

Ins and outs of butler service at hotels, including Harrah's

By Steven Ferry, Hospitality.net

Why have butler service in a hotel? In the cases canvassed, there were two basic reasons: either because the hotel owners conceived they had the best property in the world/on the PGA tour/etc. and they believed the corollary on the service side could only be supplied by the addition of butlers. Or because they wanted to give their most important guests such a level of service. The five hotels participating in this article have provided guests with this butler service for the last 6-16 years, building the desired reputation and reaping the rewards. Contrasting this with hotels that have signed onto the butler concept and then disbanded the service, it is obvious that butler departments are not always guaranteed success.

How did they do it, those who succeeded?

First of all, by overcoming the obstacles they met on the way, starting with launching the service. In the case of the iconic Burj al Arab in Dubai, the problem was finding qualified staff in a country that did not have many locals to draw upon. When you have to man a department of something like 160 butlers, it is easy to see why this would be a challenge. In the end they sourced their staff from about 100 countries. Falling Rock in Pennsylvania, a privately held resort designed in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright and boasting a challenging Pete Dye-designed golf course, also provides 24-hour butler service to its 42 rooms and suites. Their main challenge, being on a huge estate in the countryside far from any cities, was likewise recruiting butlers, which they resolved by targeting regional

colleges and universities. Harrah's in Lake Tahoe did not have such issues, but struggled with the more prosaic problem of making their pantries flow sufficiently to keep up with the demand for butler services. In the ideally situated Seven Stars Galleria in Milan, their challenge was being able to deliver the same level of service required in a private estate, while being in a hotel environment. This resolved with a perception shift that each room or suite was a single house with the most important guest in it. One of these hotels also mentioned justifying a large payroll as a challenge, which they overcame by providing the expected level of service with concomitant guest satisfaction. They all also hired experts to train their staff, rather than trying to fudge the training by in-house solutions not based on the butler model.

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