

# CUISINE NOIR

## Hospitality Veteran Greg Smith on Changing the Face of the Industry



*The senior vice president addresses diversity, inclusion, technology and trends in today's world.*

An expert view of the inner workings in the hospitality industry is rare to be privy to. Greg Smith, senior vice president of human resources with [Preferred Hotels & Resorts](#), shares that the industry has witnessed dramatic changes from several standpoints over the last two decades. Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, Smith moved to Newport Beach, California, in 2018 after handling global responsibility for human resources across several hospitality brands during that time.

At Preferred, the world's largest independent hotel brand with more than 750 hotels, resorts and residences across 85 countries, some of his responsibilities include talent acquisition, performance management and employee and labor relations for the company's worldwide team. His efforts have created several work-life balance practices that have garnered workplace awards, including *Fortune's* 100 Best Places to Work.



### **Change is Constant**

“How people stay in hotels or book travel has changed as well as conversation around diversity and inclusion,” says Smith. In fact, he states where the most significant change has occurred in the hospitality industry is in terms of diversity and inclusion. “Even at a recent hotel investment conference, it was one of the major topics of conversation. This business has really found that it pays to pay attention to its workforce and that the workforce mirrors the guests at our hotels.”





Smith adds, “In terms of gender equity, at Preferred we are very proud that at the senior leadership level, 44 percent of our executives are female. We do just as well with ethnic and racial minorities and sexual minorities as well. It brings about a diversity of thought and approaches and leads to good business decisions because these days everyone travels. If we don’t recognize that, we are missing out.”

A thought leader and practitioner in the human resources field, Smith observes that “everyone wants the same thing; to be respected. So be honest and open and listen to how they want to get there and what they want to do because those things may be different for everyone.” Even the guest interface technology has changed in hotels, but Smith opines it’s for the better.

### **Technology Builds Relationships**

Where calling an 800 number or spending hours with a travel agent for reservations was the norm, now everything is accomplished “with a little thing you hold in your hand. That is where technology and all the things we are doing converge,” adds Smith. “Everybody is a critic, so you take a look at the reviews from all of our guests before you make a decision on where to stay.” How brands meet and greet guests and where they meet them on social media is crucial.

“How brands interact with guests and how they curate experiences for guests while on the property all play a vital role. The transformation with technology has been amazing,” says Smith. “It enables all of this information to now be available at your fingertips.” He agrees that despite all the progress, there is still the need for people to make those efforts a success. While technology might have made jobs easier, in many ways it requires more work.



The big focus at Preferred is an aggressive push on Preferred Residences and the I Prefer loyalty program. To provide cultural offerings aligned with the location and its guests, Smith says, “We pick our partners, people who share our ideology. As a global company, we have to have global representation in our leadership. Of course, there are challenges we cannot escape, but like everyone else, we try to be sensitive to differences in systems and beliefs.”

### Trends and Tips

Smith’s tips for travel are simple yet profound. “Have a sense of adventure, go intending to explore and to listen. Go where you purposely want to engage the people who are there. Go with a child’s eye, and don’t be afraid to try the food — it tells you more about the people and culture than anything else.” While learning that Antarctica, Sri Lanka and Botswana are on his travel bucket list was easy, getting Smith to divulge his favorite hotel properties wasn’t. But he refers to SOPHY Hyde Park, Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel and Resort, Montage Laguna Beach and The One Palacio da Anunciada in Lisbon among a few.



He has observed travel trends with regard to specific cultures, but most importantly points out, “With African-Americans, we go anywhere too. Whether I travel in Asia or South America, there are always other Black people I see there. No one should be surprised by the places we have on our bucket list to visit.” Another trend among Black travelers is that of heritage travel. “There is the trend of a strong reconnection with heritage and a willingness to tackle places as they are, to understand them, and see and learn from them.”

He is proud to be working at Preferred, “where everyone feels welcome and wanted and valued.” “Some of the most important work we have done at Preferred is to identify what we believe and to recognize that if we really stay true to that, we will be profitable, successful and grow.”

To learn more about Preferred Hotels and Resorts visit [www.preferredhotels.com](http://www.preferredhotels.com) or follow along on [Instagram](#).