




JOURNEYS TO COME
BY CATRIONA ROWNTREE



— COME FLY WITH ME —

Norway's Northern Lights & memorable Istanbul, with Michelle Woodley, President, Preferred Hotels & Resorts

BY CATRIONA ROWNTREE SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 2018



Michelle's favourite travel destination

Of all the places I have traveled, Istanbul, the city where East meets West, is among my favourites. This vibrant city with historical world significance has professional and personal meaning to me. I first visited Istanbul in the mid-1990s when I was a reservation and distribution specialist with an international hotel company. During that time, I was fortunate to travel the world while educating our hotels on best practices for reaching consumers and travel agents. I visited some amazing places and met interesting people, and among them all, the people and surroundings in Istanbul were always the most memorable.



Istanbul market, Turkey.

After visiting several times for business with only brief moments to truly explore the metropolis, my enthusiasm for Istanbul was contagious, which led my husband and I to spend the second part of our honeymoon there in 1997. The colours, the aromas, the welcoming and amusing locals are fond memories for us now, with a visit to Hagia Sophia among my favorite and most intriguing experiences in the city. I am lucky to have been back to Hagia Sophia few times, and on every occasion, I am mesmerized by its architecture, marble, and mosaics. I can spend hours staring and wondering how this was possible and then the practical side of me wonders how did they clean it then and who cleans it now?! The grand bazaar is like no other – the colors, the hustle and bustle, the fragrant air and continual “negotiating” send a jolt of adrenalin through me every time. I love my mosaic glass candle holders, and we have an awesome leather duffle bag from here that has stood the test of time (and countless trips!). Our most treasured item from Istanbul is our Turkish rug. We spent more than three hours looking at rugs, drinking tea and, of course, negotiating! The rich colors and bold design were the focal point of our first condo and moved with us to the living room of our first house. The corners of the carpet peek out in many of our family photos. It’s currently in storage due to an almost-complete home renovation and we can’t wait for its return.



Michelle's Turkish rug peeks out in many of her family photos, like this one.

The people of Istanbul complete the experience and contribute to the fondness I have for the destination. During my time as a Front Office Manager of a large hotel in Chicago, we had many interns from Turkey. They were hard working, eager to learn, and forever gracious, and it is no different when you interact with the locals in Istanbul. In a local restaurant, a server shared with us a personal recipe for stuffed peppers and the proprietor of the carpet store delivered our new purchase in a bag suitable for taking it home with us.



The Hagia Sophia museum (Ayasofya Miiyesi) in Istanbul, Turkey.

In September 2015, we held the Preferred Hotels & Resorts European Regional Meeting in Istanbul, and it was fantastic to share experiences with my international colleagues – for many it was their first visit. While the city and area continues to have some economic and political hardships, the people and culture help it to thrive and continue to draw visitors from around the world.

Her Bucket List

I returned last month from Norway where I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the Northern Lights – one of the must-do's on my bucket list. Following a business meeting in Oslo (another great city), a colleague and I headed 217 miles north of the Arctic Circle to the city of Tromso. Tromso is a beautiful seaside city that is warmer than you think due to the effects of the Gulf Stream – temperature ranged from lower to mid-20s Fahrenheit. At 6pm Friday evening, we took a bus about 90 miles farther north in hopes of seeing the beautiful and sometimes elusive Northern Lights. At 9pm, the “shy” lights peeked out for a few minutes, and again around 10:30pm and midnight. The lights require darkness, clear skies, and solar activity to be seen. While the solar activity was low, we got a glimpse of the wondrously lit-up sky.



The Northern Lights.

While one destination is crossed off, another on my bucket list sits on the opposite side of the globe – Australia. In the almost 30 years I have been fortunate to travel for a living and for fun, I have not visited the Land Down Under. The excitement and grandeur of The Great Barrier Reef and the Sydney Opera House so far exist only in my imagination (and what I find on YouTube). Hoping to get there in 2019.



Michelle and Shell in Norway to see the Northern Lights.

What she always packs when she travels

One of the most thoughtful gifts my husband has given me is a line-a-day five-year journal. There is a page for every day of the year with a writing area for each of five years. I am in the middle of year one, and am so excited to get to the start of year two to relive what I was doing the year before. It's easy to do when I am home, and I tried catching up whenever I traveled, but the thoughts were not the same. I found that bringing the journal with me somehow keeps me connected to my home and family while allowing me to capture that one line to summarize the day.

The practical side of me always has a black t-shirt (it goes under anything and can be dressed up or down) and pair of black pants. However, it's important that your luggage stay with you to use these essentials. On a recent business trip – my luggage was temporarily “unavailable” due to its missed connection. Ugh! For 36 hours, I was stressed about what to wear for a meeting, reception, and a speaking engagement. Needless to say, I purchased black pants and a black shirt as the basis of my new temporary wardrobe.

About Michelle Woodley, President, Preferred Hotels & Resorts

Michelle Woodley is President of Preferred Hotels & Resorts. In this role, she oversees multiple departments across the company including sales, marketing, IT, revenue management, and customer relations. She also works closely with CEO Lindsey Ueberroth on financial planning and talent management, supports the development of other strategic areas of focus within the organization, and serves as a company spokesperson.

During her 15 years with the company, Michelle has held various leadership positions with cross-functional responsibilities including Senior Vice President of Global Marketing Strategy, Senior Vice President of Distribution & Revenue Management, and Executive Vice President, the role she held prior to her promotion to President in January 2018. She has used her expertise to help the company successfully execute on major global initiatives designed to foster longevity of the Preferred brand such as two comprehensive rebranding initiatives, the launch of multiple brand websites, the introduction and institutionalization of a Revenue Management Certification Program, the technology conversion of the company's global central reservation system and call center services, and the creation of the *I Prefer* Hotel Rewards program.

Before joining Preferred Hotels & Resorts in 2002, Michelle spent five years as Vice President of Distribution for Swissôtel and Raffles Hotels & Resorts, charged with overseeing the strategic direction and operations of the company's electronic distribution and database solutions. She held various senior positions in operations, marketing, and distribution with Swissôtel from 1990 to 1997.

Michelle has been an active board member in industry organizations. She is currently on the Americas Board of Directors of the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAI). She served two terms as president and two terms as vice president of the Hotel Electronic Distribution Network Association (HEDNA), and she was a founding member of the Open Travel Alliance (OTA) and served two terms on their board of directors as treasurer.

Michelle is a graduate of the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. She is based in Chicago with her husband and two sons.

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australia, turkey

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