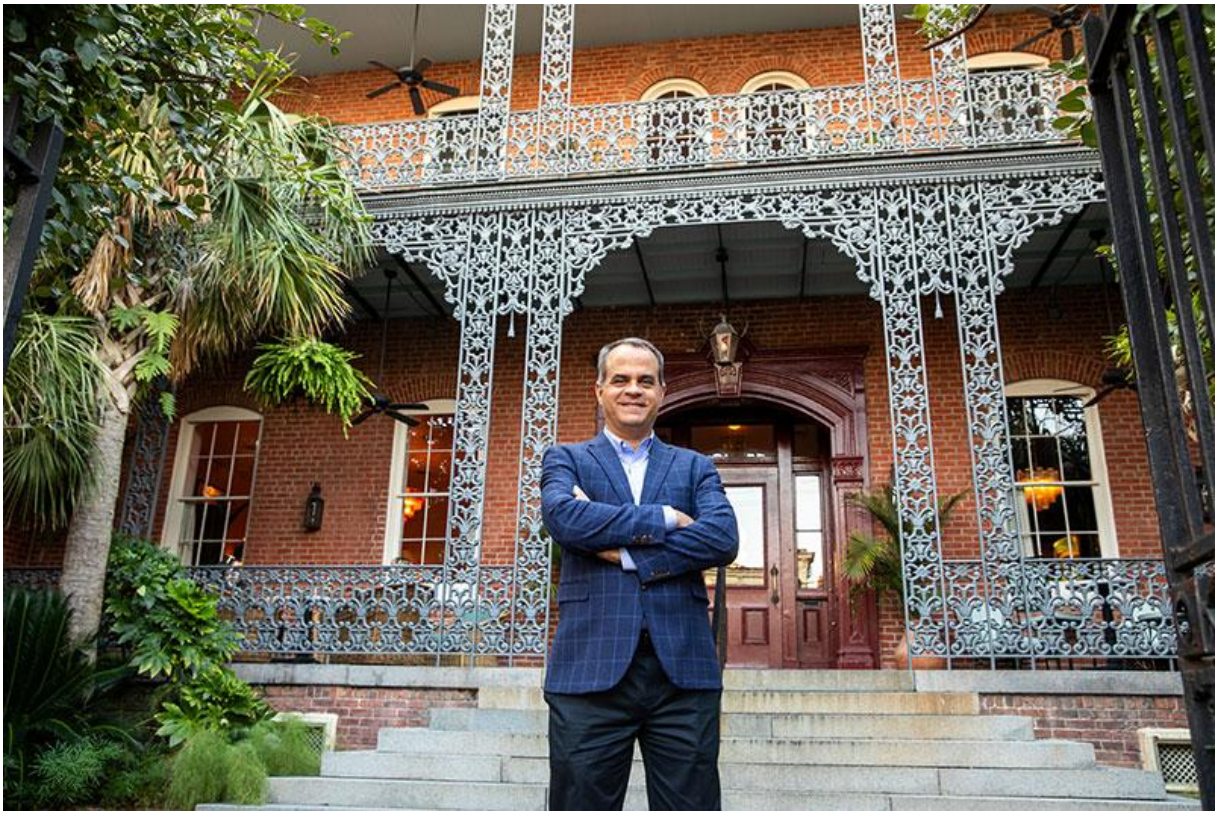
Diego Bufquin

November 14, 2024



Diego Bufquin, photographed in front of the St. Vincent Hotel in New Orleans, worked in some of the world's finest hotels and restaurants before earning his PhD in Hospitality Management. Today, he serves as professor of practice of director of the Freeman School's undergraduate hospitality certificate program. Photo by Eugenia Uhl.

By the time Diego Bufquin was 5, he was fluent in three languages. By age 18, he had lived on three continents.

It’s no surprise, then, that he found his calling in international hospitality.

“The fact that I had stayed at beautiful hotels throughout my life because we were traveling a lot, made an impact,” says Bufquin, “I became interested in the tourism sector as a whole because we had such wonderful experiences. They stick forever in my brain and my memories.”

His hotel career has trotted the globe, from Spain to Brazil. Today, Bufquin is director of the Hospitality Certificate program at Tulane University's Freeman School of Business, where he's also a professor of practice in management.

There, he prepares students for careers in hospitality. Using his own life as an example, he opens their eyes to the possibilities the field offers.

"It's a fascinating sector if you're into traveling and getting to know the world," he says. "What other kind of sector allows you to move that much and get to know new cultures and work with people from different backgrounds?"

Growing Up, Crossing Borders

Bufquin was multicultural and multinational from the start. His French father was a dam-building engineer who met his Brazilian mother, a beauty pageant contestant, at the Miss Universe contest in Tokyo.

After Bufquin and his twin brother were born in Singapore, they spent six years in Jakarta, Indonesia. There, he remembers speaking French with his father, Portuguese with his mother, and Indonesian with a nanny. His father eventually moved home to Paris. At 12, after his parents divorced, he moved with his mother to Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, where she launched her own software company.

When he reached college age, he followed his brother to Switzerland, where they attended hospitality schools 20 minutes apart. Bufquin studied at the Lausanne Hospitality School, founded in 1893 as the world's first hotel school.

"What drew me to working in hotels is the fact that you could actually pursue an international career," he says. Some of his classmates, who are still close friends, are hotel general managers in Bangkok, Cairo, and Paris.

As for Bufquin, after internships in Cannes and Barcelona, his first job was helping to open a 53-room luxury hotel in Spain's Basque Country.

In his first two months, his challenges included hosting a month-long Jaguar auto convention, a visit from the King of Spain, and a weeklong stay by celebrity couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

“It was an amazing experience,” he says. “I was starting from scratch and helping to give life to a brand new building, and everything had to be ready on day one. I would see my general manager sweating because he was making sure that everything was ready from a room standpoint and from a conference center standpoint, as well as from a landscaping standpoint because we were still planting the trees.”

Working Around the World

In Bufquin’s nomadic career, one constant has been seeking new horizons. After two years in Spain, he returned to Brazil, where he worked at a convention hotel in Sao Paulo and branched into restaurants.

He was visiting a friend in Raleigh, North Carolina, when he learned that one of France’s top business schools was opening a satellite campus nearby. Within days, he had enrolled at SKEMA Business School, where he would get a Master’s in International Business. He followed with a PhD in Hospitality Management at the University of South Carolina.

The academic world gave him plenty of room to indulge his yen for travel. He taught for nine years at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where his duties included leading student groups on summer trips to Europe.

“We would visit three different countries or more, and we would go to wineries, hotels, food markets, and museums,” he says. “We would eat at Michelin-star restaurants, as well.”

It’s a program he hopes to recreate at Tulane, where he moved in 2024. He was drawn there, in part, because it’s in one of the world’s great hospitality cities.

“Here in New Orleans, hospitality generates about $10 billion a year, and it employs thousands of people,” he says. “We have a big convention center, a port where large cruise ships dock, and a lot of retail shops. I love walking and exploring its architecture, and I’m always trying to check out new restaurants and coffee shops.”

Crescent City Connections

Part of his plan at Tulane is to connect his students with local hospitality professionals. A co-owner of the iconic restaurant Commander’s Palace will be a

guest speaker, while an organizer of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival will teach a class on festivals.

“We want our students to be future leaders in the hospitality sector, and they will learn a ton, because we are a town full of hospitality entrepreneurs,” he says.

With the explosion of international travel since the pandemic, he says, hospitality offers the chance to work around the world and to climb rapidly up career ladders.

“If you work hard, you could become a restaurant or hotel general manager within four or five years and make a six-figure salary,” he says. “What other sectors allow you to get that kind of salary in such a short amount of time?”

But hospitality graduates can also make careers in other fields, he adds. “In the banking industry, you also provide customer service. A lot of my friends ended up working in banking. Others ended up working in retail, for luxury companies like Louis Vuitton.

“If you have a Hospitality degree, you can pretty much work anywhere.”

Explore Opportunities in the Hospitality Industry

With international travel at all-time highs, hospitality jobs are booming. A program like the Hospitality Certificate at Tulane University can prepare a student for a wide variety of occupations, in hotels, food service, and more.

The program allows management students to specialize in hospitality, taking four core courses including Entrepreneurial Hospitality and Managing Hospitality Organizations. Learn more about how such a program can prepare you for a rewarding career, in the world of hospitality and beyond.