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Executive Interview: Brenda Collin

Brenda Collin, Executive Vice President of Europe for Preferred Hotels & Resorts, has transformed luxury hospitality with her strategic leadership and vision. In this exclusive interview with The Executive Magazine, she reflects on her journey, the challenges of scaling a global brand, and her vision for the future of the industry



Few leaders in luxury hospitality have had the transformative impact of Brenda Collin, Executive Vice President of Europe for Preferred Hotels & Resorts. With over 30 years of experience, Collin has expanded the company's presence across Europe, tripling its footprint while curating a prestigious collection of over 200 independent luxury properties. In this exclusive interview with The Executive Magazine, she reflects on her entrepreneurial journey, the complexities of leading in a dynamic market, and the future of the hospitality sector. Her vision, rooted in innovation and a deep commitment to excellence, continues to shape the industry's evolution.



Preferred Hotels & Resorts has significantly expanded under your leadership in Europe. Can you share your strategic vision that facilitated this growth, and what key factors do you believe were pivotal to your success in tripling the company's footprint?

"It has been a privilege to work alongside the Ueberroth family, owners of Preferred Travel Group, the mother company of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, who have given me the freedom to shape the region in a way that aligns with my vision and my leadership style. Central to our success has been an unwavering commitment to our hotel members—ensuring their success and continuously adding value to our partnerships. I believe that true growth comes from doing what's right for our members, fostering strong, mutually beneficial relationships. My background in founding a startup also sharpened my business development skills, allowing me to take a more agile, strategic approach to expanding our presence in Europe to more than 200 properties. This combination of entrepreneurial spirit, member-focused strategy, and the trust of the Ueberroth family has been pivotal in tripling the company's footprint across the region."



You have overseen the inclusion of notable member hotels such as The Beaumont Hotel in London and THE Thief in Oslo into the Preferred Hotels & Resorts’ portfolio. How do you identify potential member properties that align with the brand’s ethos, and what criteria are paramount in your decision-making process?

“We take great pride in representing the finest independent luxury hotels globally, so selecting new member properties is a highly considered process. We carefully choose partners who not only embody excellence in hospitality but also align closely with our core values and brand ethos. One of the key factors we look for is a hotel’s understanding of the importance of partnership—those who recognise the value of working collaboratively and can effectively leverage the global network and services that Preferred Hotels & Resorts and the wider company offers. Beyond just the quality of the property, it’s essential that there is a shared vision for success.”

Reflecting on your extensive career in the hospitality industry, from Hilton to founding start up, and now at Preferred Hotels & Resorts, what were the most challenging transitions, and how did you navigate them successfully?

“I’ve always embraced challenges head-on. Transitioning from Hilton operations to regional sales was a significant leap—suddenly, I had no manual to follow, only clear KPIs. I worked diligently, consistently surpassing targets, which built my confidence for my next venture: launching a startup over 20 years ago, whilst I was pregnant. The most difficult transition came later, when I decided to exit that startup after eight years. It was eye-opening to realize that not all shareholders prioritise doing the right thing, which taught me invaluable lessons about people and the importance of aligning with those who share your values. Joining Preferred Hotels & Resorts was truly a breath of fresh air. The company’s global team of experienced associates creates a positive, meaningful impact on our members every day, which has been incredibly rewarding.”



With over three decades in hospitality, how have you seen the industry’s landscape change, particularly in Europe, and what emerging trends do you believe will most significantly shape its future?

“Over the past three decades, I’ve observed a lack of real innovation in the hospitality industry, particularly in Europe. Too often, brands replicate one another rather than pushing boundaries. I believe in brands that stand out by leading with originality and having a meaningful purpose. One of the most significant opportunities lies in investing in education and training for hoteliers. Mandating a percentage of revenue to support this could have a profound long-term impact, creating a stronger, more knowledgeable industry.

“Looking ahead, consolidation is a growing trend. In 2024, we’re seeing increased acquisition activity as brands seek to acquire asset classes that fit their portfolios. Smaller, family-run hotels are being absorbed as many owners retire, which means we’ll likely see fewer truly independent properties in the future.

“Sustainability, while currently a trend, will soon become the standard across the industry. The sector needs to act quickly to meet emerging regulations and fulfill its responsibilities in this area. Investing in sustainability education will be crucial to ensure that businesses not only comply but also lead in this critical area.”



Spearheading a large region like Europe comes with diverse market dynamics. How do you balance the varying needs and opportunities of different countries within your jurisdiction, and what are some of the unique challenges you've encountered?

"Europe is a fascinating region to operate in, offering immense variety and complexity, from cultural nuances to a wide range of languages. Despite these differences, the most consistent and rewarding aspect is the people—hospitality truly knows no borders. One of the unique challenges in managing such a diverse region is navigating the varied technological landscapes. The range of systems in place often makes connectivity more complex than in other parts of the world. Additionally, the multitude of languages spoken across Europe can sometimes complicate communication, requiring more tailored approaches for each market.

"To address these challenges, we have established regional support through our five European offices, allowing us to provide localised expertise and maintain close relationships with our members. We also deploy revenue optimisation experts across the region to help streamline operations and ensure that each property can maximise its potential."

Your role involves a significant amount of engagement with independent hotels. What advice would you give to hotel owners looking to thrive in the competitive hospitality market while maintaining their independence?

"Successful partnerships are a two-way street. Independent hotels must invest time and resources to ensure the relationship thrives. Regular communication is key to aligning goals, objectives, and performance indicators. My advice to hotel owners is to think long-term—make strategic investments today that will secure future success. Focus not just on immediate gains but on positioning your property for sustained growth. Additionally, independent hotels should leverage the global reach and resources of their partners to maximise performance and visibility."



As a Fellow and trustee of the Institute of Hospitality, you are actively involved in professional development. What role do you believe continuous education and networking play in achieving and sustaining success in the hospitality industry?

"I'm deeply passionate about professional development and believe that investing in people who are committed to excellence is key to maximising both their potential and the success of the business. Continuous education and networking are essential in the ever-evolving hospitality industry. As a trustee of the Institute of Hospitality, which supports lifelong learning, we are working towards achieving Chartered status for our profession. If successful, this would elevate hospitality as a respected career of choice, helping to attract more talent into the industry. In the long run, this will bring significant benefits by cultivating a stronger, more skilled workforce that can drive sustained success for the sector."

Looking ahead, what are your key priorities for Preferred Hotels & Resorts in the next five years, and how do you plan to ensure that the company continues to innovate and lead in an ever-evolving market?

"What I love most about our company is that we are always evolving and innovating within this dynamic market. Over the next five years, our focus will be our continued expansion of our prestigious Legend Collection and targeting gap destinations to offer unparalleled experiences for our ultra-high-net-worth consumers. Equally important is ensuring the continued success and growth of our current members, helping them remain profitable and achieve strong returns on their investment. Sustainability will also be central to our strategy, with an emphasis on growing our Beyond Green brand, aligning with the increasing demand for responsible travel."