a balance between the hi-tech and the high-touch.

Rosewood looks to incorporate technology in a way that will enhance the traveler experience, not detract from it.

Though we also recognize that sometimes the greatest luxury of all is being able to unplug.

The emergence of technology also reminds us about the importance of connecting with travelers throughout every stage of their journey.

It is no longer the case that a guest's journey begins when they arrive at the property.

We all talk about digital innovation and being digital natives, but we're also looking at the ways in which AI [artificial intelligence] and VR [virtual reality] come into the experience and how something like chat bot can enhance the in-stay experience or facilitate the dreaming stage.

At the same time, as an ultra-luxury, experiential travel brand, we must remember that the people are the most important element behind the brand, so the high-touch cannot be forgotten.

As a company, we devote considerable time and money to our digital presence, whether that be the content on our Web site, our booking engine, or our social media, which is undoubtedly helping to drive demand.



A two-bedroom suite at Rosewood Papagayo, Costa Rica

Is Rosewood targeting luxury brands and retailers as tenants in its properties?

Luxury brands especially those which genuinely rely upon authenticity and pure craftsmanship are certainly likely candidates to be based on property or partner with us.

At the same time, we don't focus solely on the upscale for the sake of the image.

We also join with entities that offer the simple but finely made, or experiences or products that represent best of the location where they're found, or innovatively satisfy some need or desire of the "affluent explorer" Rosewood guest.

What role do design and service play at Rosewood?

The phrase "relationship hospitality" is another philosophy that attracted me to Rosewood.

We feel that true hospitality is defined by the strong and caring relationships we build with our guests, our communities, and our associates, and this translates to a genuinely warm and sincere style of service.

It is thoughtful and bespoke to each individual and that keeps our guests coming back year after year.

Design is also integral to the Rosewood experience.

We think of our hotels as portals to personal journeys of discovery in our destinations.

Within our properties we want to create a sense of journey and discovery as well. That could be through design, which incorporates abundant outdoor spaces or a flow of movement in the hotel that offers either a sense of spontaneity or the comfort of recognition.

Throughout, the culture of the hotel's location is authentically and tastefully woven into the fabric of the hotel.

Art plays a big role on this journey. It can be a blend of the provocative and stimulating, to the calming and contemplative, and many of our hotels champion local, emerging artists.

Even the finest details in the guest rooms from the choice of intriguing reading materials to simple but unexpected luxuries are carefully calibrated to enhance the stay.

The guest may not be overtly aware of all these elements, but ends up being enveloped in the total effect.

Geopolitical issues and weakening economies in Europe and Asia may deter more travel in the year ahead. Will that percolate to the affluent traveler market or is it insulated from these issues?

Rosewood's affluent explorers will continue to prioritize travel.

For these global citizens, the notion of social connectedness having a meaningful life and doing meaningful things with and for people is what really matters and travel provides that.

Travel has a great responsibility these days, especially in these tumultuous times.

Hotel de Crillon in Paris is currently undergoing renovations



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You've joined Rosewood not too long ago. What's your mandate?

I joined Rosewood in August last year with a mandate to help build this brand that creates desire through exceptional experiences. I want to bring its concept to a burgeoning target market.

It has been wonderful to join a brand where the guiding concept of A Sense of Place and relationship hospitality is at the foundation of everything the company does.

What will you bring from your previous work experience to this job?

Prior to joining Rosewood, I spent most of my career in the luxury retail industry.

One thing the fashion industry does quite well is create desire.

The hospitality industry, on the other hand, is known for creating one-of-a-kind experiences. As I transition into the travel industry, I look forward to translating the creation of desire from products to experiences.

What next for you and Rosewood?

It's an exciting time of growth for the Rosewood brand and I am thrilled to be part of providing our guests with the opportunity to travel to new destinations and discover new cultures in a way which only Rosewood can provide.

In 2017 alone, we anticipate seven new openings.

Outside of Asia, we will introduce guests to a charming new hotel in the historic center of Puebla in Mexico, and we are eagerly awaiting the re-opening of Rosewood Little Dix Bay in the British Virgin Islands following its full restoration.

Of course, as Paris has long been home to me, the re-opening of Htel de Crillon as a Rosewood hotel has very special meaning for me.

With these properties, in addition to Rosewood's existing ones and those in the pipeline, we aim to create opportunities for people to experience travel in a meaningful way that enables them to truly connect with new cultures and new destinations around the world.

I must say too that we expect to see Asaya our innovative, integrated new wellness concept create quite an impact when we introduce it this year in Phuket, and subsequently roll out to other selected properties.

Wellness is becoming more significant in every facet of our lives and we created a model that will offer fluid solutions to meet individual needs and can grow with the guest along their lifelong wellness journey.

Asaya is an evolution way beyond the traditional "hotel spa."

At its core is the belief in both self-acceptance and self-discovery.

And to that end, it employs a bespoke approach, fusing alternative therapies, lifestyle and nutrition coaching, educational wellness programming, fitness activities and specialized healing treatments. It's a pioneering concept which is very exciting.

There's no place like New York...