

Bio Chris K. Franzen

Managing Director Buergenstock Hotels AG

Current & Previous Positions

In my current role, I am responsible for the overall portfolio performance, strategic development, and owner relations of Switzerland's largest hospitality investment, the Buergenstock Hotels AG.

With experience spanning several continents, I have an accomplished track record in luxury, upscale and select service hotels, having operated through some of the most demanding business scenarios including economic downturns, uprisings, pandemics, and embargoes. I am known to be strategically focused, financially disciplined, and result-oriented with a strong track record of leadership and innovation.

As the Managing Director of the Buergenstock Hotels AG, managing the largest hospitality investment in Switzerland with the Buergenstock Resort Lake Lucerne. The resort dates back to 1873 and consists of several luxury hotels, private residence suites, ten restaurants and bars, shopping, two spa & wellness areas and more than 30 business event rooms, with a capacity for conferences for more than 600 guests and a world-class clinic. At the same time, Chris also is the CEO of Aureus Advisors LLC, a Swiss registered company operating in the field of luxury hospitality consulting.

Spanning over 60 hectares, the Buergenstock Resort Lake Lucerne is part of the Buergenstock Collection, one of Switzerland's largest deluxe hotel groups, operating hotels and residences with a combined total of 678 rooms, 67 residence suites and 10 luxury villas. The resort also operates its own catamaran on lake Lucerne and the Buergenstock funicular.

Before his move to Switzerland, he was the opening General Manager of Qatar's leading 5-star luxury resort, the Waldorf-Astoria Lusail Doha Resort and Residences, and Chief Operating Officer of Aureus Advisors LLC, a company established in Switzerland in 2021. Before these assignments, Chris served as the Area Vice President for Hyatt West India, 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 Hotel in Delhi. 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, overlooking all Hyatt brands in his region for several years.

Recent accolades include being selected as Newcomer of the Year 2024 by the Karl Wild Hotel Rating in Switzerland and the inclusion in the General Manager's Power List Middle East 2023, a sign of excellence for industry leaders who have excelled and set industry leading benchmarks. He also successfully executed Switzerland's largest ever political conference in June of 2024, Peace for Ukraine, with over 100 delegations in attendance and almost 60 Heads of State. As of October 2024, Chris is also member of the board of Swiss Deluxe Hotels, covering 38 of Switzerland's most prolific and luxurious hotels and resorts. Chris is also a member of the European Hotel Managers Association (EHMA) since 2024.

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 the Chef and Sommelier apprenticeships; he finished the degrees 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).

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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.

In his previous role as general manager for the Waldorf Astoria Lusail Doha, he opened the hotel in record time before the FIFA WorldCup 2022 Qatar and achieved record revenues; placing the hotel at the top of the market and achieving the number two RevPar position for the first full year of operation.

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 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, and 71 different nationalities when opening the Waldorf Astoria Lusail Doha in late 2022.

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.

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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.

Board Appointments, Advisory and Consultation Work

Chris currently serves on several boards and consultancies. He is on the board of Swiss Deluxe Hotels, the Della Leaders Club for the Hospitality & Travel Committee in India and Alumni Board of the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School.

He is also an appointed Ambassador of Tourism for the Swiss Alpine Resort of Zermatt and does consultancy work for, Guidepoint Advisors. He is a regular guest columnist for the industry leading BW Hoteliers Business publication. He previously was also published on Horizon Hospitality and served as a board member for the Indo American Chamber of Commerce in India.

The Family and What Makes Him Tick

Chris is married to Rachel who comes from Australia. Together they have two 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 Southeast Asia, where he has spent many months travelling through various countries and cultures over several decades.

