

## Hugo Slimbrouck – Regional director of Sales - Ovation Global DMC



I was born and I lived in Bruges for most of my life and in my heart I still do; although we have changed the medieval cobble stone streets in West-Vlaanderen for countryside living in Flemish Brabant four years ago. I am the proud father of 3 grown up children from a first marriage and more recently of Lola, born in Brussels in 2005. My son and his wife promoted me to granddad as well when they got their firstborn a year ago. So I got some mileage one could say.

Since 1979 I have been active in the hotel and meetings industry. I have travelled the world, always worked for premium brand companies or created new businesses and launched projects such as the Bruges Convention Bureau in 1995. In the course of this career, I became involved in an exciting association called SITE for which I have served 7 years on the international board and in 2007 I was global president.

Professionalism, networking, pro-activity, ethics, humour and 'joie de vivre' are key components in my professional development and private life. I joined the MCI Group in 2005 with the intention of participating in the development of a worldwide DMC brand which we later branded Ovation Global DMC. Four years down the road, we are a world recognized leader with 18 fully owned offices and 42 strategic partners. Most recently I was asked to lead the strategic and preferred partnerships and grow the network to 100 DMC locations around the world.

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### Hugo's favorites – restaurants

#### A quick bite:

Quick bites I normally cook myself and there are so many nice eating places around but to cut to a decision, I'd say our favorite for the moment is a well known Italian (Al Peperone) in Wommel. It's close to our home, the waiters are always friendly and

helpful – and continue to speak Italian of course, as if they were imported yesterday - and the food is fabulous. Why would they need a website if they are always fully booked and thrive on the word of mouth. So here's the number to call: 02 460 75 20

#### **A serious Tête à Tête:**

When we lived in Brussels and before Lola came into our lives, Catherine and I went out for dinner 2 or 3 times a week and discovered a world of great eating places and top class restaurants. As a DMC you constantly need to know all the new places, what works and what does not. It's not good for your diet but it's good for your business. Our favorites were Bleu de Toi - <http://www.bleudetoi.be/> , Chalet de la Fôret, le Grill aux Herbes d'Evan and a small Italian around the corner from Cath's apartment which unfortunately changed owner and lost all its charm. If the serious tête à tête is business like, my favorite has always been and still is the Maison du Boeuf at the Brussels' Hilton. Try the beef from the trolley! - [http://www1.hilton.com/en\\_US/hi/hotel/BRUHITW-Hilton-Brussels-hotel/index.do](http://www1.hilton.com/en_US/hi/hotel/BRUHITW-Hilton-Brussels-hotel/index.do)

#### **Business, Business, Business:**

I have now tasted every version of a Club Sandwich and Hamburger in room service you can't even think off. One of my major quality criteria of a hotel is the quality of the Caesar's salad or Club Sandwich. I'm travelling about 100 days a year and although many people think I live a glorious and eventful life (which is sometimes true) it's also true that most of these night's at hotels, I don't even see the restaurant as I'm working in my room after a day of client and prospect visits, trade shows or meetings an need to check my mails or prepare for projects and reports.

#### **When I travel abroad I'd like to stay in...**

A contemporary hotel with a clean room that has a nice bathroom, trendy style and perfect WIFI internet access. That is if I'm travelling on business.

However, for family holidays, we really like to explore small country side inns and chambers d'hôte. When I travel in the mountains with my hiking friends, overnight accommodation can indeed be extremely basic, but then you are so tired, you don't even hear yourself snore.

Great hotels I stayed in the most recent years were the Hotel Kamp in Helsinki, the new Clarion in Stockholm - <http://www.clarionstockholm.com/> , the Paris Hilton Arc de Triomphe - [http://www1.hilton.com/en\\_US/hi/hotel/PARDTHI-Hilton-Arc-de-Triomphe-Paris-hotel/index.do](http://www1.hilton.com/en_US/hi/hotel/PARDTHI-Hilton-Arc-de-Triomphe-Paris-hotel/index.do) , Hotel des Indes in The Hague - <http://www.hoteldesindesthehague.com/> and W New York - <http://www.starwoodhotels.com/whotels/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=9>

[7502&PS=PS aa SSP MA W New York POP 102908 NAD FM](#) – The Court (the two last ones managed by Belgian GM's!), the Abama in Tenerife (great golf!) - <http://www.abamahotelresort.com/> , the Fitzpatrick in Dublin - <http://www.fitzpatrickcastle.com/> (you must see the penthouse suite!) just to name a few.

Hotels that made a great impression on me in the past were the Earth Lodge in South Africa - <http://www.sabisabi.com/lodges/earthlodge> as well as the Waldorf-Astoria - <http://www.waldorfastoria.com/> (the mother of all business hotels in the world) in New York. Great places were also some Haciendas I visited in the Merida province of Mexico. An experience of a lifetime: some of the Maharajah palaces (especially Devi Gargh!) - <http://www.deviresorts.com> and the ultimate luxury of Oberoi in New Delhi and Rajasthan - [http://www.oberoihotels.com/oberoi\\_delhi/index.asp](http://www.oberoihotels.com/oberoi_delhi/index.asp) . But also the Coconut Grove in Kerala made a lasting impression on me. In Jordan I have very good memories of camping out in Wadi Rum <http://www.wadirum.jo/> .

When we had SITE board meetings we were often hosted by the destination in the grand luxury palace hotels of the world and in this league nothing beats the Burj al Arab in Dubai - <http://www.jumeirah.com/en/Hotels-and-Resorts/Destinations/Dubai/Burj-Al-Arab/> and the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi - <http://www.emiratespalace.com/en/home/index.htm> .

### **City**

Well, nothing beats my home town but some cities have impressed me a lot and they are Barcelona, Hamburg, San Diego, Chicago, Paris, London, New York, Stockholm, Florence, Marrakech and Edinburgh. For a small town boy, I like the big city life... just for a while. High on my wish-list are St Petersburg and Vancouver.

### **Countries**

Switzerland, Italy, Jordan, South-Africa are countries I love so much and will always go back and discover more. Rajasthan and the Kerala province in India made great impressions as well. As well as some area's in the south of France. My hiking friends discovered the Lofoten in the north of Norway, the Mercantour in the Alpes Maritimes and the beauty and friendliness of the Slovenian people around the Triglav and the heat of the maquis in Corsica this year. This summer we'll discover the beauty of the Grossglockner and the Hohe Tauern National Park in Austria. Other destinations that I have on my wish list are South East Asia and South America.

### **Incentive Destinations**

Italy (Florence, Venice, Rome and the wine region around Alba (which we discovered on a Vespa), Ireland, Stockholm, Spanish cities, Vienna, Switzerland. Let me cut it short,

browse to our [www.ovationdmc.com](http://www.ovationdmc.com) website and choose any of our destinations and I'm convinced that we have a great incentive proposal for you as a basis of a tailor-made program we want to develop for you or your clients.

My principle is that the destination is not the most important aspect of an incentive but the ability to inspire, reward and motivate the participants, and the uniqueness of this experience that is a memory of a lifetime.

### **Trains and boats and planes:**

I'm writing this in the air for the moment, flying to New York and on to the SITE Annual Conference in Aruba. In the air, you can only make a difference on two levels: quality of the food but most of all quality of the human interaction. When last year I came back from the Motivation Show in Chicago, the air hostess asked me if I wanted '*Chicken or Beef?*' And just an hour ago that question, which sounded like a military order, was repeated to me again. But when I replied that I just wanted to have some red wine and a bottle of water, the answer was: "*So you've eaten here before; you're a wise man!*"

In Europe I try to fly as much as possible on *SN Brussels Airlines* and I can honestly say that their service on the ground and in the air is perfect. We should be proud about our national carrier! On long haul I have had the worst experiences on the American carriers, but the Etihad's, Emirates and Singapore Airlines of this trade are really a world apart. Brussels by the way is the best connected airport in Europe as every region, because of the European Union, has a connection into the capital of Europe. And let's not forget the excellent high speed train connections we have.

### **Best kept secret**

What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. I like the phrase, though; nothing happened in Vegas that I should be ashamed of...

### **Meetings Industry personality**

Roger Tondeur, president of the MCI Group, is somebody who has inspired me for many years. When I put my first steps in the international meetings industry, shortly after the start of the EIBTM series in Geneva, I met Roger for the first time. And what struck me then is still very much alive today. Roger is genuinely interested in the people first; the people he meets, the people that he works with and the people who have become his major business associates. His success is to my opinion based on that simple principle of people first. I wanted to work with this guy and that happened later when we were together on the board of SITE and even more when I joined the company in 2005.

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## **5 LIKES, 5 DISLIKES**

### **Likes**

My family and children are very dear to me. I'm missing the closeness of my family and little crowd of friends from Bruges but we stay in touch. I like fashion and contemporary design. I like music from Monteverdi to Madonna and I've been told I'm a star on the dance floor. I like to cook and a nice bottle of wine or a select Belgian beer is never difficult to find. I like to play tennis, read a book in the middle of the night, go spinning to stay fit, make a fool of myself on the golf course and spend hours working in the garden when the weather is nice. And I worship the sun!

### **Dislikes**

Dishonesty, lying, unfairness and people who do not take their responsibility. And I hate accounting, expense reports and stupid complicated CRM systems.

What I hate in our industry? Politicians (there are some exceptions) who still have not understood the power and excitement of the meetings industry and who manage their convention bureau's to please themselves and other party political apparatus. Politicians whose vision does not go any further than the date of the next election. And politicians who divide our country, a heaven on earth, the essence of Europe, in 3 regions. Have a look at how the Swiss Convention Bureau does it my friends and I hope you learn from that! One destination, one voice, one image, one people. They really earn the plus in their red logo.

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### **Five people I would like to invite to a dinner party**

Catherine, my wife, of course. Padraic Gilligan from Dublin for his wit, insight and singing skills after the meal. Sofia Vandaele (W New York - Downtown) for being my dearest friend. My tennis buddies Mark from Bruges and Roger Tondeur of course. But there's so many people and friends I want to have around. And why not meet someone new?

You know what, join the party, let's have fun!