



Forecasting Executive Leadership Talent in Latin America's Hospitality Sector for 2026

By Eli Marie Rodriguez

Latin America is adding hotels faster than it is adding leaders.

With the region's development pipeline continuing to expand into 2026—led by Mexico, Brazil, and resort-heavy Caribbean markets—the real bottleneck is no longer capital or demand. For 2026, it is executive leadership capable of governing growth across complex, multi-country portfolios.

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As Latin America's hospitality sector moves toward 2026, the most pressing talent challenge will not sit solely at the functional level—it will rise sharply at the executive leadership tier. Presidents, CEOs, COOs, regional heads, and multi-brand executives will be in shorter supply just as ownership groups, brands, and investors demand clearer vision, stronger governance, and faster execution across diverse markets.

From my perspective as both an owner-operator and a former executive within global hotel organizations, the next phase of growth in Latin America will be less about building hotels and more about leading complexity. The winners in 2026 will be guided by executives who can align capital, culture, brand, and performance across borders.



Why Executive Leadership Demand Will Intensify by 2026

Latin America's development pipeline continues to expand unevenly—strong in select markets, cautious in others. That unevenness is precisely why executive-level leadership becomes critical. Owners and boards are no longer asking, "Can we grow?" They are asking:

- Where should we grow?
- How do we protect returns in volatile environments?
- Which brands, segments, and partners actually scale?

These are executive questions, not functional ones.

My earlier career experience across boutique and large-scale resort operations taught me that as markets mature, execution risk rises. Strategy, governance, capital allocation, and leadership depth determine outcomes more than day-to-day operations alone.

Latin American Markets driving Executive Leadership Demand

1) Mexico: portfolio-scale leadership and governance

Mexico's position as the region's largest hospitality growth engine creates a disproportionate need for portfolio-level executives—leaders capable of overseeing dozens of assets, multiple brands, and joint-venture structures simultaneously.

Executive demand drivers in 2026:

- Regional presidents and COOs with multi-brand oversight experience
- Executives skilled in owner relations, asset-light models, and capital partners
- Leaders who can balance U.S.-driven demand with domestic and regional strategies

In Mexico, executive credibility with both international investors and local partners will be a defining differentiator.

2) Brazil: complexity, scale, and institutional leadership

Brazil is not a market for "lightweight" leadership. Its size, regulatory environment, labor structures, and financial complexity require deeply experienced executives who can lead at institutional scale.

Executive demand drivers in 2026:

- CEOs and country heads with strong financial governance instincts
- Leaders experienced in navigating currency exposure and cost volatility
- Executives capable of aligning brand strategy with local market realities

Brazil will favor executives who have led through cycles—not just growth phases.

3) Dominican Republic & Caribbean resorts: experience-first executive vision

Resort-heavy markets elevate a different executive profile. Here, success hinges on experience orchestration, brand storytelling, and long-term destination positioning.

Executive demand drivers in 2026:

- Resort and lifestyle-focused CEOs and presidents
- Leaders with deep understanding of all-inclusive economics and guest lifetime value
- Executives skilled in balancing scale with experiential differentiation

These markets reward executives who understand that brand promise and operational reality must align seamlessly.

4) Colombia and Peru: brand builders and strategic market shapers

As Colombia and Peru continue to elevate their hospitality profiles—especially in lifestyle, culinary, and experiential segments—executive leadership demand will skew toward brand-building strategists.

Executive demand drivers in 2026:

- Leaders with experience launching and scaling premium brands
- Executives who can shape destination narratives, not just manage assets
- Strategic thinkers who can build rate power over time

These are markets where the executive role is as much about market creation as market management.

5) Central America and select secondary markets: agile, entrepreneurial executives

In Costa Rica, Panama, and select Caribbean and Central American destinations, executive leadership demand will center on agility. These markets often lack depth benches and require leaders who can operate closer to the business.

Executive demand drivers in 2026:

- Entrepreneurial CEOs and managing directors
- Leaders comfortable wearing multiple hats across development, operations, and commercial strategy
- Executives with sustainability and ESG credibility

Executive Leadership Capabilities Most in Demand for 2026

Visionary Strategy + Capital Discipline

In 2026, executive leaders will be judged less on expansion announcements and more on the clarity of returns. Boards and investors will prioritize executives who can say no as confidently as yes.

High-demand traits:

- Capital allocation discipline
- Portfolio rationalization experience
- Long-term value creation mindset

Cross-Border Leadership and Cultural Intelligence

Latin America is not one market—it is many. Executives who succeed in 2026 will be those who can lead across cultures, regulatory frameworks, and ownership structures without imposing a one-size-fits-all model.

High-demand traits:

- Regional leadership experience
- Multilingual and multicultural fluency
- Ability to empower strong local leadership teams

Owner, Investor, and Board Credibility

As a boutique owner myself and as a search consultant partnering with other owners, I can say this clearly: trust at the executive level matters. The most valuable executives will be those who can speak credibly to owners, boards, lenders, and partners—not just internal teams.

High-demand traits:

- Transparent communication
- Financial fluency
- Strong governance orientation

Talent Architecting at the Top

Executive leaders in 2026 will be expected to build leadership benches, not just manage current teams. Succession planning, leadership development, and retention of high-potential talent will be core executive responsibilities.

High-demand traits:

- Proven succession planning experience
- Commitment to leadership development pipelines
- Ability to attract internationally mobile talent

Brand Stewardship and Reputation Management

In a world of instant feedback and global visibility, executive leaders will be brand stewards as much as operators. Reputation risk, ESG positioning, and brand authenticity will sit squarely in the executive remit.

High-demand traits:

- Crisis leadership experience
- ESG and sustainability fluency
- Strong external-facing presence

What this means for owners, boards, and candidates

For **owners and boards**, the executive leadership question in 2026 will be less about resumes and more about judgment:

- Has this leader navigated downturns?
- Can they align diverse stakeholders?
- Do they understand both growth and restraint?

For executive candidates, Latin America represents opportunity—but only for those prepared to lead with humility, discipline, and long-term vision. The region will reward leaders who see complexity not as friction, but as a strategic advantage.

By 2026, Latin America's hospitality sector will face its most significant constraint not in capital or demand, but in the availability of executive leaders capable of aligning growth, governance, culture, and performance across increasingly complex portfolios.



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