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# Preferred's GOLDEN JUBILEE

The Legend collection includes such iconic properties as Ireland's K Club.

Since its debut 50 years ago, the company has grown to include **700-plus properties and hotel groups** in 85 countries

BY KERRY MEDINA

For Preferred Hotels & Resorts, 2018 marks a year of celebration as the Newport Beach, Calif.-based company commemorates its Golden Jubilee. More than 200 of the company's member hotels are offering the "Golden Anniversary" package throughout the year, including a \$50 credit or a complimentary 50-minute experience created by the hotel.

"I've enjoyed celebrating with travel agency clients who have been working with us for so long that they can tell stories about Preferred from back in the days before I joined the company nearly 18 years ago," said Rick Stiffler, vice president-leisure sales.

Today, Preferred is the world's largest independent hotel brand, according to the company, with a portfolio of more than 700 properties and small hotel groups across 85 countries. At least part of its success can be attributed to a major 2015 rebranding initiative, which executives describe as "moving the business from a house of brands to a branded house." Preferred Hotels & Resorts is the single





brand, with a single chain code (PH), under which are five collections: Legend, LVX, Lifestyle, Connect and Preferred Residences.

### THE FIVE COLLECTIONS

**Legend**, as Stiffler defined it, “is the ultimate collection of iconic properties in the best destinations, offering really immersive experiences, intuitive service, renowned dining and exceptional spas.” These are flagship, five-star hotels like The K Club in Ireland and The Upper House in Hong Kong. Because the admission process is so stringent, there are only about 80 hotels in the collection.

**LVX** hotels, which include such properties as The Capitol Hotel Tokyo and St. Julien Hotel & Spa in Boulder, Colo., are also high-end properties in prominent destinations. But they offer more of an in-the-know luxury experience, whereas Legend properties feature emblematic experiences.

The **Lifestyle** collection offers “casual luxury,” Stiffler said, pointing to The Hollywood Roosevelt in Los Angeles and The Palms Hotel & Spa in Miami Beach as examples.

Hotels in the more moderately priced **Connect** collection are “simple, smart and well appointed,” he said. Examples include Paris’ MonHotel Lounge & Spa and the Hotel Hayden in New York City. Connect properties are in city centers and other locations where Legend or LVX hotels are not.

**Preferred Residences** offer the flexibility of staying in a home but with all of the amenities of a hotel. About 35 percent of the 70 properties in this collection are dedicated residences, while the remainder are villas and penthouses at Legend and LVX properties. These properties cater to long-term corporate travelers as well as to leisure travelers who want to live like a local while on vacation. “As Airbnb continues to grow and tap into the luxury segment, this product allows our travel advisors to compete for clients who want that residential feel with all of the services that they expect from a luxury hotel,” Stiffler said.

The collections have broad appeal and cut across generational groups, including Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials, he noted.

### I PREFER LOYALTY PROGRAM

Last year the company launched a mobile app for its guest loyalty program, I Prefer, which has 2.5 million members. Travel advisors are encouraged to enroll themselves and their clients via Preferred’s travel

agent page. Agents can also earn a standard 10 percent commission when booking I Prefer rates for clients via the agent page or the GDS. The program’s structure, as it relates to travel consultants, is based on feedback from Preferred’s agent advisory board.

“It’s important that we continue to involve travel agents and get their feedback as we grow I Prefer, because the program helps to build our brand loyalty,” Stiffler said. “We don’t want to be perceived as taking business away from travel professionals with special offers that they can’t access. With the guidance of our agent advisory board, we always want to protect travel professionals.”

### COMMISSIONABLE OFFERS, AGENT ASSISTANCE

One of the company’s commissionable special offers is the Preferred Pride program, which launched almost a decade ago to encourage hotels to get involved with their local LGBTQ community through fundraising initiatives and charity support, while providing hotel staff with LGBTQ training. These hotels offer a Preferred Pride rate that includes an amenity such as a bottle of wine or complimentary breakfast; the rate is available to any and all guests.

Preferred’s corporate offices in Chicago, London and Sao Paulo, Brazil, operate VIP desks to assist top agency accounts with reservations and special requests, and the company also offers a dedicated toll-free number and email for commission-specific inquiries.

The company’s 35 worldwide sales offices provide agents with quarterly newsletters, which highlight hotels that have recently joined Preferred as well as new offers available through the GDS. An updated hotel directory is distributed tri-annually. Throughout the year, Preferred also hosts a variety of road shows and showcases for travel retailers. Most recently, a new 35 percent discount was introduced for travel professionals who stay up to three nights and agree to do a site inspection at any of 160 Preferred properties.

“We’ve found that one of the best education tools for travel advisors is having them personally experience the hotels,” Stiffler explained. “When they know the product, it also helps to define the collection.”



The Upper House in Hong Kong is positioned within the Legend collection.