

# Hospitality

## The Power of Preferred

An Interview with Lindsey Ueberroth,  
President, Preferred Hotel Group



Post Ranch Inn in Big Sur, California

**EDITORS' NOTE** Lindsey Ueberroth has held her current post as President of Preferred Hotel Group since June 2010. Before this, she served as Executive Vice President, responsible for global brand strategy, internal technology, and all aspects of brand performance within Preferred Hotel Group. In 2005, she successfully launched and managed the company's Preferred Boutique brand. Prior to joining Preferred Hotel Group, Ueberroth was an Account Executive at Ambassadors International, Inc. and earlier, a Change Management Consultant at Andersen Consulting (now Accenture). She is a graduate of Wake Forest University.



Lindsey Ueberroth

**COMPANY BRIEF** With a global reach extending into more than 85 countries, Preferred Hotel Group™ ([www.preferredhotelgroup.com](http://www.preferredhotelgroup.com)) represents more than 650 of the finest independently owned and operated hotels, resorts, and serviced residences in the world. The company's family of brands includes Preferred Hotels® & Resorts, Preferred Boutique™, Summit Hotels & Resorts™, Sterling Hotels™, Sterling Design Hotels, and Summit Serviced Residences™. Branded programs include Preferred Residences™, Preferred Golf™, the I Prefer™ Guest Benefit Program, Preferred Pride, and Preferred Family.

### What is the Preferred Hotel Group vision? How has it evolved into an industry leader since your family became involved?

In 2013, it will be nine years since my family bought Preferred Hotel Group. The company has grown from just a marketing organization with three core brands and less than 300 hotels to a leading global provider of sales, marketing, distribution, and turnkey consulting services for more than 650 hotels across six brands. We have also expanded our global footprint in many ways. When we bought the company, we had eight offices, and now we have 36 sales offices worldwide and hotels in over 85 countries. It is hard to believe how much we have accomplished in such a short time frame.

Our mission has evolved over the years to better meet the needs of independent hotels with a keen focus on our sales efforts. Our focus and commitment is to continue driving revenue to our member hotels while constantly innovating in terms of the services, technology, and sales support they need to succeed in the global environment.

### How tough was it to manage rapid growth without losing the family feel?

The pace was rapid, but also controlled. We closely follow emerging market trends and make sure we are growing strategically and in the right locations. For example, about 10 years ago, we had 11 hotels in Asia; now, we have more than 150 hotels in the region.

I believe that being a family owned and operated company provides us with a unique advantage in serving our member hotels and our associates. I personally

spend a lot of time on the road, as do my parents, visiting with our clients and teams around the globe because we want to keep that culture of a family business. We truly mean it when we say that our associates are an extension of our family.

### Are you concerned with growing too large?

Preferred is not interested in playing the numbers game. Our focus is on growing strategically, ensuring we have the right hotels in the right markets to give consumers multiple options regardless of where they are traveling. Being a multi-brand company gives us additional room for growth because not every traveler is always looking for a luxury experience when traveling on business or leisure. Our focus for 2013 is on growing our portfolio where we presently have little or no presence and working to increase our footprint in those destinations.

### Tell us a little about the offerings of Preferred Hotel Group.

Preferred provides all the benefits of a chain, while leaving the actual management and ownership to the hotels. We offer as much or as little support as our members need to meet their goals while allowing them to maintain their independence, which is extremely appealing to hotel owners.

Our services include global sales, branding, and marketing, as well as state-of-the-art distribution and technology solutions, quality assurance programs, and social media support. But more important than anything, we provide access to the collective knowledge and expertise we've acquired over 45 years in the industry. For the single independent hotelier, this is invaluable.

### Is there some synergy among the different brands you offer?

Absolutely. Synergies definitely exist, but the Preferred, Summit, and Sterling brands have distinct personalities with different service levels, amenities, and location expectations for each brand.

The Sterling and Summit brands lend themselves more to the corporate traveler and those who combine business with leisure during their trips. The Preferred Hotels & Resorts and Preferred Boutique brands are geared towards high-end leisure and destination travelers as well as corporate travelers with more flexibility on where they can stay.

### How challenging is it for independent hotels to compete with well-known brands?

There is tremendous demand by travelers around the world for authentic "live-like-a-local" experiences. Independent hotels offer unique experiences that reflect their settings versus the predictable, "one-size-fits-all" programming of a chain. However, a challenge that independents face is the allure of loyalty programs. Those can be big motivators of buying behavior, especially if you're looking at the corporate travel side of the business. We're excited to face this challenge, because in 2013, we'll be enhancing our loyalty program to help our member hotels better compete with the chains in this area.

### Are there opportunities to broaden into other segments of the hospitality industry?

We are always looking for ways to expand the services we provide – as long as the venture is complementary to our core business and can be supported by our infrastructure. In fact, last month we launched a new business division called Optriant, which will provide sales representation, marketing, and consultancy services for sectors of the travel industry beyond just hotels, such as cruise lines, destination management companies, and tourism boards. We saw an opportunity to tap into the expertise and reputation we have built over the past 45 years and we're excited to partner with an entirely new set of travel companies worldwide.

### Can you elaborate upon the company's corporate responsibility focus?

Our GIFTTS program – Great Initiatives for Today's (Tomorrow's) Society – was born out of both my family's belief in philanthropy and the importance of honoring our worldwide member hotels that take the meaning of genuine hospitality beyond their front doors and into the world.

Every year, our team looks at member hotels that are serving as leaders for the hospitality community in three areas: community service, philanthropy, and environment. Four winners – one from each category and one overall – are recognized at our annual conference. Our family is committed to supporting and enhancing awareness of our member hotels' exemplary efforts to prove that every small step can make a big impact on the world. ●