

## Enjoying High Pressure Banquets in Orlando: A Conversation with Jorge Oliveira

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Growing up in Massachusetts, Jorge Oliveira got his start in the foodservice industry working in his aunt and uncle's diner at a young age. Knowing that a culinary career was in his future, he attended Johnson & Wales before traveling the country working for various hotels from Dallas to Las Vegas to Chicago to Atlantic City.

But, since moving to Florida in 1991 and going to work for the Rosen Hotel & Resorts he hasn't had the urge to move on. He enjoys the family atmosphere of the company and the fact that the company's president, Harris Rosen, is so involved in the day to day operations.

"We have a unique situation here, all the way from Mr. Rosen all the way down. We all work closely together and we all get along," Oliveira said.

In his current position as Executive Chef of the Rosen Shingle Creek, Oliveira oversees all the banquet and restaurant operations at the 1,500 room property. Though the focus is on high volume banquets, the restaurants compliment the \$30 million in banquet sales in a variety of formats that are on the cutting edge of the industry. In the last year, they have opened a sushi restaurant and a flat bread restaurant and have plans for another outlet that is themed after roadside taquerias.

"I spend most of my time in banquets," Oliveira said. "I have a lot of your talented chefs working in the outlets and we're constantly looking to make things better."

Oliveira spends about half his time in the kitchen, but he isn't necessarily prepping food, but instead overseeing and offering guidance to his staff of 200. Keeping his team running efficiently is the key to getting the large events they handle done properly.

"I wouldn't have fun if I wasn't in the kitchen," he said. "I really love getting into the mix of things on a daily basis and getting involved with the employees."

Being such a hands-on manager has given Oliveira a great relationship with his staff, many of whom have been with him for 15 years. Thanks to the family atmosphere created by himself and the company, Oliveira enjoys his work and helping others at the hotel.

"When I'm at work, believe it or not, I really like every aspect of it," he said. "A lot of people come to me to solve problems and besides cooking, that's what I specialize in."

Having always worked in banquet operations, Oliveira enjoys the high pressure situations and thinks it's great that food is starting to reemerge as the star of the show, thanks to things like the Food Network and cooking shows on other networks.

"Food was looked at as an amenity for a long time," he said. "The quality of food I've just seen skyrocket and it has been exciting to work with."

Aside from the improving quality of the food during his time in the industry, Oliveira also noted the increase in special diets due to food allergies or preferences. He estimates that five to seven percent of all the meals they put out for a banquet are special meals.

"We have been forced to become experts in all the different food allergies and diets that have arisen," he said.

Overall, he is seeing the trend move towards healthier food in general, regardless of dietary restrictions.

"A lot of our menus are leaning towards high protein diets that are low in fat," he said. Low sodium is a big thing lately; there are a lot more clean label products."

In addition to healthier foods, going green is a big trend in the industry and Oliveira said that the Rosen Hotels are actively involved in being as green as possible for such large operations. At Shingle Creek, not only do they use organic produce and organic cleaners, but they recycle all of the kitchen fryer oil into biodiesel for the property's tractors.

"We are one of the top hotels in Florida for recycling," he said. "Mr. Rosen likes to keep us on the cutting edge. In order to compete, as an independent hotel group, we've always got to be better than everyone else."

Due to his great working relationship with Mr. Rosen and the family-like atmosphere of the hotel, Oliveira wants to finish out his career with the group and hopes to see himself working on some more hotel designs in the future, as he has helped with the layout and design of the Shingle Creek property and the Rosen Centre Hotel.

"My goal is to finish out my career with Rosen Hotels & Resorts," he said. "I'm at my best doing design and development of new locations. That's my second love after cooking."

