

Bio Chris K. Franzen

Managing Director Aureus Advisors & General Manager Waldorf Astoria Doha Lusail Resort

Current Position

Pre-opening General Manager of Qatar's soon-to-be newest luxury hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria Doha Lusail resort, and Managing Director of Aureus Advisors LLC. Before relocating back to Doha, Chris served as the Area Vice President for Hyatt West India and General Manager Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences, overlooking the largest portfolio of Hyatt hotels in India, including such iconic properties as the Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences and the luxury lifestyle Andaz Delhi Hotel. Chris was responsible for a rooms inventory in excess of 2,200 rooms; over 4,000 associates, in excess of 30 restaurant operations and over 100,000 sqf of meeting space during his time on the subcontinent. Before India, he was responsible for Hyatt's operation in the State of Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman as Area Vice President.

Childhood & Upbringing

Chris grew up in the Swiss alpine village of Zermatt at the foot of mount Matterhorn. Growing up in the family hotel, he was always destined to be in the hospitality business. He travelled extensively from a very young age and is a third-generation hotelier.

Professional Education

He finished his schooling in Switzerland before embarking on Chef and Sommelier culinary degrees that he finished with distinction, achieving the highest grades in his state. Chris then ventured abroad to complete his university education in Australia (Australian International Hotel School, Canberra) and the USA (Cornell University, Ithaca).

Work and Experience

Chris gained experience in many countries and cultures, including Switzerland, Germany, the US, Australia, Russia, the UAE, the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, and India.

Before joining Hyatt, he also worked for many small luxury boutique hotel operators and for Hilton. His experience ranges from Luxury, Upscale to Select Service operations in Urban as well as Resort environments. He also has pre-opening experience and oversaw the development and the opening process of various hotels in his capacity as Area Vice President. Chris joined Hyatt in 1999 and worked at the Hyatt Regency Dubai, followed by Grand Hyatt Muscat, Park Hyatt Moscow, Grand Hyatt Dubai, the Grand Hyatt Doha Hotel & Villas, the Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences in India before joining the Waldorf-Astoria Doha Lusail as pre-opening General Manager and Aureus Advisors as Managing Director.

He is very passionate about delivering above-and-beyond moments for guests and colleagues in a luxury environment. In addition, he enjoys consulting and sharing his experiences as part of the Aureus Advisors group with other industry professionals and hotel operators as well as owners.

Passion for Operations, Associates, and the Owners

Chris's passion remains in the field of food and beverage where his roots lie. He has successfully launched several new food and beverage concepts over the past decade with Hyatt. These concepts have been used as benchmarks for other hotels and had been replicated in many other operations. Under Chris's leadership, three F&B concepts from the Grand Hyatt Doha were selected to be showcased at the 2018 Hyatt F&B conference, with 60 hotels in attendance. The Grand Hyatt Doha was the only hotel to receive this honour.

Chris believes that restaurants need to be able to tell their own story, evoke emotions, and become destinations in themselves in order to rival free-standing restaurant operations. His focus on F&B does not stop with the concept and execution. Chris also strategically guides marketing, design, and the training of associates for any new concept to ensure the implementation of the vision.

Chris excels at guest engagement and making patrons feel welcomed. He also believes in motivating and engaging with associates from the most junior level up to the management teams. Having a flat communication hierarchy and being approachable to all is very important to him.

Having worked in various cultural environments, Chris has gained vast experience especially with Asian based work forces while in the Middle East. He has successfully managed 52 different nationalities at the Grand Hyatt Doha Hotel & Villas alone; with most colleagues coming from South East Asia.

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Chris strongly believes in ensuring job satisfaction. This is a core principle when managing colleagues to ensure superior guest service is delivered. He believes in finding a balance between empathy and care while also holding members of the team accountable to ensure results are achieved. He places great importance on mindfulness and colleague wellness through applying industry leading principles that positively affect the employee body.

As a leader, Chris has consistently succeeded in increasing employee and guest satisfaction scores. This has resulted in superior returns for hotel owners through an increased number of return guests and lower staff turnover percentages than in any other comparable hotel.

Engaging with owners, be they single unit investors or conglomerates owning several assets, is of great importance to Chris. The circle of service delivery must include the owners so a long-term strategy can be implemented, and short-term challenges can be overcome together through engagement and discussion.

Open, candid, transparent communications with the financial stakeholders are of greater importance now than ever. Having dealt with owners from various backgrounds and needs, Chris understands the importance of keeping them informed and involved on a level they feel comfortable with.

The ability to balance and evaluate the needs of Owners, Guests and Associates is the single most important aspect to ensuring long-term success and buy-in from all three stakeholders. Chris has also extensive experience in handling Union related issues and negotiating with the employee representative body effectively.

His View on Business and Leadership

Chris believes in constant innovation, and ongoing evaluation of tactics and processes. Applying latest and proven technologies to reduce manpower costs and the implementation of finance, marketing, purchasing, and human resources clusters has proven to be the right strategy over the past two years. This strategy allowed the hotels under Chris's leadership to react much more aggressively and decisively during the COVID19 crisis. Many decisions taken at the beginning of the economic downturn were later emulated by other hotels.

Taking calculated risks, trying out new approaches and learning from setbacks are important to him. Teams can only evolve if they are at the forefront of what they do with clear and concise leadership that successfully explains the 'Why and How' and with leadership from the front. Chris wrote two papers on 'Learning from the COVID-19 Crisis' and 'Emerging Leaders During a Crisis', to be found on his blog ckfranzen.com that were also published in hospitality publications.

Besides his engagement with the Waldorf Astoria Doha Lusail and Aureus Advisors, Chris is also tied to Guidepoint to assist them in the field of Hospitality and Tourism. He was also an Executive Committee member of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce and is on the Alumni board of the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School. Chris is also published as a Guest Columnist with Hospitality Horizon, one of the leading publications in India in the field of Tourism, Hospitality and Travel. Since 2010 he is also appointed as Ambassador of Tourism for the Swiss Alpine Resort Zermatt.

The Family and What Makes Him Tick

Chris is married to Rachel who comes from Australia. Together they have two high-school aged children, Ashley and Lex, who were both born in Dubai, UAE.

Chris's passion is motorbiking! He has toured many exotic destinations such as the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, Lesotho in Africa, Vietnam and South Africa to name just a few. He is an avid traveller and has a great understanding of South East Asia, where he has spent many months travelling through various countries and cultures over several decades.

