



Beyond the Lobby:

How One GM Built a Culture of Connection from Oman to Washington

From a 10-year-old enchanted by the scent of a hotel lobby in Oman to a transformative leader at the **Gaithersburg Marriott Washingtonian Center**, **Vivin Kuriakose**, General Manager, exemplifies what it means to be a true trendsetter in hospitality. Under his leadership, the property has become one of the most consistently high-performing hotels in its market, often running at or near full occupancy. Vivin's journey reminds us that great leadership in hospitality is not just about operational excellence but about creating cultures where both associates and guests feel genuinely cared for.

The Magic That Sparked a Career

Every journey begins with a single moment of inspiration. For Vivin, that moment wasn't in a classroom but in the grand lobbies of Oman's most iconic hotels. As a child, he was mesmerized by the aroma, the stunning décor, and the impeccable service at places like the Al Bustan Palace Hotel (now The Ritz-Carlton) and the InterContinental. Those early impressions planted the seeds for a lifelong passion.

From Aeronautical Engineering to Hospitality Management

Though his early ambitions were set on aeronautical engineering in the United States, fate had other plans. Just months before graduation, a presentation by Merit-Swiss Hotel School at his high school in Muscat rekindled memories of those enchanting hotel visits. The presentation proved to be a turning point, inspiring Vivin to pivot toward hospitality. While his parents were initially hesitant, they soon recognized his passion and supported his enrollment at a leading hotel school, the beginning of what would become a remarkable career.

The Mentors Who Forged a Leader

Vivin's leadership philosophy was deeply shaped during his early years at the Renaissance Mumbai. Working under hospitality stalwarts like **Rajeev Menon** (now CEO for APEC Marriott) and **Neeraj Govil** (now COO for APEC Marriott), he witnessed Marriott's people-first culture in action. His first Director of Human Resources, **Gurmeet Singh**, reinforced the importance of care, respect, and even fun in the workplace. These leaders became part of Vivin's personal "board of directors," offering guidance throughout his career. Today, he continues that legacy by mentoring emerging leaders himself.



**VIVIN
KURIAKOSE**

General Manager,
Gaithersburg Marriott Washingtonian Center





Mastering the Pivot: From APAC to the U.S.

Transitioning from a strong reputation in the APAC region to starting over in the U.S. was both exciting and daunting. Adapting to the U.S. hotel model, often run with leaner staffing, was a challenge Vivin embraced with resilience and patience. His ability to learn quickly and build relationships paid off, earning him a nomination for Marriott's prestigious Emerging Leaders Program. The experience reinforced one of his core beliefs: success comes from trusting the process while staying prepared.

The Modern GM: A Culture Driver and Strategist

For Vivin, the role of a General Manager extends far beyond operations. He sees himself as a **culture driver**, aligning people, strategy, and resources to create exceptional guest experiences. He also believes today's GMs must think like owners, mastering not just operations but also sales, revenue, and asset management. His people-first approach shines in initiatives like the launch of the **Tiki Bar & Grill**, where team involvement from the start fostered ownership and pride, ultimately leading to record-breaking guest satisfaction scores.

Navigating Crisis with Empathy

The pandemic brought some of the toughest challenges of Vivin's career, including the painful task of making staff reductions. He navigated the uncertainty with transparency and empathy, ensuring his team never felt left in the dark. By working alongside them at the front desk or delivering meals, he reinforced the message that they were in it together. The experience underscored the power of resilience, empathy, and connected teams, lessons that continue to guide his leadership today.



The Future of Hospitality: Human Connection Meets Technology

Looking ahead, Vivin is energized by the shift toward personalized, experience-driven hospitality. At Gaithersburg Marriott, his team is embracing technology, from mobile platforms to trial initiatives like robot room deliveries, not to replace human service but to enhance it. By leveraging data and feedback, they're crafting tailored experiences for guests, from personalized event packages to anticipating Bonvoy Elite preferences. For Vivin, the future lies in blending innovation with genuine human connection.



A Legacy Built on People, Not Titles

When asked about legacy, Vivin is clear: he wants to be remembered for the leaders he helped develop and the opportunities he created for others. His advice to aspiring hoteliers reflects this philosophy: "Make every decision through a people-first lens. When you take care of your people, everything else naturally follows."

Finding Balance Beyond the Lobby

Despite overseeing one of the busiest hotels in the market, Vivin prioritizes balance. Whether enjoying the festive season or relaxing at Virginia Beach, he models the importance of recharging. He believes that when associates see their leader valuing personal well-being, it encourages them to do the same, creating a healthier and more sustainable work culture.