

LODGING



Lindsey Ueberroth on Preferred Hotel Group Rebrand

Posted by: Lodging Staff in Checking In, Featured, People March 4, 2015



Over the last decade, Preferred Hotel Group, a global collection of 650 independent luxury properties, has grown by adding brands to its portfolio to satisfy evolving customer demands. As major hotel chains creep into the soft branding space, the company realized it had to become a stronger consumer-facing brand in order to stay competitive in the market. That's why the group is moving from a multi-brand portfolio to one master brand: Preferred Hotels & Resorts. President and CEO Lindsey Ueberroth shares what this move means for the company and how it supports future growth.

How have you repositioned your various collections under the new flag? We're doing the reverse of what the chains are doing. We're actually retiring four of our brands, and we're going to make Preferred Hotels & Resorts the master brand because of the strong heritage and legacy behind the Preferred name. Now, all of our hotel members are going to fall under that name, but will be aligned with one of five distinct collections—Legend, LVX, Lifestyle, Connect, and Preferred Residences. That's been driven by what we've seen and what the consumer is telling us, which is that everybody's definition of luxury is very personal.

What does luxury mean now? Going to eat at a fine dining restaurant is considered a luxury experience. I enjoy that, but 80 percent of the time, I'd rather be in my favorite pair of jeans and a nice sweater, and go eat at my favorite local Italian place around the corner that has meatballs I dream about. That, to me, is luxury, too. It's a definition based on my lifestyle choice at that moment. That's really how consumers look at hotels now. Depending on whether you're traveling with your spouse for a special occasion, your family, or your buddies on a golf trip, you look for a different type of property and experience to fit your needs. We think by structuring the brand with these collections, it'll make it a lot easier for the traveling consumer to find that perfect experience.

Can you tell me more about the different collections? We want to move away from the traditional "good, better, best" tiered star rating, and move to more of a horizontal version of luxury, which goes from a casual luxury to a very high-end luxury. The Legend Collection, which has about 60 hotels, is the ultimate collection of iconic properties in the best destinations with really immersive experiences. The LVX Collection features exquisite, elegant properties that are also world-renowned and provide a luxury experience with more personalized service. The Lifestyle Collection provides more approachable, authentic hospitality and probably has the broadest shoulders in terms of the type of hotels. The Connect Collection will probably be one of the fastest growing because casual luxury has the right services and amenities and blends value with convenience. It's about connecting with friends, businesses, and the neighborhood. We also recently launched Preferred Residences with about 20 of our hotels and resorts that have a residential component. This satisfies people's desire to have a lot more space without giving up all the amenities and services of the hotel attached to it.

What are the benefits of making this shift? It's going to be much easier to communicate what Preferred Hotels & Resorts stands for now, and that this is the brand to go to when you want an authentic, one-of-a-kind, independent hotel experience. We have 650 hotels in 84 countries, so with that sort of breadth, the consumer should be able to find just about any type of hotel they want.

How will you change your online and social media presence? We want to elevate what we're doing in web and social. We're launching a new brand website, PreferredHotels.com (**Editor's Note:** *The site is expected to go live by end of day March 4*). We're going to spend a lot of money on making sure it's a place where people go before, during, and after a trip. We're going to make it a lot more inspirational, and we want the content to be relevant. It is going to be more about experiences, not just where you go when you're ready to book your trip. We've got some fun new ways that we want the brand to have a better, stronger personality that resonates with everybody.

Will you still market toward niche groups, such as families and weddings? The collections are just one way for the consumer to look for a hotel. We're really going to grow our experiences as well. Right now, we've got family involved, and we rolled out weddings and celebrations. But going forward, we're going to expand upon those. We're going to add art and culture, food and wine, wellness, adventure, and sporting life. Hotels in any of those collections could fall under those experiences. We're finding that's how the consumer really starts to search. Sometimes they know exactly where they want to go. Other times it's just to have a really great culinary experience and they're open to any type of location.

What are your major goals in the next few years? We're at 1.3 million active members, and we're trying to grow that to over 4 million in the next three years. In three years, I want to have 1,000 hotels in 100 countries. And it's not just for growth, it's so we can have the right hotels in the right places. I want people to consider Preferred as one of the top five brands if they're trying to find a really unique hotel.

<http://lodgingmagazine.com/lindsey-ueberroth-on-preferred-hotel-group-rebrand/>