

InterContinental opens first of five hotels for Vietnam

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Perched on the edge of a fabled city lake, the InterContinental Hanoi Westlake officially opens its doors March 6 as the UK-based hotel group's first property in Vietnam.

After a soft opening in mid-December, the 359-unit hotel shows off its polish in a market where the demand for upscale accommodation has never been greater.

'We couldn't get our doors open fast enough,' said Jon Nielsen, general manager of the InterContinental. 'In many ways, Hanoi is one of the most happening cities in Asia, for business and leisure travelers alike. As a hotel, we've got to respect the unique dynamics of this city, and its demand for the authentic and the progressive. That's why we're breaking the mold of what a big-city hotel is all about.'

Located just 10 minutes from the heart of Hanoi, the waterfront hotel evokes a resort-like ambiance with its torch-lit Venetian promenades and hard-to-find airiness in Vietnam's bustling capital. Balconies jut from each of the hotel's 340 rooms and 19 suites, all with singular views of the 500-hectare (1,235-acre) lake, the cityscape or the property's tropical gardens.

The Westlake hotel is anchored by a 161-room main building that functions as its own island and complemented by three pavilions, each with 66 rooms and suites.

'We've married the best of both worlds here,' said Nielsen. 'Proximity to the cultural heart of Vietnam and a sanctuary on the edge of a spectacular lake. That we've been able to successfully have it both ways continues to fuel our anticipation for this property. There's nothing else like this in Vietnam.'

At a 43-square-meter minimum, the InterContinental's guest rooms rank as the most spacious in the city. The rooms indulge the latest in modern technological amenities, with LCD televisions and high-speed Internet access. Each bathroom offers double-basin vanities and both a deep-soaking bathtub and a separate walk-in rain shower cabin.

In the suites, the accommodation steps up with an array of welcome amenities and services, from Bose entertainment systems to around-the-clock butler service. In both suites and rooms, the Vietnamese Contemporary décor reinterprets familiar Vietnamese designs, from sitting room chairs that echo Nguyen Dynasty aesthetics to reading lamp shades styled like West Lake fishing traps.

'Historically, West Lake, or Tay Ho as it's known locally, was the preserve of Vietnam's Ly and Tran royalty, as well as the country's mandarins, who built summer homes on these shores,' said Nielsen. 'We do feel a responsibility to uphold that heritage with a hotel that caters to the very highest expectations.'

Next door to the hotel is the Kim Lien (Golden Lotus) Pagoda, a site made famous by a Tran Dynasty princess in the 12th Century and later consecrated by the construction of a pagoda in the 17th Century.

Expectations are soaring all over Vietnam as the country's GDP gallops at a nine percent rate of growth, reputed to be among the fastest, if not the fastest, in the world. The InterContinental has positioned itself as a service provider in this economy with a ballroom that can accommodate 400 guests and meeting rooms equipped with technical support that includes Internet coverage, video conferencing and projection capabilities.

Beyond accommodation and conference facilities, the hotel whets the appetite and the thirst with a bevy of dining and lounge options. The hotel's signature restaurant, the Milan-Saigon, sprawls across the entire mezzanine level of the main building as a stylish, fusion of contemporary European and rustic Asian aesthetics.

The Milan-Saigon satisfies a desire for transparency and bustle with its glass-encased show kitchens, featuring both Italian and pan-Asian cuisine, and for respite in its smart, private dining rooms. The bar and lounge lure pre- and post-dinner patrons with a hip setting and a long wine list.

The dining options shift gears at Café du Lac, a classic brasserie that fronts the expansive lake waters. Referencing the great cafes of Paris, the chic dining venue blends wood, stone and light colors, inspiring a relaxed atmosphere for informal dining.

An icon in the making, the Sunset Bar occupies its own island in a lake that ranks as one of Hanoi's great attractions. Currently under construction, a 14-kilometer footpath will circumnavigate the lake, taking in the storied pagodas of Tran Quoc and Kim Lien, as well as the flower villages of Tay Ho and Nghi Tam.

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