

HOTELS



Asset managers

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SERVICE ON Arrival

Hotels step up welcome process with advance planning, personalization and pampered check-in.

WORLDWIDE Hoteliers are rethinking welcome tactics, bringing the check-in process out from behind the front desk and in some cases beyond the lobby entirely.

For example, guests visiting **Hyatt Hotels Corp.**'s luxury Andaz brand for the first time may be surprised by the lack of a front desk. Instead, guests are approached by hosts who offer them refreshments while checking them in with handheld Fujitsu tablet computers running Micros Opera. "The check-in process at Andaz is designed to return to the basic elements of hospitality," says Tom Smith, Hyatt's vice president of North America. "All guests are personally greeted, invited to sit down and offered a beverage of their choice while being checked into the hotel." The check-in process can actually take place anywhere on property, including the guestroom, if that is the guest's preference. Self check-in at kiosks is also an option, as is a more traditional check-in process.

Also, much like how airlines do it, Hyatt guests have the option to register prior to arrival, picking up the room keys from an envelope at the front desk.

Speed The Process

Michael Holtz, owner of Smart Flyer, a New York City travel agency that caters to high-end travelers, says his clients ask for two simple things from the hotel arrival process: speed and discretion. "They don't want to chat

with the front-desk person about how the weather is. They don't want to chat about how the drive from the airport was. They just want to get their key and get to their rooms."

One problem with in-room check-in, Holtz says, crops up when hotels need to make photocopies of passports or credit cards down at the front desk, leaving the guests to wait anxiously for the sensitive items to be returned. If the check-in transaction cannot be completed within a few minutes, then it defeats the point, he says. "A lot of hotels think it's exclusive and private to do it that way," Holtz says. "But most people just want their passport and credit card back—they don't want to wait for it to come back to the room." He says the better strategy is to gather that information before arrival, or if that is not an option, to simply process the check-in as normal at the front desk.

Six Senses Resorts & Spas, Bangkok, requests a photocopy of guest passports prior to arrival, not only to help speed check-in but also as a customer relationship management tool. With the guest's picture in hand, hotel staff are able to greet him or her by name immediately upon stepping foot on property.

Stacy Small, president of California luxury agency Elite Travel International, says hotel concierges are increasingly reaching out to her guests in advance to set up reservations for dinner, spa, golf and the like, and to coordinate transportation and other



needs. It is a way to personalize the stay for the guest, Small says, while also providing an extra upsell opportunity for the hotels. It also speeds check-in when the guest does arrive. "It eases the pain of trying to figure out all those things when they arrive," Small says. "People are looking for that more—guests don't want to get to the hotel and figure out where they're going to eat dinner."

Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts staff makes contact with expected guests via email or phone, offering an overview of available amenities and offering assistance in booking spa, dining or activity reservations. In addition, each Four Seasons property employs a dedicated "guest historian," whose job is to track all guest preferences, whether they are returning guests or are visiting for the first time. This information is shared with the concierge teams to ensure that any needs

global update



Biras Creek Resort GM Rik Blyth welcomes guests arriving via ferry to the boutique resort in the British Virgin Islands.

are addressed well before the guest arrives on property.

Kempinski Hotels, Geneva, last year unveiled a new position complementary to the concierge at each of its luxury hotels. Known as the Lady in Red, her role is to roam the lobbies, greeting guests and providing guidance to them while also taking note of their preferences and interests. The Lady in Red is a living, breathing customer relationship management system.

The attachés working for **Trump Hotel Collection**, New York City, serve a similar role, except that Trump Attachés reach out to guests before, during and after guest visits to fully customize stays. Besides meeting a guest's every request, attachés are charged with delighting the guests by preparing their guestrooms with thoughtful amenities. "The key to this is all anticipation," says Trump Chief Operating Officer Jim Petrus. "The key to this is

knowing what the guest wants. We're not reacting—we are delivering this in a proactive fashion."

Guests of **One Ocean Resort Hotel & Spa** in Atlantic Beach, Florida, are contacted by a guest historian up to four times prior to stay. With all the details taken care of, visitors are able to enjoy seamless check-in and completely bypass the front desk of the Remington-managed property, says GM Sileshi Mengiste. Throughout the stay, personal hosts known as docents apply the learned knowledge collected by the historian. "Our goal is to be intuitive with guest's needs," Mengiste says. "Having an idea of what they may want or need in advance of their arrival and experience is critical to the level of service we provide."

Check-In Time Is... Whenever

A number of hotel companies have dramatically altered the paradigm of check-in and checkout times, allowing guests fully 24 hours in their guestrooms, regardless of when they arrive on property. **The Peninsula Hotels**, Hong Kong, was one of the first chains to do this, and others including **The Address Hotels** and select **Raffles Hotels & Resorts** properties have followed suit.

Laguna Beach, California-based **Montage Hotels & Resorts** takes the concept a step further, permitting guests to take and relinquish control of their rooms whenever they wish, only charging for the night stayed. This requires front desk staff to anticipate guest arrival and departure times and to coordinate desired room types days and weeks in advance, and bookable room nights are sometimes lost due to check-in/checkout overlap, but guests with off-peak travel schedules find the service to be invaluable toward making their whole journey more bearable, says Ali Kasikci, vice president of strategic planning and development for Montage.

Personal Greetings

At the 31-key **Biras Creek Resort** on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands, resort staff and often the GM always meet guests at the arrival dock when they arrive via ferry. Guests are given cool aromatherapy towels and a fruity island cocktail to take with them on an impromptu golf cart tour of the resort. During the tour, staff try to learn as much about the guests as possible, information which is then shared via email with other front line staff to be used to wow the guests throughout their stay.

Such a practice of immediate tours can be a problem, though, when exhausted, well-traveled guests want nothing else than to immediately hit their beds to fall asleep. Biras trains its staff to pick up cues telling of tired guests and to adjust the welcome process accordingly, says GM Rik Blyth.

Andaz hosts are likewise trained to read guests' body language upon arrival and adjust their welcome procedures accordingly. Hosts at the newly opened Andaz 5th Avenue, New



Guests of **One Ocean Resort Hotel & Spa** in Florida are contacted up to four times prior to their stay, and information collected in those correspondences helps guests bypass the check-in process upon arrival.