



**QATAR**

# Chris Franzen brings a global playbook to Bürgenstock Resort Lake Lucerne

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Chris K Franzen

For three decades, Chris Franzen worked at the forefront of the global hospitality boom, managing sprawling portfolios in India and launching ultra-luxury landmarks in the Middle East.

But when he took the helm as managing director of the Bürgenstock Resort Lake Lucerne on April 1, 2024, it wasn't just a new appointment, it was a homecoming that closed a 30-year circle.

Franzen, a third-generation hotelier, has returned to Switzerland with a unique mandate: to apply the agility of the Middle Eastern market and the service ethos of Asia to one of Europe's most historic alpine destinations. Stepping into the role at Bürgenstock, he sees a seamless transition from his recent tenure opening the Waldorf Astoria Lusail in Qatar.

Speaking to Gulf Times on the sidelines of the Qatar Travel Mart 2025 in Doha on Tuesday, Franzen says, "The managing director role at the Bürgenstock fits perfectly into my career profile because it's a very international resort".

With a guest list covering the United States, the UK, rising markets in Thailand, and a huge clientele from the Arab world, the demographics mirror the global portfolios he managed in India and the Gulf Cooperation Council region.

However, he says the synergy goes deeper than that. The resort is owned by Katara Hospitality, the Qatar-based global hotel owner and developer. Franzen's extensive experience in Doha, witnessing the city's meteoric rise from the 'Old Airport' era of 2012 to the gleaming metropolis that hosted the 2022 World Cup, gives him a distinct advantage. He speaks the language of the owners, understanding their strategic vision in a way few European managers can.

"I'm extremely lucky that I work for Katara Hospitality," Franzen notes, citing their stewardship of iconic assets like the Raffles Singapore and The Savoy Hotel in London. "Having an owner who has a very clear strategy... helps a lot. This money is not invested in a building, it's invested in brand building".

While Franzen respects the heritage of Swiss hospitality, he is keeping a keen eye on the future. He identifies two diverging trends that will define the next era of the Bürgenstock Resort: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and “well-aging”.

Franzen argues that while luxury will always require a high-touch, human element, “looking each other in the eyes”, AI has a critical role to play in the back of house. By automating confirmations and calls, he aims to free up staff to engage more deeply with guests.

Simultaneously, he is turning the resort’s wellness strategy toward longevity: “I want to stay away from the word fitness or well-being because it’s overused,” he says. Instead, he envisions the hotel as a sanctuary for an aging, affluent demographic that seeks to age gracefully in a five-star environment.

For Franzen, the return to Switzerland was driven by a desire to be closer to his aging parents, but it has sparked a personal rediscovery of his homeland. After years in the flat, arid landscapes of Qatar, where he gave up his passion for motorbiking, the Swiss Alps have reawakened his love for the road.

“I didn't realise until I went back how much I missed motorbiking. Sitting on a bike and going up a hill... the fresh air and having a helmet on without having to answer the phone,” he recalls.

This appreciation for the seasons, specifically the crisp Swiss autumn, contrasts sharply with the perspective of his peers

who never left. Franzen observes a stark difference in mindset between himself and childhood friends who remained in Switzerland.

“They have not been exposed to other cultures... their mindset has not changed,” Franzen reflects. “Sometimes I think, wow, I must be much younger than they are. Not physically, but mentally”.

Despite his global outlook, Franzen says his leadership style remains rooted in the lessons learned from his father and grandfather. Whether managing 13 hotels in India or a single luxury resort in the Alps, his philosophy focuses on discipline and the democratisation of respect.

“For me, it never made a difference how I treat employees or guests if it’s a privately owned hotel or a big corporate chain,” Franzen says. “An employee for me was always a colleague, someone to listen to”.

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