

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Sumindi Peiris Woman to Watch 2018

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Sumindi Peiris, vice president global marketing luxury & lifestyle brands, Hilton Worldwide

By STAFF REPORTS

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Vice president of global marketing for luxury and lifestyle brands, **Hilton Worldwide**, Washington, DC

"I have noticed luxury travel evolving to put a larger emphasis on connecting guests with the destinations they are visiting"

What do you most like about your job?

Three things come to mind immediately:

Company culture: Almost 100 years ago, Conrad Hilton set out to "fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality." That mission is truly at the heart of the company.

I love working in an organization with a culture that is guided by a shared purpose to be the most hospitable company in the world by positively impacting our guests, team members, hotel owners and the communities where we live.

The amazing brands of today: I am excited every day by the opportunity to lead and think forward with our three amazing brands.

The iconic Waldorf Astoria New York pioneered the luxury hotel experience in the early 1930s, and every day each of our 26 Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts worldwide provide True Waldorf Service to every guest from check-in through checkout.

Our second luxury brand, Conrad Hotels & Resorts, is our smart luxury hotel brand named after our founder Conrad Hilton.

With 32 hotels located in the world's most sought-after destinations, Conrad is for global luxury travelers for whom life, business and pleasure seamlessly intersect. And our new lifestyle brand Canopy by Hilton delivers guests a truly thoughtfully local experience, with our first hotel in Reykjavik, Iceland and two more planned to open this year in the U.S.

I have had the pleasure of working with many iconic brands in my career, but these brands present the biggest

opportunity for me that continues to excite me every day when I go to work. This is a dream job.

Future: I love studying and understanding what consumers are looking for in luxury hospitality and finding the white space that is right for us.

I'm committed to building our brands into game changers that will break through the clutter of sameness within the hospitality industry.

What is the biggest challenge in your job?

Hilton is a large matrixed organization with many individual hotel owners, so there are a lot of people that market these jewels of hotels. We all have the same vision and purpose, but my role is to ensure that they are articulated in the same way by all to ensure consistency of our luxury positioning.

There is a fine balance of maintaining strong global guidelines, but also flexibility for regional and local nuances. At the end, no matter the beautiful brand campaign, beautiful property, unbelievable amenities, the perfect location, it all comes down to the personal experience at the hotel or resort.

Like the great Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

What is your work priority for 2018?

With the luxury hospitality market predicted to grow almost 4 percent each year until 2021, producing over \$40 billion in revenue, Hilton's luxury and lifestyle brands will capitalize on this trend by investing in pipeline projects to expand each portfolio globally.

Waldorf Astoria currently has 10 new properties slated to open by 2025, Conrad has 21 new properties poised to open their doors by 2025 and Canopy has 16 new properties predicted to debut by 2019.

By growing these three brands, we are not only enhancing awareness by bringing them to new markets, but also introducing our loyal guests to far-flung locales rich with culture and history that many other hotels have yet to build in.

What is your proudest achievement in luxury?

I am fortunate to have been a part of many successful achievements in my career and the one that comes to top of mind at the moment is the launch of a global platform for Johnnie Walker Blue Label.

Establishing Gratitude as a platform that was born out of the master brand purpose of "Inspiring Personal Progress" for the luxury variant in the portfolio. The platform was launched with a 360-degree execution strategy that entailed a globally orchestrated digital media launch of a long-format branded content, in the form of a film, coordinated with experiential events and extensive retail programs for the on- and off-premise using one set of global assets.

The magnitude and scale of global market participation was unprecedented and resulted in awareness growth, performance growth and revitalizing focus and excitement for the brand and providing luxury halo to the master brand.

How do you see luxury evolving in 2018?

As the vice president of global marketing for Hilton's luxury and lifestyle brands, I have noticed luxury travel evolving to put a larger emphasis on connecting guests with the destinations they are visiting.

Whether travelers are staying at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills, CA at Conrad Osaka in Japan or Canopy Reykjavik in Iceland, we find they are eager to explore their surroundings and understand local culture.

All team members at Waldorf Astoria, Conrad and Canopy hotels work tirelessly to ensure guests are exposed to the hidden gems each city has to offer and I predict this return to niche, experiential travel is a luxury trend that will continue into 2018.

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