

For the love of magical London

Meet Neli Tsaneva, executive head housekeeper at The Strand Palace Hotel

Q We know you're originally from Bulgaria and achieved a master's degree at university in Sofia. We're wondering how this led or influenced you on your journey into hospitality. Can you tell us about growing up there, perhaps a little about your family and whether any of them worked in hospitality. Perhaps you did during your time as a student. Please share your story.

Yes, I am from Bulgaria, a country that is truly a remarkable tourist destination. Tourism and hospitality are highly developed there, and from an early age I was fortunate to experience the beauty and diversity of Bulgarian resorts. Those early experiences naturally shaped my appreciation for service, atmosphere of creating memorable guest stay. Although my parents worked in completely different fields, that did not represent hospitality and tourism. My interest was entirely self-driven and grew stronger over time.

I graduated from Technical University in

Bulgaria and began my professional journey working for a private television company as an office manager. Working in a dynamic media environment, being surrounded by creative professionals and international contacts, further strengthened my desire to travel and work in an industry that connects people from over the world. That ambition naturally led me towards hospitality – a field where cultural exchange, operational excellence, and human connection come together every day.

Q You came to London and went on to hold roles in facilities management companies. So why London – did you already have friends here or perhaps it was something you always planned to do after university? In London you completed a bachelor's degree in business administration and management. Was this a full-time course or did you achieve it while working?

I'd always dreamed of coming to London. I had travelled to other countries before, but never England. That curiosity turned into a strong desire to experience London for myself. I first arrived in January 2010. At the time, I had taken unpaid leave from my job in Bulgaria, as I did not know how long I would stay. However, the moment I arrived, London completely captured me. It was that rare feeling you experience when you visit a place for the first time and instantly know it will remain part of you forever. That is exactly how it felt – London simply felt like my place.

And that is how my journey in London began.

I truly started from the very beginning. I understood that if I wanted to grow and develop professionally, I needed to continue my education. I enrolled in college, and later progressed to university, completing my degree in Business Management. At the same time, I was working to

support myself financially. Education played a significant role in shaping my confidence and professional mindset. It strengthened my leadership abilities and gave me practical experience.

To build a career in hospitality and tourism, I started from the very bottom, working as a room attendant. My professional growth went hand in hand with my academic development.

Q Was your first role here with Atalian Servest UK & Ireland as a contract manager? You also spent just over a year and a half with aparthotels specialists Dao by Dorsett UK as an executive housekeeper and nearly three years with KANSO Facilities Management as a senior area manager. What was involved in these roles and what did you gain from the experience?

My role as a contract manager was a natural continuation of my professional journey. Step by step, through hard work, and dedication, I progressed, with each position reflecting my commitment to growth and excellence. As a senior area manager, I further developed my strategic and operational leadership skills. Managing multiple sites strengthened my ability to lead diverse teams, maintain high standards, and focus on client satisfaction. The role enhanced my decision-making under pressure, communication with senior stakeholders, and ability to see the bigger picture while maintaining attention to detail. Each stage of my career has been the result of consistent effort, ambition, and a clear determination to grow within the industry.



“Housekeeping is the backbone of any successful hotel, yet its impact is often most visible only when something goes wrong.”

A woman who considers her job a privilege

Q We think you might love the mix of 'hands-on' and management that being an executive housekeeper offers. Tell us about your current role and when and how that came about.

I truly value the unique balance of hands-on involvement and strategic management that the executive head housekeeper role offers. I joined Strand Palace Hotel at the beginning of October and am genuinely happy and excited to be part of such an iconic hotel. Leading a housekeeping team in a property with such a strong history and reputation is both a privilege and a responsibility that I take very seriously.

In my current role, I oversee the entire housekeeping operation, ensuring the highest standards of cleanliness, presentation, and guest satisfaction. I lead and support a large team, manage performance, staffing levels, and operational standards. This position came to me at the right moment in my career. While working as a senior

area manager, I spent much of my time travelling independently between sites. I found myself missing the daily connection with a consistent team and the opportunity to be closer to people.

I realised that what motivates and fulfils me is leading a team directly, being present within operation, and building strong culture together. Returning to a hotel based executive role allows me to combine my strategic experience with hands-on leadership.

Q How many people work in your housekeeping team and are they employed by the hotel or is housekeeping outsourced?

I currently lead a team of about 90 people; the majority of whom are outsourced staff, and I work closely with our outsourcing partners to ensure full alignment with the hotel's standards and expectations.

Q Tell us about your working day and include the bits that send you home cheering. Do enough employers recognise the importance of housekeeping (we're sure your current ones do!) and if we gave you a magic wand to wave what would you most like to change?

Housekeeping is the backbone of any successful hotel, yet its impact is often most visible only when something goes wrong. I believe forward-thinking employers truly recognise that cleanliness, presentation, and consistency directly influence guest satisfaction, online reputation, and ultimately revenue. When housekeeping performs at a high level, the entire hotel performs better.

With a 'magic wand' I would focus on elevating the perception of housekeeping even further – ensuring it is consistently seen not just as an operational department, but as a strategic contributor to the hotel's commercial success. I would invest even more in training, career development pathways, and recognition programs, so that every team member clearly sees a future within the industry. For me, housekeeping is not just about cleaning rooms; it is about creating an environment where guests feel safe, comfortable, and valued. When that understanding is shared across all departments, the hotel truly operates as one unified team.

What truly sends me home cheering, however, is seeing my team fully recognised and appreciated by our guests. When we receive positive comments, strong cleanliness scores, and direct praise for the housekeeping team, it gives me immense pride. Those moments confirm that our hard work, attention to detail, and commitment to excellence genuinely make a difference – and that is incredibly motivating for both me and my team.

Q Tough as your job sometimes is, everyone's entitled to a work-life balance. What do you do in your spare time – any interests or hobbies?

In my spare time, I enjoy travelling and I like to watch football. Exploring new places and cultures inspires me and often gives me a fresh perspective, both personally and professionally. It helps me recharge and return to work with renewed energy and focus. Also, I admire teamwork and strategy behind the sport, which I believe closely reflects leadership in hospitality.

Neli Tsaneva with some of the housekeeping team

There are plenty of iconic landmarks in the capital – and the Strand Palace is definitely one of them

About The Strand Palace Hotel

We're not surprised that Neli loves her job – this hotel has won many plaudits, from guests who return again and again, but also a stream of industry awards, from being named among the best places to work to top city break destination and last year the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award. A happy team makes all this happen, led by hotel manager Jill van Rest. And it's not just big on prizes, but something of a giant itself, having 785 rooms, from classic singles loved by solo travellers to deluxe studio kings.

The Strand Palace has a prominent spot in the capital's history having opened in 1909. Over the years there have been several refurbishment projects, the most notable of which was the Art Deco spectacular project in the 1930s, and more recent modernisation in 2019. With such a long history the hotel has had some notable guests, including film stars Charlie Chaplin and Vivien Leigh, but they're just as proud of the role played during the Second World War in providing accommodation for American servicemen, accepting ration vouchers in its restaurants and sheltering guests in the basement during air raids, all while the regular dances continued!

The hotel constantly supports sustainability initiatives, including a project with Star Linen and social enterprise The Sewing Rooms to produce special duvets and pillowcases for the youngest guests. All rooms provide complimentary, reusable BottleUp water bottles made from sugar cane to help eliminate single-use plastic, with refill stations located across the hotel.

Investment company London and Regional Properties took over the hotel in 2006.

You pick up a hint of that Art Deco heritage in even the most modern rooms

