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Readers: Our Most Precious Asset

“We look at Mix-Use developments for the Indian mid-market that will cater to the demands of the new generation”



Marloes Knippenberg,
CEO of Kerten Hospitality

It was during International Hotel Investment Forum (IHIF) that I caught with one of the most thoughtful and technology inclined CEO in hospitality sector. During the event I had the opportunity of meeting **Marloes Knippenberg, CEO, Kerten Hospitality**. Not only is she beautiful and charming but also quite expressive with an innovative mindset as I thoroughly enjoyed spending quality time with her. The portfolio of Kerten Hospitality spans a range of countries and is soon looking to enter the Indian market. In an exclusive interview with **Global Destinations** she focuses not only on her company and that technology and hospitality go hand in hand but also on her expansion plans. **Excerpts**

How was IHIF and your main purpose for participation?

This year's forum was very positive and filled

with insightful discussions about current and upcoming projects. The event was well-attended by many interested buyers, operators and individuals with technology background as well as different-angled backgrounds. It demonstrated that there was much bigger hunger for doing actual business and transactions compared to previous years.

I took part in a panel called “A Brave New World: What Are the Opportunities in Alternative Models?” The discussion looked at when hotels are becoming mainstream, what are the most attractive alternatives within hotel categories to invest in. My panel participation was in line with my interest to share industry insights and explore other industry worldviews. All in all, very interesting conversations and explorations of new opportunities come from such discussions.

Great. As a speaker what was your focus?

I focused on the fact that owners are expecting a much greater RoI (Return on Investment) from all new products. This is what we, in the industry, aim to tackle by creating experiences, destinations and injecting innovation along the way.

A key topic in my panel were the latest developments across our Kerten Hospitality projects. We predict that our concept retail-meets-hospitality on the ground floor will generate the greatest RoI in the future. The panel also dwelled on the shop-in-shop concept, co-working in a super market concept as well as the technologically-enabled services that Generation Z demands and we seek to deliver.

I talked about the lobby space and how it should have funkier design and a co-working space. Bring in a co-working serviced concept in any lobby and you will get the 2020 hotel vision, which we have created already.

How will implementing the latest technology will help the industry grow?

I think the latest technology utilized in the hospitality

industry is not yet fit compared to where the rest of the world is. When it comes to the technology in our industry, what needs to be done is to look at what is available in different industries, such as aviation, banking, finance and retail, for example. In my opinion, what is going to drive things is if we can adapt parts of those technologies into our industries.

The implementation of opening the door with your phone is not going to make a world of difference to hotels. The reception-less hotels are not a new happening in our turf, but iPad checking-ins and Alexa-style robots welcoming guests in multiple languages definitely are.

With voice, face recognition, AI there is much more coming up than the small investments we can do now. We can create an experience through an app, give guests a connected bracelet to open the door, order room service or pay for services across a resort without carrying a credit card or room keys. A game-changing experience would be an app that will order room service, ask for laundry pickup and book a concert ticket or a bicycle tour of the city.

What about emerging technologies?

We would like to create smart hospitality infrastructure that combines seamlessly food concepts, retail, accommodation, maintenance services, smart concierges and lifestyle facilitators across our mixed-use projects.



Kerten Hospitality Michelin-star Chef Jaume Puigdemolas



Cloud7 room

Voice and AI are the key technologies that we are currently focusing on. Instead of looking at data generation and data security we have recognized that there is a need to look at how do we really use the data we have acquired. What is more critical is identifying how do we provide people with the right product at the right time using this data and how do we cater to what they really want and what fits their taste best.

Collectively, the industry needs to look at how this data will create the benefits guests and travelers have at home. Using WhatsApp instead of calling the reception or housekeeping On-Demand are no longer the perpetrators of change in the consumer landscape. Very few people have total home automation. But everybody has a mobile phone and works with it. This will immerse us.

How do we go beyond Big Data? We look at how can a micro-targeted offer generate unique experiences for our guests and how AI will ensure the instant delivery of this customized choice. Another such example would be retail in a hotel prompted by beacons through the IoT connected sensors that provide instant information on habits, preferred retailers and cuisines.

Coming to the group what is the range of hospitality verticals covered by your group?

Our portfolio includes hotels, serviced apartments, branded residences, food and beverage, and serviced offices that are more akin to a business club. We are a crossover in horizontals and we put all of our support functions, including technology, over those. Technology and our skillset combined allow us to connect all of them. However, our standout feature remains our operator mindset: For an asset operator like us, it remains critical to not differentiate between an owner and an operator and to align our global viewpoint regarding the RoI with the owners' perspective. We address risk and investments like an owner and we take ownership in this partnership.

In our industry we need to start thinking more like disruptors and combine the shared-economy demands with technological innovation in order to create unique and personalized experiences for our guests. This can be achieved only if we choose to collaborate and not operate in silos.

What about partners and what do you expect from them and what should they expect from your group?

Developed and launched with the backing of Kerten, Ireland-based investment vehicle, Kerten Hospitality focuses extensively on operating mixed-use projects: branded residences, serviced apartments, luxury hotels, serviced office and business clubs, gourmet burgers and a rich portfolio of F&B concepts, tailored hospitality solutions and personalized approaches. This is what we offer.

The Hospitality brands created by Kerten Hospitality include The House Hotel, The House Residence, Cloud7 Hotel & Residence, Ouspace, a serviced office and business club that provides the possibility for solo working and collaboration, and our tech-driven gourmet burger concept, Frikadell - with more brands in the pipeline. Our team is our greatest asset. We are disruptors, rebel hoteliers and food enthusiasts with hospitality pedigrees from well-known brands based in the Middle East and Europe.

We are a mixed-use operator that connects its brands in one building or a single development project so that developers and owners no longer need multiple operators for different parts of their projects. We are a one-stop-shop that creates a customized local solution, optimizes space and brings RoI.

As a hospitality operator, we deliver on guests' expectations by collaborating with owners, who know what they want when it comes to development costs and use of all spaces. We are the partner of choice for simplicity-seekers who focus on per sq m profitability when applying brand collaboration and plugin concepts that lead to low operating costs.

With competition on the rise what differentiates your hotels from the rest?

We are a unique mixed-use operator because we simply look at every single project in a different way. We can have a residential element, a serviced apartment space and a serviced office all in the same building. We create communities for residents and co-working spaces for those willing to get to their work space without extensive travel and time loss due to commute.

Our hotels have a standout feature, too: We look at the ground floor in a very different way where we don't necessarily need to



The House Hotel & Residence Fouka Bay

place check-in reception counter. We gladly share the Ground floor with either retail or Food & Beverage of our own brands or others. This is what differentiates us from the rest of the operators. Nowadays, the ecosystem is focused on design, the comfort of the guest and the mattress, blackout and a good shower. The integration in working with owners and having flexibility is what sets us even further apart.

We create experiences and this what appeals to Generation Z who are purported to be the largest travel group that rents smaller



Ouspace in Jeddah

units and expects value for money. Their needs prompted the birth of our brand Cloud 7 that caters to a mid-market lifestyle - a modern concept based on affordable build and fit-out for owners, maximizing space, and offers collaboration of brands.

Which are your major focused markets?

Our launch pad was the Middle East since nowadays many trends start from this part of the world and later move towards the West. Our next footprint growth will be further Eastwards before we start looking at further growth in the Western hemisphere.

A lot of hotel brands are currently emphasizing green practices. What's the scene at your hotel?

We are very sustainability-orientated and focus on reducing the carbon footprint in all our projects. We connect locally with suppliers, vendors and partners with whom we share our global experiences. We do our best to source as many local products and services as possible. There is so much more impact we can ALL make and that is the reason why sustainability in all we do is high on our agenda and across all of our brands.

How important is MICE?

MICE for us are pivotal in our Ouspace brand where we connect the working audience with the living and traveling audience and create unique experiences for them as part of a global platform. Working is not about sharing a network of colleagues from one industry but is more about the value different industries provide within one network. When we talk about MICE, we firmly believe in tailored experiences for each forum or a meeting.

How do you perceive the Indian market and any specific plans?

We have a completely different perspective on where innovation originates from. We believe that new trends are nowadays born in the East and no longer in the West. Our growth in India, will create a common interest and benefit for all stakeholders, the traveller, the business club co-worker, the investor or the owner.

The Indian market has been growing exponentially with more development projects in metro cities mainly. Also, the market has been shifting greatly, and I believe that there is an increased hunger for new concepts, like Cloud 7 as well as mix-use developments. A good mixed-use project can be completed with our own brands or a mix of other brands in combination with our own brands.

On a personal front why have you chosen to pursue a career in the hotel industry?

When I was younger, we lived in a touristic area and my friends' parents owned hotels and restaurants and I felt a great affection and affiliation to the industry. My journey in the hospitality field started with Hilton where I held senior operational and commercial management positions for over a decade. After studying and pursuing a corporate career in hospitality, I believe, there has been a



Cloud7 Hotel Atakoy in Istanbul

massive shift in the world for new concepts. The world is shifting towards greater collaboration of other industries, like aviation and technology. Kerten Hospitality's innovative portfolio came to life with such innovation at its core.

What are your expansion plans and as you look to 2020 what are your key priorities?

We look at Mix-Use developments for the Indian mid-market that will cater to the demands of the new generation who seek simplicity, ease of access and instantaneous delivery of services. We create living and co-working destinations affordable for those who choose rented over owned. We want to prioritize and focus on changing the industry mindset, entering a market with such great potential for growth while adding value to the residential and business environment.