

Ana Gorjão Henriques:

Creating the Experience of a Lifetime



Meet Ana Gorjão Henriques, the new General Manager of Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve soon to open in Ubud, Bali. With more than 20 years of experience in the luxury hotel industry, Ana is a true visionary, a passionate leader and the perfect embodiment of a Ritz-Carlton Lady who fully embraces the values and philosophy by which the Group operates.



Q: Sincerest congratulations on the upcoming opening of Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Ubud! How are things coming along up there and when is the property likely to open?

A: The construction is progressing very well. A lot of the areas are almost ready—the villas, the suites, the restaurants. It's all looking very nice. Let's say we are at 80%. We are hoping to open in the summer of 2015. It's very exciting!

Q: Please tell us a bit about yourself and how you got to where you are today.

A: I'm Portuguese, 47 years old. I have always enjoyed organizing things, cooking, taking care of my friends and family and entertaining them. I went to a prestigious hotel management school in Portugal and during my internship I quickly realized that this is my passion. Upon graduation in 1991, I started working as a cost controller and assistant general manager at a four-star hotel in Lisbon.

I worked for a total of 12 years in sales and marketing as a manager and then a director at numerous five-star properties in Portugal, including The Orient-Express, the Four Seasons Hotel, The Ritz Lisbon, the Pestana Palace Hotel, the Praia Del Rey Marriott Golf & Beach Resort and The Ritz-Carlton Penha Longa Hotel Spa & Golf Resort. Eventually I became the Hotel Manager and, soon after, the General Manager of Penha Longa when my predecessor left.

Then I started to look at "what's next". My predecessor was already in Asia at that time, a region that was experiencing tremendous growth and when asked if I'd be willing to move, I said yes and ended up as the General Manager of Phulay Bay, The Ritz-Carlton's first Reserve in Krabi, Thailand, for two and a half years. It was a very challenging but highly rewarding experience. After that, I told my vice-president of my next wish: to stay longer in Asia, to continue working at a Ritz-Carlton resort and to open a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. He then presented me to the owners of Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve and here I am!

Q: Having worked with the prestigious Ritz-Carlton Group for more than nine years, what do you think really sets the group apart from its competitors?

A: At The Ritz-Carlton our company motto is: "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen." It's all about our people, attention to details and giving our guests exceptional experiences that they will remember for life. It's what sets us apart from other companies.

Every time we recruit new Ladies and Gentlemen, we have an orientation to introduce them to The Ritz-Carlton philosophy. It's rewarding to see them growing, knowing everything by heart and truly living and breathing it. A lot of it cannot be taught; The Ritz-Carlton Culture comes from talent and the heart. For me, The Ritz-Carlton way is the only way. They breed it from the top to the bottom.

all of these in all of the resorts, focusing on attention to details and creating an experience of a lifetime for our guests.

We are opening Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Ubud, and there is also an upcoming project to open a Reserve in Tanah Lot in three years. There is no better place to open a Ritz-Carlton Reserve than Ubud—the culture, the ceremonies, the Balinese way of living—all of which will be recreated in Mandapa.

Q: What were your impressions when you first visited Mandapa as the new General Manager and when you relocated to Ubud, Bali, from Thailand?

A: When I saw the property for the first time in May 2014, I was totally overwhelmed by the beauty of the place, by the forest, the river and the rice fields and by what the project would become. We have 270 degrees of riverfront view! It's beautiful. I love nature. The architectural



Q: Your new property Mandapa, is a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. Could you please explain the key elements that differentiate a Ritz-Carlton Reserve from a Ritz-Carlton Hotel?

A: The Ritz-Carlton Group has more city hotels than resorts. The idea of opening a Reserve came from our President. When he was coming up with the name, he thought about a very exclusive bottle of wine. The concept of a Reserve is that it has to be a small and intimate resort with a maximum capacity of 100 rooms and, most importantly, it's about the location, the local culture and its people. We try to reflect

concept is to recreate a Balinese village in all aspects. I didn't know what a Balinese village was at that time. The understanding came later after I moved here and started to see what a real Balinese village is.

Q: What are the key elements of Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, that you hope will give the property a competitive edge over other hotels in Bali?

A: We are still working on a lot of the concepts, but essentially, it's all about the experiences. We are recreating a Balinese village, bringing

the essence of Ubud—its traditions, culture, craftsmanship, museum and art—into Mandapa. We will organize painting workshops and cooking and offering-making classes, encourage our guests to participate in rice harvesting and involve them in the local temple ceremonies.

Q: How would you compare managing Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, with any of your other hotel experiences?

A: It's all about attention to details and the proximity to our guests. In Thailand, (and it will be the same in Mandapa), I was out on the property a lot, greeting guests at every check-in with our butlers, building close relationships and creating special experiences for them. We were so close that, at times, we became friends and on several occasions, as the guests were departing, some of our butlers cried! The connections and the special bonds we have with the guests are what make their stay truly memorable.

Being around a lot also allowed me to better manage my teams. The more they saw of me, the more approachable I became. It's our "open-door policy". The stronger the management interaction, the more you get out of everybody. It's walking the talk.

Q: What do you perceive as the biggest challenge for Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve?

A: An opening is a challenge in itself, hopefully a good one. The competitors are challenges too. On one road we have five big names and we are the new kid on the block, which is nice, but it can also be challenging to explain what a Ritz-Carlton Reserve is. Even with the two Reserve properties we have in the world, it's a concept that a lot of people still don't understand. We need to push it, put it on the map and spread the word!

The other challenge is more immediate. We are currently facing a lot of different problems: travel alerts for Indonesia, the conflicts in Russia and economy problems in many countries around the world. If it continues this way, it's going to be a challenge to open in such an environment. Challenge is a strong word. Let's call it an opportunity.

Q: Most general managers are men. What is it like working in a male-dominated field and what advice do you have for young women who aspire to this top job?

A: To be honest with you, I don't see a big difference. I have always had very good relations with men, maybe even better than women. It's definitely still a man's world and I think the main reason is (and I believe it's the biggest one), at one point, ladies have babies. They feel the need to put their family and babies before their career. I think that's a mistake. You can still have a family and a career as long as you have good support for the family.

There are 88 Ritz-Carlton properties in the world, but there are only nine female general managers. In Asia, I'm the only one. At The Ritz-Carlton, there are career analyses and management evaluations several times a year and each time we help them get to where they want to be by providing the appropriate training and coaching, if needed.

If you'd like to move forward in your career, my advice is to be strong, persistent and be the best in what you do. Don't give up, be straightforward and ask for what you want. Everything is possible and everyone at The Ritz-Carlton is eager to help make it happen.

Q: How would you describe the current state of Bali's hospitality industry? What are some of the emerging trends that you see?

Down south, new restaurants are opening and competing in luxurious experiences and exciting food and beverage concepts. In Ubud, the trend is all about wellness and spirituality. There are things here that you can't find anywhere else in the world: its friendly people, the yoga culture and the healthy lifestyle. It's comforting to see Ubud growing that way. You see these people with very good vibes going about town and it's contagious. You just have to go with the flow.

Q: How have you changed since you first started out in the luxury hotel industry?

A: I think it was a normal progression; I have grown and evolved with different phases of my life and my positions—maybe in terms of my attention to details, my sense of luxury and my way of living—but apart from that, it's just a way to mature and to grow with my team.

Now as a general manager, I have become more tolerant, more patient and closer to our Ladies and Gentlemen. I was not aggressive, but sometimes I was too straightforward with my team. I've matured a lot. The biggest change in me is probably adapting to all these new experiences and seeing what can make me better.

Q: If you weren't working in the hotel industry, what would be your dream job?

What I do is my dream; it's really what I feel happy doing. The long hours are challenging sometimes, but I don't care! I love my job. At the hotel management school, there were 50 to 60 of us every year and today most of them are no longer in the hospitality industry. A lot of them gave up due to the tough working conditions. For me, it's my passion. I don't see myself doing anything else.

Q: What would be the title of your autobiography, were you to write one?

A: I would not write a book about myself, but perhaps a book about stories within the hotel industry. We have so many unbelievable stories! The problem is that I'm very bad at recording them. I have them in my head, but I will need to start on paper. That I would write, but not a book about me.

Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Ubud

Jalan Kedewatan, Banjar Kedewatan,

Ubud, Bali, 80571, Indonesia

T: (+62) 821 4450 8787

www.mandapareserve.com