



Hotels rethink the concierge: From selfies to sustainability

By KRISTI EATON November 2, 2021

Looking to increase your vacation selfie game? Don't worry, Eduardo Vallin has you covered.

As "Instagram concierge" at the W Punta de Mita hotel in Mexico, Vallin helps guests locate and take the best social media-worthy photos while they bask in that vacation glow.

"One of my favorite parts of the job is seeing the pictures come to life," Vallin said. "I enjoy getting to know the person through their Instagram aesthetics and interests and then creating a personalized tour, then finally seeing the finished product on their Instagram."

His is just one of a variety of creative concierge jobs that hotels and resorts have introduced in recent years.

In Aruba, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort recently

introduced a "carbon offset concierge"; Jareth Vermeulen helps guests offset the environmental impact of their flights to the carbon-neutral hotel by purchasing carbon emissions offsets. Guests can do this on their own or have Vermeulen assist them. Though the position is new, Vermeulen had been offering sustainability tours of the property as sustainability manager.

"It's really been enjoyable to mingle with the guests and understand the reason why they choose Bucuti & Tara Beach and also their sustainability passion," he said.

For hotels, it's a way to stand out from the crowd and convey a vision by focusing on topics like climate change, said Emanuel Schreiner, founder of RVS Hotel Consulting.

As for customers, "personalization is not just a travel trend; hotel guests want to experience unique moments, tailor-made for their vacation," Schreiner added. "Having highly specialized staff that is able to cater to the most extravagant aspects of their travel will definitely create added value for the guests. We will see in the long run whether the demand actually meets all these particular offerings."

Ewald Biemans, owner and CEO of Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, said he created the carbon offset concierge because some travelers feel guilty for the emissions that come from air travel. Offsets can help guests enjoy a more guilt-free vacation, he said.

"Global warming and climate change appear in almost every review" of the hotel, Biemans said. "Three years ago, most people didn't even know what climate change was or global warming was. Today it is a household word."

Another new take on the concierge position: The Hyatt Regency Portland in Oregon plans to have a "concierge of weird," starting in November, to help guests find unique and little-hyped tours and experiences.

"What makes Portland so great is that it's the small, some call them weird, off-the-beaten-path destinations and characters that make the city so beloved," said Jamie McKinney, the new concierge. "We both wanted a way to highlight these quirky entities, which don't always rise to the top of Yelp, yet are so crucial to the liveliness and the effectiveness of tourism in our city."

McKinney said the position is being created in response to feedback from travelers wanting to explore the "real" Portland.

"The places that locals actually go to," she said.

For example, guests might want to learn about the elusive Bigfoot, so she will send them to the North American Bigfoot Center, where displays feature an array of bigfoot information and artifacts.

"In scouting these tours, I've relied on my local expertise and my natural inclination to explore and dig deeper, allowing me to uncover the very best of the weird side of Portland," she said.