Interview with Robert Hogenstijn General Manager of Le Meridien Jakarta



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As the general manager of Le Meridien Jakarta, what is your point of view on the evolution of Jakarta's infrastructure? Do you believe that hosting the APEC 2013 will put Indonesia more in the spotlight?

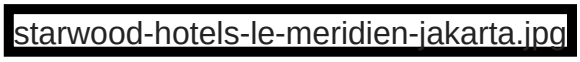
Definitely. I believe that Jakarta and Indonesia– not only just because of the APEC – are already in the spotlight within the South East Asian region. Within the Indonesian economy, infrastructure remains one of the main challenge/issue at the moment. I do not think it is a secret if I say that Jakarta is still plenty of years behind compared to other cities at the moment. If you look at the roads, ports and airports, there still is quite a lot of work to do. So I think this is one of the main challenges the government has to face right now.

Could you please tell us what the government has been doing to improve the infrastructures of Indonesia? Are they performing well? And how do you also imagine Jakarta and Indonesia to be in terms of infrastructure 5 years down the road?

During the last 8 years, a lot of planning has been done. For example, the many new highways around the country, the new bridge to Sumatra, the extension of the port here in Jakarta, etc. So, the plans are all there but the sad thing is that from all the plans just around 15% have been carried

out. Moreover, the real problem is that we are now moving towards the end of the current government by June next year, so a lot of projects will be on hold again. So is the government going into the correct direction? Yes, I would say. But are they going at the right speed? Clearly not.

Then, in terms of how I see Jakarta's infrastructure in 5 years from now, the key aspect is the traffic congestion. Yes, the government has been working on this too, but the road infrastructure still leaves a lot of room for improvement. At the end of the day, addressing this problem will make life for business owners easier as capacity in itself is certainly not the problem.



In your view, what cities could Jakarta possibly mirror or take as a role model for its infrastructure development?

I personally do not think it is good to try to copy any city. But why not compare the growth of Jakarta with what has been happening for the past 10 years in Bangkok, especially in terms of infrastructure. In any case, if someone says: "let us try to be the new Singapore", personally I would see that as too ambitious.

Moving forward to Le Meridien, the hotel you have been managing for the past 4 and a half years. Could you please give a brief history of Le Meridien in Jakarta?

Le Meridien Jakarta has a long history. Since the day it opened in 1992, this hotel has been very unique, providing a boutique hotel experience with a Javanese cultural touch. Now, we are celebrating our 20th anniversary. Originally, we had just one building until we opened an additional building in 1998. We can be proud to say that this hotel is very well established and has a strong brand. Also, our central location is fantastic, as we are easily accessible from everywhere in the city.

Regarding conference and networking infrastructure at Le Meridien Jakarta: which would be the key assets to attract and unite the business community?

First of all, our first class accessibility gives us a ‘TRIPLE A’ advantage in terms of location. Second of all, our team is exceptional. As for the business, I can testify about our strong results. As an example, we have people coming from Singapore for the last 10 to15 years on a weekly basis. Last but not least, there is the entire infrastructure we offer as part of the Starwood Hotels Group. The ease of making bookings, the ease of doing business and the easy access through our own webpage are just a few of our strengths in this regard as well as our Award-Winning SPG Loyalty program.

Looking at the hotel itself, we have 396 luxury rooms, 5 executive floors and a spacious panoramic lounge club on the 20th floor.. Moreover, there are also the many different venues around the hotel, such as a very unique Lebanese restaurant that has been here since 1998 – which is particularly appealing to our growing number of visitors from the Middle East –as well as a delicious Japanese restaurant. Recently, we also renovated 10 smaller functional rooms.

How much of the business relies on visitors from Asia itself?

About two-thirds to 80 per cent of our guests come from Asia, excluding the Middle East). The biggest market is Indonesia itself, followed by Singapore and Malaysia. We have seen a decrease in business coming from Europe, but our visitor numbers from the US has remained stable. China and South Korea are our main growth markets within Asia, while the Middle East and Australia drive our growth from outside of the Asian continent. As for our major accounts, we mainly find people from the banking, IT and consulting sectors.

How would you define your main competitors to provide business infrastructure in Jakarta?

This is difficult to compare, because you normally look at the specific characteristics of the hotel, rather than taking a general benchmark. In any case, within similar location I would consider the Intercontinental, the Marriot hotel and the Shangri-La as our top competitors.

What does the investment agenda for the hotel look like today?

Two to three years ago, our food and beverage venues had partly been renovated, along with all our function rooms on the first floor, as well as the ballroom. From July 2013, we will refurbish our hotel rooms further. Over the next 18 months, we will be renovating the rooms floor by floor in order keep sufficient space for accommodation available. In 2015, we will be renovating our lobby and other public areas. So major upgrades are ongoing.

Though a business entity, you have also been active on the social front, through an initiative called GNOTA. Can you elaborate?

GNOTA is a very famous organization that helps children from poor rural areas to go to school. GNOTA tries to facilitate better conditions for them by providing different kinds of materials. We as a company also launched a sustainability initiative in order to save water, energy, and waste. Then, from the money we save every single month we also donate 2,5%to GNOTA. For two and a half years we have been working with them and we can say that we are really grateful for this initiative. Compared to 5 years ago, we have also really improved our level of sustainability. As a target, we want to save 20% of our electricity bill and 30% of our water bill by 2020.

Have you also been successful in attracting events for the pharmaceutical industry?

Bali – as one of the biggest infrastructure location – is the one that always takes on all of the big events, i.e. those with more than 1000 people. However, we have been hosting different board meetings, annuals meetings, sales meetings, and product launch and training meetings for several pharmaceutical multinational companies like Novartis and Pfizer.

Would you like to share a final message?

It is a huge market here, and there is still so much potential to develop, so now is the time to come. So make sure that you are on time.

Moreover, you should never forget that Indonesia is a very interesting country from a socio-cultural perspective. You have to taste the different life style and the authentic hospitality of its people. Come visit and see what is happening, you won’t be disappointed.

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