

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



**VIRGIN HOTELS ANNOUNCES BRAND LEADERSHIP TEAM  
ADDITIONS AND PROMOTION**

*Seasoned Industry Veterans Appointed to Leadership Team to Helm Food & Beverage, IT, and Entertainment and Partnership Initiatives*

**Miami, FL (January 15, 2019)** — Virgin Hotels, the lifestyle hotel brand by Sir Richard Branson, is pleased to welcome two new members of the team: **Owen Deignan** as the new Director of Food & Beverage Operations, and **Denise Walker** as the new Vice President of Information Technology. Additionally, Virgin Hotels announces the promotion of **Blake Smith** from Executive Director of Entertainment to Vice President of Entertainment & Brand Partnerships.

Owen Deignan, who was based in Chicago, brings 24 years of experience to the brand, and will be responsible for the food & beverage operations of all Virgin Hotels, including the highly anticipated Virgin Hotels San Francisco, opening in 2019. Deignan will work closely with the senior leadership team to develop and execute Virgin's strategic plan to drive growth and profitability in the culinary space, largely focusing on the evolution of the Commons Club concept and developing individual dining destinations in future Virgin Hotels.

Jay Wetzel, Vice President of Virgin Hotels Food & Beverage, remarked, "Owen was instrumental in the success of Commons Club and crafting the seasonal strategy for Cerise at Virgin Hotels Chicago which has seen unparalleled success this year. In addition, Owen has proved that strong leadership skills, pinpoint focus and comradery are the key ingredients in building a great team."

A graduate of Kendall College with an AAS in Culinary Arts, Deignan has worked with a number of food & beverage visionaries including Jean George Vongerichten, Ian Schrager and Hubert Keller. Prior to joining Virgin Hotels, Owen was Director of Operations of Snap Kitchen, a market-based concept company with Austin roots.

Denise Walker, who is based in Miami, is a seasoned Senior Global IT Leader and Operations Executive, and brings 15 years of experience in corporate operations management from a global company. Walker has successfully developed and led an accomplished, talented team of IT leaders and professionals to support, evolve and transform, IT infrastructure and business solutions one of the most highly-recognized, brands in the hospitality industry, Brookfield Hospitality.

Raul Leal, CEO of Virgin Hotels, stated, "Her track record speaks for itself by increasing performance through strategic planning, business process re-engineering, technology innovation and change management. Walker is a passionate, high-energy, result-driven leader, contributor and collaborator that is motivated to deliver organizational and operational excellence by leveraging her strengths and capabilities."

Blake Smith, who is based in Chicago, has overseen entertainment initiatives for the brand since 2014. Smith has booked over 400 bands and musical acts to perform at Virgin Hotels Chicago's two entertainment venues, Upstairs and Cerise, as well as organized partnerships and activations with renowned Chicago music festivals Pitchfork and Lollapalooza. Stepping into his new role as Vice President of Entertainment & Brand Partnerships, Smith will create brand-wide entertainment initiatives and partnerships to be implemented at new Virgin Hotels properties as the brand expands this year, creating an entertainment program that provides guests and locals alike with unparalleled cultural experiences.

"Entertainment is an integral part of our brand's DNA and we're honored to have Blake at the helm of this division," said Doug Carrillo, Vice President of Sales & Marketing at Virgin Hotels. "Blake has played a pivotal role in the success of Virgin Hotels Chicago's entertainment initiatives, cementing the hotel as a go-to destination for entertainment in the city, and we're excited to see how he grows this program to new properties as our brand expands this year."

The company's first property, Virgin Hotels Chicago, opened in 2015. In terms of new development, Virgin Hotels San Francisco is slated to open in 2019. The brand has broken ground on four locations: New York, Dallas, Nashville and Edinburgh, UK. Forthcoming hotels have also been announced in Palm Springs, New Orleans, Silicon Valley and Washington DC Union Market, including the newest acquisition, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas.

To learn more about Virgin Hotels, visit [www.virginhotels.com](http://www.virginhotels.com). To learn more about future developments, please visit <https://development.virginhotels.com/>.

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**About Virgin Hotels:**

Virgin Hotels is a lifestyle hospitality brand that combines heartfelt service, straightforward value and a seamless, personalized hotel experience with the track record of innovation and smart disruption that Sir Richard Branson's global Virgin Group has pioneered for over 40 years. Each property intermixes a passion for food and beverage with music and culture, fusing with the local landscape and providing a vibrant and inclusive environment for travelers and locals alike. Virgin Hotels Chicago - named the "#1 Hotel in United States" in 2016, and "#1 Hotel in Chicago" in both 2016 and 2017, by the Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Awards. Virgin Hotels San Francisco will open in 2019. Locations in Nashville, Dallas, New York, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, Silicon Valley, Palm Springs, Edinburgh, Las Vegas and others are to follow. Virgin Hotels continues to explore hotel and office conversions as well as ground-up development in cities such as Boston, Los Angeles, Miami, Austin, Seattle, and London.

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