

Renovating an iconic hotel

One of Japan's - if not the world's - most iconic hotels, and a member of the select luxury hotel collection, The Leading Hotels of the World, the venerable Hotel Okura Tokyo will from September 2015 embark on a renovation of its main building scheduled for spring 2019.

"There has been such an outpouring of emotion from our customers about the renovation," said hotel Managing Director and General Manager Akira Nishimura, recounting both the heartfelt comments received and memories shared by regular guests upon hearing the news of the main building's temporary cessation.

An extraordinary combination of modernist architecture and Japanese aesthetics, courtesy of a team led by architect Yoshiro Taniguchi, who also created Tokyo's National Museum of Modern Art and the Crown Prince's Palace, Hotel Okura Tokyo occupies a distinguished position among the capital's hotels.

Upon opening in 1962, it set out to be not only an international hotel, but also one that would also embrace Japanese culture and not just imitate its Western counterparts.

Centrally situated in Toranomon amidst the so-called "embassy district," the hotel is also a longstanding choice for visiting dignitaries and has hosted all visiting presidents from the United States and world distinguished guests.

The hotel has developed a reputation as a leading fine dining establishment showcasing the best of Chinese, French and Japanese cuisines. Nishimura says the hotel was quick to welcome culinary visionaries into its kitchens (Raymond Oliver, Alain Ducasse and Joel Robuchon are some of whom have graced the hotel's kitchens) and in turn enabled its own chefs to share their expertise overseas.

During the renovations, some of the main building's restaurants - Toh-Ka-Lin (Chinese), Yamazato (Japanese), Sazanka (Teppanyaki) and the Orchid Bar - will transfer operations to the Hotel's South Wing, an extension of the main building, which was completed in 1973.

Profoundly grateful and mindful of the role guests play within the Okura "family," the hotel is launching a four-stage countdown to the renovation, the "This is Okura" 300 Days Project. The First Stage (Oct. 30, to Jan. 9, 2015) allows participants to make a little bit of history and create everlasting memories via "Hotel



(Left) The venerable main building of the hotel; (above) Joel Robuchon (left) and executive chef Masakichi Ono

Love the wine you're with

Finding the perfect wine to complement a delicious meal at one of the excellent restaurants at the Grand Hyatt Tokyo hotel in Roppongi is much less of a daunting prospect since the hotel welcomed its newest sommelier, Manuel Rodrigues, earlier this year.

Born in Portugal, Rodrigues moved to France's Burgundy region as a child, where he worked alongside his vintner father, gaining an intimate understanding of what goes into making a great bottle of wine and providing the foundation for his future as a sommelier.

Thanks to stints in Dubai and Singapore before his arrival in Tokyo, Rodrigues is comfortable with recommending wines suited to a wide variety of tastes and is extremely careful to consider the best wine to meet diners' requests, rather than pushing the most expensive or best-known option.

To give guests a better understanding of wines and their pairing with different foods, Rodrigues and the hotel have been holding various promotions, including special menus to demonstrate some recommended combinations and wine seminars to teach some of the finer points of wine.

Through Nov. 30, between 6 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., The French Kitchen restaurant is offering "Bistro & Vin," a ¥5,800 set menu created through a collaboration between Rodrigues and the hotel chefs. The menu features an appetizer, daily autumn soup, a choice of fish or chicken, and five wines, including a sparkling, two reds and two whites, all selected by Rodrigues. The vintages have been chosen to best complement the food and are free-flowing for 90 minutes.

In the wine seminars, Rodrigues is aiming to give diners insights into the world of wines in a friendly and comfortable atmosphere. "We try to do them in a fun way and give people a chance to learn a little more about wine in a very relaxed way," Rodrigues said. "When people think of wine seminars, they think of a classroom setting where they are just sitting and listening to a lecture for one or two hours... especially for beginners, the worst thing we can do is to be too aggressive."

The seminars are intimate, limited to about 16 people, as well as educational, with the first teaching guests how red, white, rose, and Champagne and other sparkling wines are made, with the second seminar covering how sweet varietals such as ice wine and port are made. One upcoming seminar is slated to look at Champagne, including information about the region, a history of the wine, how it is made and food pairing, while another will examine the steps involved in tasting and describing wines.

The hotel is also planning events for next year involving the hotel chefs and Rodrigues, where guests will learn about the regions of France. Chefs will show how to prepare traditional dishes from each region and participants can enjoy wines from the areas.

Some people say that properly pairing food and wine is an art; if that is true, Rodrigues and the chefs at the Grand Hyatt Tokyo are working to create a masterpiece.



Managing Director and General Manager Akira Nishimura

Okura Today." Noting that the hotel's famed lobby has never been utilized commercially, Nishimura says that during this stage applications will be accepted (via the hotel's official website) for a limited number of wedding ceremonies to be held there in June or July 2015.

There are also chances to stay in the Royal Suite, usually set aside for eminent guests, as part of the "Legendary Royal Suite Special Stay Plan." Guests can also receive a voucher to stay in the new main building upon opening in spring 2019.

In the next three stages, other exclusive offers will be available to let guests enjoy and remember the hotel until the building's last moment.

The concept of quintessential Japanese hospitality, omotenashi, has gained traction in the lead up to the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Part of the hotel's fabric and something it has embodied for over 50 years, the Hotel Okura Tokyo's new main building will be reborn as a "Made in Japan" luxury hotel to see in the new era, and will continue to preserve and carry on its rich history and tradition.



Manuel Rodrigues

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Respecting other cultures leads to success

ANA, Japan's premiere airline and InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) began a joint venture, ANA InterContinental, in 2006, becoming the largest international hotel operator in Japan.

They now operate 32 hotels with over 9,000 rooms across four main brands - the five-star luxury InterContinental and the upscale ANA Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn and ANA Hotels. The merging of two separate corporate cultures created both challenges and opportunities. In the capable hands of CEO Fergus Stewart, who has been involved since the beginning as the former Regional General Manager of Greater Tokyo Area, IHG ANA Hotels Group Japan, the co-branding of a total of 25 hotels including ANA InterContinental Tokyo is a success story - not only financially, but also in showing how careful management and attention to cultural differences and detail can make a difference.

As Stewart explained: "I think in the initial stages there were a few lessons to be learned in working together as both companies have their own cultures. IHG has its hotel culture and ANA has its airline culture. [At] IHG, it wouldn't be uncommon for people to work for five or six different companies over a 20-year period, while a number of our former Japanese ANA Hotels colleagues were in the same company for 20 years. So, our cultures were quite different.

"As an international hotel operator with an understanding of how to run hotels across different countries, going into a joint venture with the Japan-based international airline ANA worked out well for both of us in terms of cultural best practices. The hospitality industry is primarily a service industry and we believe one of the keys to delivering great guest experiences is a strong performance culture internally. We have spent time developing a systemized, standardized way of measuring and defining what success looks like for our hotels and the corporate offices, and this has worked to our benefit in the partnership with ANA.

"It took time for us to learn how best to tap into each other's domain knowledge, and today we are in a good place. It has been a journey: a little bit of give and take from both sides just to get that right working compatibility, which is where we are now," he concluded.

There were a few key growth areas for IHG in Japan, ranging from corporate expectations to the general culture and in



(Above) Fergus Stewart; (right) The group's flagship hotel, ANA InterContinental Tokyo in the Akasaka district.



the mindset shift of communicating in the Japanese language. Stewart commented, saying: "IHG has been in Japan for many years and we've grown to understand the importance of having a local presence not just through our hotels, but in how we communicate. Now most of our brand standards and training programs are in Japanese."

On the other hand, Stewart had to bring his Japanese staff into the world of international hotel management. He explained, "We also created opportunities for our Japanese managers to attend meetings overseas, which I think was quite unique for them as, working for a predominately Japanese business, traveling abroad on business was not common for them. So we were taking people out of their comfort environment."

The advantages of having an international brand incorporating a trusted name in travel are not lost on Stewart's management strategies. He explained: "We're quite fortunate in having a presence in both sides of the market. But we constantly need to be mindful of finding a middle ground to appeal to both Japanese and international consumers."

And in the rush to accommodate the expected influx of tourists leading up to the 2020 Olympics, Stewart takes a clear and well-thought-out approach.

"I think it's really important that we don't lose sight of who's giving us business - today, tomorrow and leading up to the

Olympic period. We would like to enhance our capabilities in looking after international travelers to the world-class city of Tokyo. We also own the world's largest hotel loyalty program, IHG Rewards Club, which has over 80 million members today, and it is a strong sales channel for us. We always ensure we take care of all our loyalty members when they stay with us and this helps draw more international guests to our hotels in Japan. We've got to make sure that we continue to look after those guests who support us and keep coming back to stay with us. And not just try and benefit from a two or three-week period during that Olympic time."

One of Stewart's personal goals is to have more female leaders to take the helm in key positions, such as being the general manager of IHG's hotels. He highlighted another goal: "Personally, I need to learn Japanese. To be respectful to the Japanese people here I need to make a greater effort to speak their language. So, that's what I'll be doing on a personal level."

IHG ANA Hotels Group Japan and their hotels' road to success has been carefully developed by attending to cultural differences and being respectful to them, working with them and integrating them into international corporate culture. Stewart makes it a personal mission - and it shows.



Bistro dishes prepared using fresh autumn ingredients are on offer, along with a selection of free-flowing French wines, chosen by Hotel Sommelier Manuel Rodrigues.



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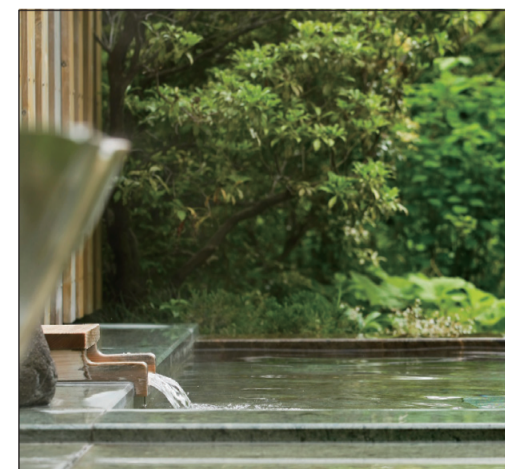
The logo for this project uses the Main Building's "mitsuya" three arrow style construction as the motif, conveying a sense of the Hotel Okura Tokyo.

Countdown to Main Building Renovation "This is Okura" 300 Days

Reconstruction of the Main Building of the Hotel Okura Tokyo will begin in September 2015, with scheduled completion in spring 2019. To express our gratitude to our guests throughout the years, a 300-day, four-stage, commemorative event "This is Okura" will be held from October 30, 2014 through August 31, 2015 offering opportunities to rediscover the charms of the Main Building.

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hotel special

(Publicity)

Haneda sees nation's first transit hotel

If Japan is famous for its *omotenashi* (hospitality) around the world, a new service to further strengthen the message is now available at Tokyo's Haneda airport, a gateway to Japan. Royal Park Hotel The Haneda, Tokyo opened September to provide an option for passengers on layovers.

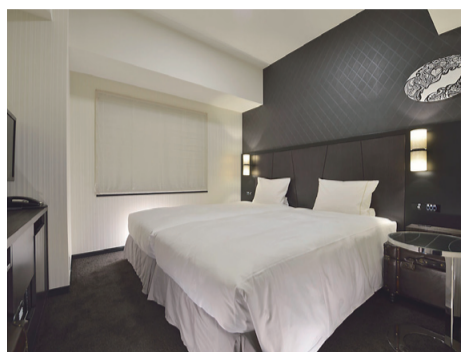
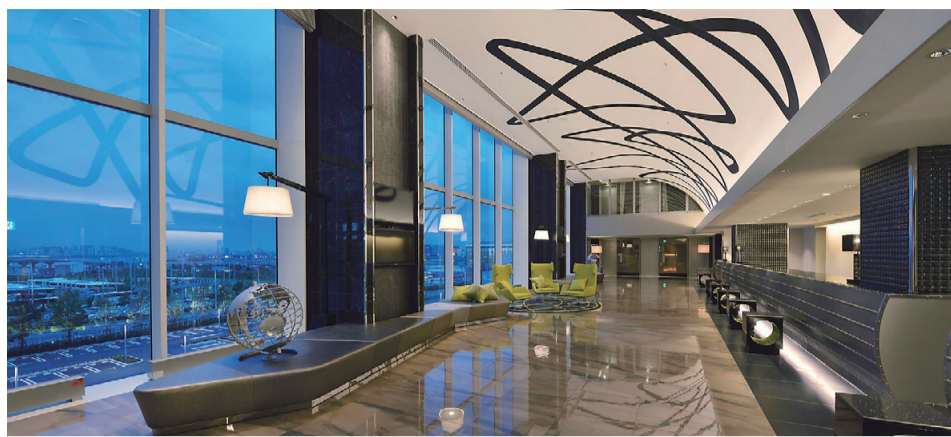
To accommodate and better serve the increasing number of international flights, the hotel — the first transit hotel in Japan — offers a variety of rooms, services and amenities to welcome customers and provide them with a more comfortable travel experience.

Specializing in comfort and elegance, the hotel offers transit passengers or anyone else using the airport comfortable accommodations; a variety of food is available at the restaurant and bar that is open for breakfast, lunch, dinner; meeting rooms; a business area complete with computers and printers; and refresh rooms, which offer shower facilities and a quiet space in which to relax.

Offering a variety of options, the hotel has 313 rooms in total, and each room has been designed to meet the needs of both business and leisure travelers. In addition to amenities and service items to satisfy any customers demands, the rooms are equipped with mattresses by Serta — the top supplier to U.S. hotels — to help travelers freshen up.

An overnight stay without breakfast is offered from ¥10,500 including tax and a service charge.

The hotel, in collaboration with various artists, including both professionals and students, has selected art works from



(Clockwise from left) Hollywood Twin room; the hotel's outer terminal reception lobby; transit hotel reception.

among those submitted by 305 artists to display in each room so the hotel can serve as a venue for artists to make their art known to the public. On the fourth floor, 18 selected works are displayed as well.

The biggest feature as a transit hotel, is the smaller "transit" section, located within the airport's inner-terminal zone for the passenger who has just landed after a long flight and will transit at Haneda. The hotel's "Transit Area" offers 17 guest rooms, eight refresh rooms with showers and a lounge.

It has a separate entrance and lounge, and without crossing into the hotel's outer-terminal area, or even having to clear passport control, passengers can directly access the facilities after embarkation procedures.

For travelers seeking only a place to rest until their next flight, or after their long

flight, the general area offers six refresh rooms, each with a sofa, television and shower, intended for short-stay use at ¥2,000, and ¥3,000 for the rooms in the transit area. There is no need to reserve in advance.

The hotel's restaurant and bar "Tailwind" is open from 5 a.m. to 1 a.m. to welcome anyone in any occasion with its various dishes. In the morning, from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m., a healthy breakfast both Western and Japanese style buffet is available for ¥2,500 per person to give travelers a jump start to their days.

The number of international passengers is expected to increase as Haneda expands the number of slots for international flights, therefore the hotel would play a significant role in the future.

Anniversary plan offers a heavenly sleep

The Westin Tokyo marked its 20th anniversary on the 14th of this month and, in celebration of this milestone year, the hotel is holding a year-long anniversary fair and offering special events and offers throughout the hotel's facilities, covering the restaurants, accommodations, spa and wedding areas.

Opened in 1994, the luxurious European style hotel has welcomed a great many customers from all over the world and has provided them with its trademark exquisite service and wonderful food based on the concept of "Timeless Elegance." As a pioneer of the foreign luxury hotel in Japan, The Westin Tokyo has gained accolades and recognition from guests from around Japan and the world.

One of the biggest offers during the anniversary fair is an accommodation package called "Sleep Well," offered through December 20.

The package allows customers to stay for two days in the hotel's most luxurious rooms, the Imperial Suite or the Presidential Suite, both of which are five times larger than a standard room and come with a dining space, cozy sitting area, spacious bathroom and other amenities and luxuries that will allow guests an unprecedented amount of pampering.

As a part of its brand mission "For a Better You," that aims to have customers leave feeling better than when they arrived at its hotels, Westin Hotels & Resorts has introduced the "Heavenly Bed," featuring a pillow-top mattress, down comforter and luxurious, all-white bed linens. It was an immediate success in when it was introduced in 1999 and remains hugely popular today. The original exclusive bed is installed in all Westin rooms to offer customers restorative



(Clockwise from right) The Westin Tokyo's exclusive Heavenly Bed; the spacious sitting area of the Presidential Suite; the Imperial Suite's relaxing bedroom



sleep that is crucial for maintaining both mental and physical health.

Those guests taking advantage of the "Sleep Well" package can, after enjoying their stay, receive a king-size edition of the superfine bed, including all the accessories such as pillows and bed sheets, allowing them to continue to enjoy the same relaxing sleep in the comfort of their own homes.

During their stay, customers can also enjoy access to the exclusive Westin Executive Club Lounge on the 17th floor, where they can enjoy breakfast, tea and cocktail service with a splendid view of the Tokyo Metropolis.

The "Sleep Well" accommodation

package is available at ¥1,000,000 for double occupancy for two nights, including consumption tax and a service charge. For additional details, information and reservations are available at 03-5423-7770.

The Westin Tokyo is located in Ebisu and although it is only one stop away from Shibuya and two stops away from Roppongi, the hotel stands in a very tranquil residential district, making it one of the city's best options for both leisure and business occasions. Additionally, the hotel's lush garden, The Westin Garden, provides a calm and restful space to help customers relax and unwind.

One-of-a-kind Pokémon Hotel Experience

For young "Pokémon Trainers" around the world, The Peninsula Tokyo is now the newest hunting field to test their skills.

This month, the hotel launched a unique accommodation plan called the "Pokémon Hotel Adventure: The Power of Ten," in collaboration with the Pokémon Company. An exclusive collaboration of this kind is unprecedented in Tokyo, and the result is a fun, innovative, customized interactive Pokémon hotel experience.

Guests aged five and up are welcome to don a Pikachu hat and, equipped with a Poké Ball, a magnifying glass, a copy of "The Pokémon Times," a detective's journal and a map, set forth on a fun and imaginative hotel-wide quest to seek out various Pokémon characters hiding throughout the elegant property.

This interactive plan has been designed exclusively for the hotel by the Pokémon Company. It is offered in both English and Japanese, and those customers who book the package can enjoy playing a deputy investigator while following the trail to seek out the missing characters at the time of check-in.

The activity begins once registered guests have collected their set of adventure goods at the front desk. Reports published in the latest issue of "The Pokémon Times" suggest that some Pokémon characters have begun to disappear on the hotel premises. Lucario has been assigned to the case as special investigator along with a senior detective, but they need the guests' help to solve the mystery and locate where the characters are being magically transported. The hunt for the lost Pokémon characters concludes in a secret chamber



(Left) A Peninsula pageboy poses with players of the hotel's Pokémon plan. (Above) Pageboy Pikachu plush doll.

deep within the hotel, specially designed for the climactic ending. Advanced optics technology creates an augmented experience of reality with a "magic mirror" that makes this adventure fun and exciting for participants of all ages.

Upon completion of the experience, players will be rewarded with an original Pageboy Pikachu doll, which is not available for purchase.

Offered room types are the Deluxe Room (¥100,000) and Deluxe Suite (¥200,000). Each room type will be available for triple occupancy. Prices are subject to a service charge, tax and per-person Tokyo accommodation tax. All rates are quoted on a per room, per night basis and are valid for single, double or triple oc-

cupancy. A fourth occupant is permitted if three years of age or younger.

The package plan includes Pikachu hats and dolls for two, American breakfast for three and complimentary use of the hotel's fitness facility and swimming pool. The "Pokémon Hotel Adventure: The Power of Ten," is a wonderful opportunity for families to experience the magic and imagination of the Pokémon world, and for children of all ages to realize their dreams of becoming Pokémon trainers.

Pokémon is not all that is happening at The Peninsula Tokyo this autumn; as the leaves start to turn vibrant shades of red, yellow and orange, the hotel will also decorate the hotel interior with a seasonal motif, offering a big fall welcome to customers.

From Nov. 1 to 9, nine magnificent maple trees will be placed in the hotel lobby. Each stands nearly three meters tall and they will be illuminated with Japanese *washi* paper lanterns and surrounded by 64 yellow and orange flower table arrangements.

By day, Tokyo and the world can pass under the lobby's maple-leaf canopy while being serenaded by traditional Japanese *shakuhachi* flute music. By night, guests are treated to a serene setting with flickering *washi* paper lanterns, ivory walls and wooden lattices which echo the *senbongoshi* wooden lattice architecture of old Kyoto, the nation's former capital that remains the center of Japanese culture even today.

During this time, the hotel's lounge restaurant, The Lobby will offer an Autumn Leaves Afternoon Tea inspired by the season, priced at ¥3,900 per person.



The hotel's spacious lobby is decorated with nine magnificent maple trees.

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