

She has a broad experience in the hospitality market, having worked as General Manager of Hilton hotels all over the world and now she is ready to continue the development of Athenee Palace Hilton Bucharest. Appointed last September as General Manager, Linda Griffin successfully delivered two important projects of Athenee Palace Hilton Bucharest, the opening of Café Athenee restaurant and the renovation of the lobby and is looking forward to new challenges on the Romanian hospitality market, which she considers a growing and attractive market.

B.H:You have filled management positions in various Hilton hotels worldwide. What was the most rewarding experience and what are your targets for Romania?

Linda Griffin: Each job is very special for me. I have done so many different things. I started in front office and worked my way up. I had the objective to become a general manager by the time I turned 40 and I achieved it. An exciting part of my profession was that I had the opportunity to travel all over the world, I worked in multiple cultures, I had to deal with multiple types of situations. I was for a period a Project Manager, during this time training teams, seeing people succeed in a very short window of time was very rewarding. However I think the most rewarding experience was my last job, being the general manager of Adana Hilton and Mersin Hilton in Turkey. I had to manage these two hotels and also develop the teams and revenues in those hotels. At the time I was leaving, several key people from the employees I trained were being picked up by other hotels as well.

B.H: Why did you decide to develop your career within the Hilton chain instead of looking at the opportunities offered by other international chains as well?

Linda Griffin: Hilton is an exciting and successful hotel management company, with great diversity and dynamism. Hilton has a great legacy in this industry, with many firsts, making it an exciting company to work for and a very solid reputation for training and developing hospitality professionals. I was looking for an international career where I could live and work abroad, Hilton was the natural choice for me. Each position has always been a new growing experience, so I have enjoyed it, been challenged and had opportunities to move on and up when I was looking for them. I have grown up in this company and it has never let me down.

B.H: What are your targets for Romania and what do you expect from your experience here?

Linda Griffin: From Romania I expect to improve my job skills even further. For me this is a different hotel, a different type of market from where I was in Turkey. Getting to work in a different environment is exciting, because this is a dynamic and growing market, as I am challenged in different ways. Developing my team here is also a new opportunity and challenge. I hope to see the team here develop in new ways. Another target is to grow the revenues of the hotel, this quarter of the year looks very positive for Athenee Palace Hilton and we expect occupancies of 70 to 80%, which is very good in the current market conditions.

B.H: What is your perspective on the development of Bucharest hospitality market this year and next year, considering the effects of the financial crisis?

Linda Griffin: The hospitality market in Romania is evolving. I think it is a growing market and it still has some room to develop and attract more business and leisure travelers. I understand am also told that there are not many major hospitality schools in Romania and hospitality professionals need proper education in this area. People that choose to work in the hospitality market should have the opportunity to study the profession, opening up opportunities that may seem out of reach initially. In terms of business the market is soft, it has gone through a rapid expansion in the last few years, also under the pressure of the economic crisis, a combination which has not been so positive for the hotels. On the other hand this was good for the consumer, because it resulted in significant price decreases. At the same time, the volume of hotel rooms also gives Bucharest the opportunity to draw in big pieces of congress business. There is enough quality accommodation in Bucharest that it should start trying to attract some bigger conferences, which, so far I understand has not really happened as there is no single organization behind this type of initiative. Congress should be possible as the People's House has a grand ballroom which can be used for big events or exhibitions. Romexpo also has a lot of hotels around and could probably draw in some business travelers, but this takes organization to pull it all together.

B.H: Do you expect 2011 to be a more challenging year for the Romanian hospitality market than 2010 or we should see better results?

Linda Griffin: I think 2011 will be similar to 2010 for the hospitality market given the current economic situation in Romania. Other markets have grown and developed, compared to Romania. Germany is in a solid position, the London market is doing very well, but with the current economic situation in Romania I think there will be conservative growth. We have seen some volume growth happening early in the year, compared to 2009, but not to the same level as in other places.

B.H: How affected was Bucharest hospitality market by the crisis, compared with other hospitality markets in the region (Budapest, Prague, Sofia etc)?

Linda Griffin: I am not in a very good position to discuss other Eastern European markets as I am new to the area, however I believe Budapest is still going through a difficult time, just as Bucharest. It is my understanding that Vienna is starting to see positive light. I do not know a lot of things about the Sofia market.

B.H: What is your strategy for the development of Athenee Palace Hilton in the next years? Do you believe that Bucharest is prepared for new hotel chains which are not present here yet?

Linda Griffin: I am sure there are international chains looking around and trying to find opportunities on the Romanian market. We are actively working and looking for expansion

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Saturday, 13 November 2010 05:09 - Last Updated Tuesday, 16 November 2010 05:13

opportunities. There will be a new Doubletree hotel opening in Bucharest next year. It will be a hotel operated to Doubletree standards and services, which will give added value to the hotel.

B.H: How would you comment this opening and how could it influence the development of Athenee Palace Hilton?

Linda Griffin: Normally the brands enhance one another, that should be the outcome of it after Doubletree opens. We are targeting totally different markets, Athenee Palace Hilton and Doubletree are different types of hotels. Athenee Palace Hilton is a classic building style five star hotel and Doubletree will be a modern smaller business hotel. The differences are also location wise, so hopefully these two hotels will complement one other. We have a Doubletree hotel coming online in Oradea, later next year. We will also open a Hilton Garden Inn and some other hotels in some of the other cities. Having all these properties in smaller communities will be healthy for us, as Hilton guests will have the opportunity to use our hotels in other cities as well and benefit from their Hilton Honors cards/points.

B.H: Athenee Palace Hilton has just finished the refurbishment works prepared for 2010 and has opened the new restaurant Cafe Athenee. What was the impact of these refurbishment works on the customer number?

Linda Griffin: So far it has been really well received by our customers, they are positive about both the look and feel of the Café Athenee as well as about the menu and restaurant concept.

B.H: What were the main challenges you have had to deal with since being appointed at the head of Athenee Palace Hilton?

Linda Griffin: Opening the cafe and finishing the lobby renovations were the priorities since I came to Romania and was my number one challenges. Another challenge has been trying to understand the politics of the country, which is going through so many changes.

B.H: What events is the hotel preparing for this autumn and for the winter holidays?

Linda Griffin: For winter we are still putting together a holiday programme. We normally have a Christmas charity tree for children, and intend to do that this year as well for the benefit of Robin Hood and Mia's Children Associations. Currently, in Cafe Athenee, every Friday and Saturday we have electric jazz lounge music with a DJ and our customers can take advantage of our buy one and get two glasses of champagne. We are preparing other surprises for winter, which people can find on our newly launched website: hiltonbucharest.com or by adding the Athenee Palace Hilton page to the "likes" on Facebook.

Linda Griffin: Am inceput sa lucrez la receptie si am ajuns director general pana la 40 de ani

Are o experienta bogata pe piata hoteliera, dobandita in pozitia de Director General al

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mai multor hoteluri Hilton din toata lumea, iar acum este pregatita sa continue dezvoltarea hotelului Athenee Palace Hilton Bucharest. Numita in septembrie in functia de Director General, Linda Griffin a finalizat cu succes doua proiecte importante din cadrul hotelului Athenee Palace Hilton Bucharest, deschiderea restaurantului Café Athenee si renovarea holului si asteapta provocari noi pe piata hoteliera din Romania, pe care o considera o piata atractiva, in dezvoltare.

B.H: Ati ocupat functii de conducere in diverse hoteluri Hilton in lumea intreaga. Care a fost experienta care v-a adus cele mai multe satisfactii si care sunt tintele dvs pentru Romania?

Linda Griffin: Fiecare job este foarte special pentru mine. Am facut atatea lucruri diferite. Am inceput sa lucrez la receptie si am avansat pe scara profesionala. Obiectivul meu a fost sa devin director general pana la varsta de 40 de ani si am reusit. O parte interesanta a profesiei mele a fost posibilitatea de a calatori prin toata lumea, am lucrat in culturi multiple, a trebuit sa ma confrunt cu tipuri multiple de situatii. O perioada am fost Manager de Proiect, iar in aceasta perioada am instruit echipe, am vazut oameni care au ajuns sa aiba succes intr-un interval foarte scurt de timp, iar acest lucru mi-a adus multe satisfactii. Cu toate acestea cred ca ultimul meu job, in pozitia de director general al hotelurilor Adana Hilton si Mersin Hilton din Turcia mi-a adus cele mai multe satisfactii. A trebuit sa conduc aceste doua hoteluri si sa dezvolt echipele si sa cresc veniturile din acele hoteluri. In momentul in care am plecat, cativa angajati cheie dintre cei pe care i-am pregatit erau preluati de alte hoteluri.

B.H: De ce ati decis sa va dezvoltati cariera in cadrul lantului Hilton, in loc sa luati in considerare oportunitatile oferite de alte lanturi hoteliere?

Linda Griffin: Hilton este un lant hotelier interesant si de succes, cu mare diversitate si dinamism. Hilton are o mostenire extraordinara in aceasta industrie, care a facut compania una interesanta pentru cei care vor sa lucreze in cadrul ei si are si o reputatie solida in ceea ce priveste pregatirea si dezvoltarea profesionistilor in domeniul hotelier. Mi-am dorit o cariera internationala in cadrul careia sa pot locui si calatori in strainatate, Hilton a fost alegerea naturala pentru mine. Fiecare pozitie a fost intotdeauna o noua experienta de dezvoltare, asa ca mi-am placut, m-am simtit provocata si am avut oportunitati sa avansez, atunci cand le-am cautat. Am crescut in aceasta companie si nu m-a dezamagit niciodata.

B.H: Care sunt tintele dvs pentru Romania si ce asteptati de la experienta dvs aici?

Ms. Linda Griffin: Ma astept ca in Romania sa-mi imbunatatesc si mai mult abilitatile profesionale. Pentru mine acesta este un hotel diferit, un alt tip de piata, fata de piata din Turcia, de unde vin. Este o experienta interesanta sa lucrez intr-un mediu diferit, intrucat aceasta este o piata dinamica si in crestere. Sunt provocata in diferite feluri, dezvoltarea echipei mele este de asemenea o oportunitate si o provocare noua. Sper sa vad echipa de aici dezvoltandu-se in diverse feluri. O alta tinta este sa cresc veniturile hotelului, acest trimestru arata foarte pozitiv pentru Athenee Palace Hilton si ne asteptam la un grad de ocupare de 70-80%, ceea ce este foarte bine pentru conditiile de piata actuale.

B.H: Care este perspectiva dvs asupra dezvoltarii pietei hoteliere din Bucuresti anul acesta si anul viitor, avand in vedere efectele crizei financiare?

Linda Griffin: Piata hoteliera din Romania evolueaza. Cred ca este o piata in crestere si se mai poate inca dezvolta si poate atrage mai multi turisti de business si de leisure. Am inteles si mi s-a spus, de asemenea, ca nu sunt multe scoli mari de turism in Romania, iar profesionistii din domeniul hotelier au nevoie de o educatie adecvata in acest domeniu. Oamenii care aleg sa lucreze in domeniul hotelier ar trebui sa aiba ocazia sa studieze profesia, sa acceseze oportunitati care pot parea initial imposibil de atins. Din punct de vedere al afacerilor piata a scazut, a trecut printr-o extindere rapida in ultimii ani, chiar sub presiunea crizei economice, o combinatie care nu a fost atat de pozitiva pentru hoteluri. Pe de alta parte acest lucru a fost bun pentru clienti, pentru ca a dus la o scadere semnificativa a preturilor. In acelasi timp, volumul de camere de hotel ofera Bucurestiului posibilitatea de a atrage multi clienti pentru turismul de conferinte. In Bucuresti exista suficienta capacitate de cazare de calitate si capitala ar trebui sa inceapa sa atraga conferinte de dimensiuni mai mari, lucru care, din cate am inteles, nu s-a intamplat pana acum, intrucat nu se afla nicio organizatie in spatele acestui tip de initiativa. Organizarea de congrese ar trebui sa fie posibila, intrucat Casa Poporului are un grand ballroom, care poate fi folosit pentru evenimente mari si congrese. Si Romexpo are multe hoteluri in jur si ar putea probabil sa atraga turisti de afaceri, dar este nevoie de o organizatie care sa coordoneze toata aceasta activitate.

B.H: Va asteptati ca 2011 sa fie un an cu mai multe provocari pentru piata hoteliera din Romania, decat 2010, sau rezultatele vor fi mai bune?

Linda Griffin: Cred ca 2011 va fi similar cu 2010 pentru piata hoteliera, avand in vedere situatia economica actuala din Romania. Alte piete au crescut si s-au dezvoltat, comparativ cu Romania. Germania este intr-o pozitie solida, piata londoneza functioneaza foarte bine, dar avand in vedere situatia economica din Romania, cred ca va fi crestere conservatoare. Am vazut o crestere a volumului la inceputul anului, comparativ cu 2009, dar nu la acelasi nivel ca in alte locuri.

B.H: Cat de afectata a fost piata din Bucuresti de criza, comparativ cu alte piete din regiune (Budapesta, Pragua, Sofia etc)?

Linda Griffin: Nu sunt foarte in masura sa vorbesc despre alte piete est-europene, intrucat sunt noua in zona, cu toate acestea cred ca Budapesta inca trece printr-o perioada dificila, la fel ca Bucuresti. Am inteles ca Viena incepe sa vada o lumina pozitiva. Nu stiu multe lucruri despre piata hoteliera din Sofia.

B.H: Care este strategia dvs pentru dezvoltarea hotelului Athenee Palace Hilton in urmatorii ani? Considerati ca Bucurestiul este pregatit pentru noi lanturi hoteliere care nu sunt prezente inca aici?

Linda Griffin: Sunt convinsa ca exista lanturi internationale care incearca sa gaseasca oportunitati pe piata romaneasca. Noi suntem activi si cautam oportunitati de expansiune. Un nou hotel Doubletree se va deschide in Bucuresti anul viitor. Va fi un hotel operat la

standardele si serviciile Doubletree, care vo conferi valoare adaugata hotelului.

B.H: Cum comentati aceasta deschidere si cum ar putea influenta dezvoltarea Athenee Palace Hilton?

Linda Griffin: In mod normal marcile isi sporesc valoarea una altele, acesta ar trebui sa fie rezultatul dupa deschiderea Doubletree. Tintim pietele diferite, Athenee Palace Hilton si Doubletree sunt tipuri diferite de hoteluri. Athenee Palace Hilton este un hotel de cinci stele deschis intr-o cladire de tip clasic, iar Doubletree va fi un hotel de business modern si mai mic. Diferentele tin si de locatie, asa ca, speram ca aceste doua hoteluri sa se completeze unul pe celalalt. Vom deschide un hotel Doubletree in Oradea, anul viitor. Vom deschide de asemenea si un hotel Hilton Garden Inn si alte hoteluri in alte cateva orase. Faptul ca vom avea aceste proprietati in comunitati mai mici va fi sanatos pentru noi, intrucat oaspetii vor avea oportunitatea de a folosi hotelurile noastre din alte orase si vor beneficia de cardurile/ punctele Hilton Honors.

B.H: Athenee Palace Hilton tocmai a finalizat lucrarile de renovare planificate pentru 2010 si a deschis noul restaurant Cafe Athenee. Care a fost impactul acestor lucrari de renovare asupra numarului de clienti?

Linda Griffin: Pana acum clientii nostri au reactionat pozitiv, atat in ceea ce priveste aspectul cat si atmosfera, meniul si conceptul restaurantului Café Athenee.

B.H: Care au fost principalele provocari cu care v-ati confruntat de cand ati fost numita la conducerea Athenee Palace Hilton?

Linda Griffin: Deschiderea cafenelei si finalizarea renovarii holului au fost principalele prioritati de cand am venit in Romania si au fost provocarile mele numarul unu. O alta provocarea a fost incercarea de a intelege sistemul politic al tarii, care trece prin atat de multe schimbari.

B.H: Ce evenimente pregatete hotelul pentru sarbatorile de iarna?

Linda Griffin: Pentru iarna inca elaboram un program de sarbatori. De obicei pregatim un brad de Craciun caritabil pentru copii si intentionam sa facem acest lucru si anul acesta, pentru Asociatiile Robin Hood si Mia's Children Associations. In acest moment in Cafe Athenee, in fiecare vineri si sambata avem muzica electric jazz lounge cu un DJ, iar clientii nostri pot profita de oferta noastra, prin care cumpara un pahar de sampanie si primesc doua. Pregatim si alte surprize pentru iarna, care pot fi gasite pe website-ul nostru nou lansat: hiltonbucharest.com sau adaugand pagina Athenee Palace Hilton la "likes" pe Facebook.