



HARBOUR GRAND KOWLOON

On Board & Full Speed Ahead!

Hospitality veteran YNGVAR STRAY takes over as General Manager of the iconic Harbour Grand Kowloon hotel at a time of change and challenge. Is he at the right place, at the right time? Does it matter? To whom?

Hong Kong's tumultuous hospitality industry is in many ways a victim of its own success. Serving, Asia's Pearl of the Orient, our hotels have traditionally not had to work too hard to stay profitable, that is until now. Today, a rising tide of small, clean, functional boutique hotels, have begun gnawing at market share formerly the preserve of large brands. Visitors, (now with less dollars and more sense) are opting for the more pragmatic, than lavish choice of hotels leaving large hospitality chains little choice but to offer more service apartments or stay innovative and add value. And while all this is happening, the threat of luxury accommodations in other corners of the earth, from exotic destinations to areas not a hundred miles away, steadily grows.

Enter Yngvar Stray, no stranger to Asian culture nor industry challenge. A consummate professional, his flair for sculpting incomparable hotel experiences has made him most distinguished in the top tiers of the business. Having hosted magnates, celebrities and world leaders from east to west, receiving the appointment of General Manager from the five-star Harbour Grand Kowloon comes as absolutely no surprise. Being in charge of this majestic edifice is no small feat, except perhaps with Stray's profound expertise.

Key To Success

Lovely and imposing at is, the satu-



Yngvar Stray: "The execution in Hong Kong is next to flawless."

rated city skyline forces one to squint for a glimpse of it - that is, if it were just any other building. Its contribution to Hong Kong's heritage and strategic placement

in tourism and enterprise sets it apart, and makes it a valuable player in the hotel industry. "Hong Kong undoubtedly remains the most attractive and dynamic

market in Asia to operate hotels - or even among the most sought after destinations in the world - along with the likes of London, New York and Tokyo. This city is a mature economy that operates in a worldly manner yet with a Chinese foundation and backbone. The execution in Hong Kong is next to flawless compared to many other Asian destinations, hence the challenge is not to deliver on current expectations, but to drive innovation and make further improvements in order to stay ahead of the curve and lead the market.”

Nevertheless, even with such a strong position, the world continuously getting smaller means that many other destinations in Greater China and neighboring countries will be getting their shine. Competition is not just next door; it’s on the next flight out.

“Hong Kong has for years, been the center of Asia and the main hub into China and other destinations. And as the countries around Hong Kong mature the main source of business evolves, and the key for success in this city, among others, would be to look for new business sources that can replace those that have since moved into new territory,” says Stray.



Personal Service

Seeking new opportunities may not prove so difficult, given how the hotel has established itself, sitting august along the shores in the tranquil area of Hung Hom with its unobstructed view of the harbour where it has been for nearly two decades, and favorable reviews keep coming in.

“The Harbour Grand Kowloon is arguably Hong Kong’s famed ‘grand old dame’. This hotel was built with space as a key element of luxury - something that perhaps is even more crucial for any luxury hotels in today’s world...a significant point of distinction and advantage.”

He further lists how the Harbour Grand compares in the highly competitive luxury market.



“The hotel boasts five hundred and fifty-four generously appointed guestrooms and offers a wide range of dining facilities, and a remarkable ballroom for events and social gatherings. The service delivery is consistently of a very high and reliable standard as many of the hotel’s staff members have been with the hotel since its inception in July 1995,

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which provides that foundation that is so verily needed for a luxury hotel to be able to deliver on its service promise. As in all service related industries, the ability to make a personal and emotional connection with your guests is what sets you apart from the rest - and at Harbour Grand Kowloon we are able to connect with our guests in a personalized manner.”

Many travelers have attested to this, apparent in the hotel being conferred both Certificate of Excellence and Traveler’s Choice Award citations by TripAdvisor successively, for the past five years.

Taking the Reins

Still, much remains to be done for the new General Manager, as he sets out to secure more market share for the hotel. “Arriving into a dynamic market as Hong Kong and a successful hotel such as Harbour Grand Kowloon, driving top line and financial performance is a key

area and a vast part of my focus point. With the planned renovation and extension of the hotel, it is crucial that we start ahead of the completion to develop new and exciting markets.” Currently in the works is a full-scale upgrade, including the addition of another three hundred and sixty guest rooms.

Confident with the hotel’s state of operations, Stray takes to the acquisition of new business, which is often beyond conventional scope. “MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) is without a doubt one area that we will focus on along with corporate as well as leisure FIT (Foreign Independent Travel) from new markets such as Middle East and Russia alongside the traditionally strong markets such as China, England, Australia, USA, South Korea, India and Southeast Asia. We will work with the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the travel industry to cultivate these new markets and segments as this is beneficial for all hotels in Hong Kong and not only the work of one hotel alone.”

Impeccable taste, high standards of perfection, and a sincere devotion to both the industry and each individual guest are the qualities that define true masters of hospitality. If these traits are shared by the people behind this hotel as Yngvar Stray does, the Harbour Grand Kowloon will undoubtedly lead Hong Kong towards becoming the business travel capital of the world. ■

For additional information please visit www.harbourgrand.com