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Aman Group CEO Vladislav Doronin Builds on the Past to Create Hotels of the Future

Wards by COCO MARETT | August 22, 2022



Following the recent opening of Aman New York, we spoke with Vladislav Doronin, CEO of Aman Group, about his beliefs on respect, growth, and why building a hotel empire is more than just a numbers game

 VIEW GALLERY

“We celebrate our destinations, rather than commandeer them,” says Vladislav Doronin, CEO of [Aman Group](#). I’m speaking to Doronin by video chat, just weeks before the August opening of Aman New York, the brand’s second city property after Aman [Tokyo](#), which the Miami-based businessman promises will be “one of the best hotels in the world”.

It's something I hear a lot as an editor who covers travel, and I've learnt to take it with a grain of salt. But in fairness, Aman has earned its bragging rights.

For one, 15 of Aman's properties are built within or near Unesco heritage sites: Amangalla sits within the ramparts of the 17th-century Galle Fort in the historic port of Galle, Sri Lanka; Amanzoe in Greece is surrounded by the Unesco-protected ruins of the Peloponnese; Aman Kyoto in Japan is walking distance from the Kinkaku-ji Temple; and Amansara in Siem Reap, Cambodia, is nestled within the haunting and historic Angkor Archaeological Park.

Doronin believes the Aman brand plays a role as a custodian of the unquities of each destination. Amanjiwo in Central Java, Indonesia, for example, has a resident anthropologist to offer guests in-depth insights on the customs, history and spirituality of the region.

"It's important to connect local culture, surrounding nature and design to each hotel," he says. "We take our cues from the environment, working with natural materials and visionary architects who know the soul of the Aman brand."

Such architects include the late greats Ed Tuttle and Kerry Hill, and Belgian architect-designer Jean-Michel Gathy, who has become a regular Aman collaborator, working on various properties including Aman New York.



The indoor pool at Aman New York.

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Aman New York occupies the storied Crown Building on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, which was built in 1921 and designed by architects Warren & Wetmore—the same visionaries behind New York landmarks such as Grand Central Station and the Helmsley Building. The laborious and loving restoration of Crown Building—which had been among the most expensive retail and office space locations in the US—cost Aman a slick US\$1.3 billion.

“This is a milestone not just for the brand, but personally a very important project,” says the 59-year-old CEO. “It’s a piece of history. You can always build new skyscrapers, but an icon like Crown Building is irreplaceable.”

Despite having 25 storeys to work with, the hotel houses just 84 rooms and suites, and 22 apartments under the Aman Residences brand—each with its own working fireplace, which is quite the treat.

“For a place like New York City, 84 guest rooms is considered boutique,” says Doronin, emphasising that his goal in growing Aman’s portfolio of city properties was not about increasing volume, but to “apply what we had in our resorts, but instead of it existing horizontally, it’s vertically”.

“What is important—and what no one has done in major cities—is that we are generous with space and offer our guests beautiful surroundings and large amenities.”

We celebrate our destinations, rather than commandeer them

— Vladislav Doronin

In New York, this includes a 25,000 sq ft Aman Spa spread across three storeys, a private members’ club, a library, a cigar room and a jazz club. “I love jazz,” says Doronin, who is keen to bring back the culture of high-end jazz supper clubs to New York—think Café Carlyle and the like. He’s also jazzed about Aman New York’s 7,000 sq ft wraparound terrace with its dramatic landscaping, reflective pools and firepits.

Aman’s generosity with space has served it well. During the pandemic, its properties in destinations that weren’t under lockdown performed better in the years 2020 and 2021 than 2019. “It took us completely by surprise,” says Doronin, who attributes this success to Aman’s commitment to providing each guest with ample room and privacy. “During the pandemic, we had a lot of guests staying with us long term, some for months at a time, working remotely and taking care of their health and their families,” he says, adding that the notoriously fierce loyalty of Aman fans also helped.



Aman New York's terrace is one of a kind in the city

“Aman has the highest repeat rate for guests in the hotel industry,” Doronin tells me. Indeed, its cult-like following is the envy of its peers in the industry. There’s even an unofficial title for these loyalists: Aman junkies, travellers who have stayed in at least five or six Aman properties.

It does take one to know one, however, and there is truly no bigger Aman junkie than Doronin himself.

His history with the brand began in 1990, while he was living and working in Hong Kong as a commodities trader. He was an avid traveller, and a friend suggested that he check out a new hotel in Phuket called [Amanpuri](#), the first Aman resort.

“I had never experienced anything like that before. It was very private, with exceptional space, design and personalised service,” says Doronin. “In Sanskrit, Amanpuri means ‘place of peace’, and this perfectly captures the feeling when you visit this amazing property, which is still one of my favourites in the Aman portfolio.”

He was hooked, and began planning his travels around destinations where there were Aman resorts, from Java, Indonesia and Rajasthan, India to Bhutan. In 2014, he bought the hotel group’s 26 existing properties from Indonesian hotelier and Aman founder Adrian Zecha, for a reported US\$358 million.

Now, Aman has 34 hotels and resorts in 20 countries, and counting. Aman Nai Lert in [Bangkok](#) is slated to open in 2023, along with the launch of Aman’s new sister brand, Janu, with destinations in Tokyo, Montenegro and Saudi Arabia’s AlUla. Plans have also been announced for Aman Beverly Hills in Los Angeles, which will be set among 3.25 hectares of botanical gardens.

With such rapid expansion, one has to wonder whether the integrity of the Aman brand risks being compromised. But Doronin, ever stoic and certain, isn’t worried about that.

“We have brand loyalists who, now, we see their children come and stay with us and, in some cases, even their grandchildren. People continue to love connecting with the brand. It doesn’t matter if it’s a resort or city; people who stay at Aman know they will always find privacy, peace and unparalleled service.”

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