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**INSIDERS**



## **The Asia Hand: Brian Williams**

*Managing Director, Swire Hotels*

**H**aving worked in the luxury hospitality world on four continents over the last three decades, Brian Williams is leading the international expansion of Hong Kong-based [Swire Hotels](#), which is opening its [first U.S. property](#), East Miami, this spring.

**Let's play spin the globe—name the one place you've always wanted to go.**

After more than 30 years off and on in Asia, I have been ticking off the countries I have wanted to visit. China is a region in itself and I have many parts of China still to visit. I'm quite keen to get to Lijiang, Xinjiang, and Kashgar at some point, but highest on my list for now is Bhutan.

**What's your spirit city? (Where do you want to return to over and over?)**

I would have to say [London](#). It has it all. Arts, culture, restaurants, pubs, clubs, diversity, architecture, green spaces, fun, and familiarity.

**Do you have a travel ritual?**

I have often picked up a Christmas tree decoration if I see one on my travels to give to my wife each year. Needless to say that our tree is now pretty eclectic—no fancy themes in the Williams household!

**Do you maintain any routines from home while traveling or does it all go out the window?**

I will try to get some exercise in the fresh air if I can, especially with jet lag recovery and the need for sunlight. It used to be a run; now it's more of a shuffle.

**Sorry, you only get to eat one regional cuisine for the rest of your life. What is it?**

Probably Italian, but then I can cheat a bit and indulge in crudo and pretend it is sashimi.

**What one piece of advice would you give to someone traveling abroad for the first time?**

Try to see the authentic, less touristy, and older parts of cities if you can. Walk the district; feel the street life and local culture; eat in a local café.

**Describe your travel personality in three words.**

Adventurous, interested, foodie.

**Are your trips very planned, or very spontaneous?**

Both, but I prefer spontaneous or even spontaneous during a planned trip.

**What's the one travel souvenir you'd save in a fire?**

I bought a Burmese thangka on the first trip I made with my wife in 1988, when travel to Burma was still limited.

**What book/movie most inspired you to travel?**

Books by writers such as Paul Theroux, Jan Morris, and Simon Winchester will inspire me to travel every time.

**Who's your ideal travel partner?**

My family. My children are adults and we try to holiday together regularly. We are all interested in and motivated by new places, new cultures, and local food.

**Which travel experience do you prefer: plugged in or unplugged?**

I would prefer unplugged but inevitably I have to stay tuned to my smartphone. One day...

**What's a custom from another culture that you'd love to implement in your life back home?**

I have to say that I admire the Latin cultural tradition of sitting down for lunch, and not just grabbing a sandwich and eating it in the office. In fact, this is very prevalent in China. Very civilized.

**What's the first thing you seek out in a new place?**

Where the locals eat ...

**What's the one thing you indulge in on a trip that you don't at home?**

When in Turkey, I love a wet shave at one of the local barbers. Though I can also get this in Hong Kong or London, it is an indulgence left for holidays (as is not shaving at all!).

**What's your first travel memory?**

My parents took us to Portugal in 1966. I recall customs coming out in a bus to our BOAC plane and doing immigration at the bottom of the plane steps, and our bags being thrown, one by one, from the cargo hold and onto the tarmac. Things have changed a bit since then!