

IN-STORE

Marriott International uses global blending to enrich guest experience

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The Ritz-Carlton Naples, FL

By JEN KING

NAPLES, FL – The president/CEO of Marriott International at the Luxury Summit 2014 said yesterday that international hotels must have a sense of place to appeal to the sensibilities of the modern traveler.

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While speaking with Travel + Leisure editor in chief Nancy Novogrod, the Marriott executive placed emphasis on "global blending" and how the hotelier has become more contemporary with a better connection to its surroundings. Understanding what travelers expect when visiting Marriott International's global properties has helped the hotel conglomerate become the largest luxury hospitality brand in the world.

"Marriott has been in the hotel business for 57 years," said Arne Sorenson, who runs **Marriott International**, Bethesda, MD. "Its innovation in the early years was inventing categories and a strong service culture.

"In doing that, [Marriott] has focused on predictability, which has caused guests to expect a standard of service," he said. "We want to promise and deliver a room where guests won't be disappointed and create an experience and memory that can be taken home with

you.

“[This is a] a reflection of what the surroundings look like. I want to know that I am in Puerto Rico, or Half Moon Bay, CA, or Hong Kong. I want to feel that place, not every bar I’ve seen at a Ritz-Carlton.”

Marriott International's luxury portfolio includes The Ritz-Carlton, Bulgari hotels and The JW Marriott.

Community signature

To create a context for sense of place, Mr. Sorenson referenced the Ritz-Carlton, Naples, FL, beach property where the Luxury Summit 2014 is being held. The Luxury Summit was hosted by Richard David Story, editor in chief of Departures, and Evelyn Webster, executive vice president of Time Inc.

The hotel is 30 years old and has helped to transform the Gulf Coast of Florida as both a business and leisure destination.

Across its properties, Marriott International guests have seen its hotels as a gathering place that reflect a sense of belonging that is “strangely embracing.” This is true even as the hotelier moves away from the traditional Ritz-Carlton codes such as large oil paintings and wood panelling that many guests have come to know.



Travel + Leisure's Ms. Novogrod with Marriott International's Mr. Sorenson

To further understand how to create the sense of place affluent travelers are looking for, Marriott International has created a Gen-Y traveler profile named Gia. Like most affluent travelers, Gia is a tech-enabled global citizen interested in collecting experiences.

This type of traveler is not concerned with the status of travel but rather the richness of the experience. From five-star accommodations to commune stays, this traveler looks for experiences that resonate, and they are eager to share their adventures with loved ones via social media.

Through its analysis of likeminded travelers who are literate in international culture,

Marriott International has learned to communicate with its guests through empowerment methods. By doing so the hotel chain is able to show it cares, is interested and can provide guests with an opportunity to achieve what they want.

“People have a strong cultural grounding,” Mr. Sorenson said. “Moving away from that shows that we don’t care about what is natural and native to them.

“If they see us communicating but only in self-interest, they’ll go elsewhere,” he said.

Giving back

This empowerment is strengthened by Marriott International’s ethos.

According to Mr. Sorenson, this is a result of two key factors: putting hotel associates before guests to ensure the best possible service and investing in the surrounding community.

For instance, The Ritz-Carlton Montreal is bolstering its support for local children’s charity CHU Sainte Justine Foundation with a five-year \$100,000 commitment and other efforts.

The hotel is asking guests to make a \$1 donation upon check-in that will go directly to the charity’s operating costs. With the exposure generated from various collaborative events, Ritz-Carlton Montreal aims to ease the tightly budgeted burden of CHU Sainte Justine ([see story](#)).

Although rooted in a local community, hotel charitable initiatives do not need to be property-based and can be expansive projects for the greater good.

For example, The Ritz-Carlton expanded its efforts to help students around the world pursue a fulfilling education by making its “Succeed Through Service” toolkit available to all.

Since the Succeed Through Service project launched with America’s Promise Alliance in 2009, the brand has helped more than 15,000 students. The persistence of children stifled in the United States educational system calls for influential companies to assist where they can ([see story](#)).

Marriott International feels that travelers such as Gia appreciate giving back and seek out opportunities to do so.

“This is something that Gia, we think, will find important,” Mr. Sorenson said. “We need to recognize that authenticity and collectivity of experience is important.

“[Guests] will be proud to stay at a Marriott or Ritz-Carlton because [the hotels] are focused on making the world a better place,” he said. “People love being a part of something.”

Final Take

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