

Skift

Rooms, Hotels

Interview: Swire Group Brings Its Brand of Luxury to the U.S.

Colin Nagy, Skift - May 30, 2017 10:05 am



Swire is an interesting hospitality brand that not enough people know outside of Hong Kong. That is set to change.
— Colin Nagy

Swire isn't a household name for most of the world. But for those in the know, they own Cathay Pacific, and also some of the most remarkable hotel properties around.

It's no secret I am a huge fan of their flagship property, Upper House, in Hong Kong, and also Opposite House in Beijing and Temple House in Chengdu. The brand is also known for a series of high-end real estate developments around Hong Kong, notably Pacific Place near Star Street.

I've been watching their first foray into the United States with interest: Swire is the developer behind City Center in Brickell, the business district in downtown Miami. There's residential, a well curated retail experience, as well as commercial space. Their aspiration is to give a proper, urban city center to Miami, replete with rail-link to the airport.

The first Swire hotel brand opening in the U.S. is East, a brand that fits firmly in the lifestyle category but would also appeal to a style-oriented business traveller.

The experience on a recent stay was considered. It didn't feel like a large chain and there was character and interesting partnerships. With service, overall, they got the details right, from the coffee in the lobby to the musical selections. I left thinking the hotel was a well-priced balance to Swire's more luxurious portfolio offerings with the "House" family of hotels.

Since the brand, and Swire, aren't hugely known in the U.S., I caught up with Giovanni Beretta, Vice President of Swire Hotels U.S. and GM at East, Miami to unpack both the hotel's strategic purpose as well as Swire's ambitions in the U.S. The interview is lightly edited for clarity and length.

Skift: What is East and where does it fit in the portfolio?

Giovanni Beretta: East, Miami is the first hotel from Swire Hotels in the United States, and the third under the lifestyle business hotel brand, following the openings of East, Hong Kong in 2010 and Beijing in 2012. We want to create distinctive hotels with a sense of place that break away from convention.

Skift: The property feels unique for the price point, and differentiated at that tier. What is the underlying philosophy of East and why was it an interesting fit for Miami?

Beretta: East is for the business traveler looking for a relaxed, convenient and modern environment. It's distinguished by its natural vitality, its sense of place and purpose. We want to provide a business hotel that is unpretentious and down-to-earth, yet still provides luxury service.

Skift: Describe Swire's approach to hospitality— what makes them interesting? What has the hotel learned from Upper House, etc. that they are applying to the portfolio?

Beretta: A distinguishing facet of every Swire Hotels property is an exceptional focus on guest services. East, Miami has employed hundreds of residents, and has transferred select highly trained personnel from their properties in Hong Kong as well as restaurant staff from Uruguay for the hotel's signature restaurant, Quinto La Huella.

Skift: What role does tech play in the experience?

Beretta: Miami-based Unified Technologies has partnered up with East, Miami to support high IT demands throughout the property. There's an integrated mobile app, 4K Samsung Smart TV platform for guest rooms and meeting spaces including state of the art video-walls, and ultra-reliable extreme-high-speed beacon ready Wi-Fi. Also, in every guestroom and residence suite, cables, and charging docks have been sourced from Native Union, a Hong Kong-based company that specializes in creating design accessories of exceptional quality.

Skift: Why is Brickell important in Miami?

Beretta: Brickell has become the center of Miami. What was once primarily a business district, is now one of the hottest places to live, work and play. Swire Hotels recognized this when it began to invest in South Florida years ago.

Colin Nagy is the travel and innovation columnist for Skift. Reach him at cjn@skift.com