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[Q&A] Preferred ways of navigating 2017

Singapore, January 12, 2017

Preferred Hotels & Resorts' new executive vice president for Asia Pacific, David Spooner tells Karen Yue that unique and flexible solutions are more critical than ever in today's tough business environment



Here's an easy question to start us off: What's your business resolution for 2017?

Having recently joined Preferred Hotels & Resorts, I'm excited to be part of the world's largest independent hotel group with over 650 hotel members, and continue the almost 49-year legacy advocating the independent hotel space here in Asia Pacific. Independent hotels are all about a unique identity combined with a wealth of "character" and deep connection with being "local". My first business resolution is to work with our partners to align these unique experiences under our philosophy of #thePreferredLife. This ensures that our travellers have a myriad of luxury travel experiences that reflect an authentic sense of place.

For our hotel partners, we want to bring to fruition fresh ideas to help them differentiate themselves from their competition. A key area of focus for 2017 would be to help our members further develop and harness the power and influence of Digital Marketing, and fully embrace the power of integrated Social Media Engagement.

The mega mergers of 2016 have led to a consolidation of power and reach for hotel franchise chains, allowing them to offer even more perks and loyalty rewards to corporate and business event clients. How is Preferred Hotels & Resorts reacting to this?

With the consolidation of such chains the commoditisation of both brands and experiences increases. The modern consumer does value benefits but the trend is for more unique experiences and an "authentic" local stay.



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Independent hotels are all about creating an organic sense of something uniquely crafted in their city or region. More than ever, both business and leisure travellers desire to experience the authentic, unique nature of each destination they visit or hold an event at – a perspective that independent hotels are renowned for providing.

Unlike traditional offerings based on multi-level star values, Preferred Hotels & Resorts aligns our hotels based upon experience, allowing travellers to easily select the hotel that will meet their personal idea of luxury for each individual trip or event. Our iPrefer programme, the world's first guest loyalty programme for independent hotels offers travellers instant benefits – upon free enrolment – at more than 600 unique hotels worldwide.

There's much talk about 2017 being an even tougher year for travel in general and business events. What is your outlook?

2016 concluded with a somewhat flat global outlook and we see that 2017 is likely to continue being a VUCA business environment (Volatile, Uncertainty, Complex and Ambiguity). Each section of the hospitality industry is faced with the unfortunate global geo-political situation, which requires the hotel sector to be more agile than ever before.

Shorter booking lead times, the easing of cancellation policies, and flexibility in bookings are some of the trends that have come to the forefront in 2016. However, with more than 30 sales offices worldwide, of which 10 are in Asia Pacific, our company firmly believes that Asia is still very much the epicenter for growth despite the global uncertainties, and our strategy is to keep communication lines open with the hospitality community, engaging in dialogues that will create new dynamic alliances that can weather the cyclical economic movements.

How can Preferred Hotels & Resorts help make business travel and meetings possible even for clients with a tighter budget?

We have over 650 hotels worldwide with a cross section of hotels over five distinctive collections to suit every budget and meeting requirement, as well as a dedicated sales team in each major business hub in Asia – Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, China, South Korea, India and Australia. Our philosophy as a company is that every hotel, every guest and every business partner is unique and has different needs. We are not about mass pricing or marketing – our hotels work on a principle of tailoring an experience around the guest according to their budget. Our teams have great experience in finding destinations that are more affordable or value periods at certain times of year. What is key is that whatever budget a client has we won't compromise on providing a truly exceptional and unique experience for the guest.

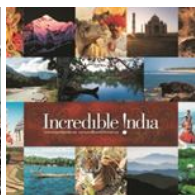


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