

Joburg p. 8 | Big Brother p. 24 | Traveling Safely p. 30

GLOBAL BUSINESS travel

SEPT. | OCT. 2013 • \$4.95

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Special Risk Issue

In the aftermath of Haiti's tragic earthquake, philanthropist Petra Nemcova joined with United CEO Jeff Smisek to help in the relief effort. . . .With risk can come reward



Got Your Back

Concierges can be counted on for more than just restaurant leads.

“A concierge can do anything you need to open all the doors to the city and beyond,” says Lило Alim, Chef Concierge at the Four Seasons Hotel, Toronto. A concierge is the hotel’s most valuable asset. For business travelers, the concierge is an away-from-home Personal Office Manager/Vice President of Operations. Forgot your business calling cards? A good concierge will arrange for your cards to be redesigned and printed within the hour. Luggage missing with an important meeting in an hour and your clothes rumpled from the overnight flight? The concierge will arrange a new wardrobe to be delivered to your room with time to spare.

A concierge not only makes a guest’s life easier but also can prevent a business trip from turning into a disaster. A female CEO arrived in the lobby of the Four Seasons, Toronto to discover she’d left her purse in the taxi. Concierge Alim immediately had Security screen all the taxi footage until they located the license plate of the CEO’s cab. Alim then tracked down the driver and arranged for the purse to be delivered back to the relieved guest.

Concierges constantly have to figure out how to return lost items. A guest departed the Palace Hotel Tokyo by taxi to the Narita Express Airport train with a ticket Concierge Maki Yoshioka had arranged. The guest had left behind his camera containing priceless shots of an architectural project that had been the prime reason for his trip. Soon after, the taxi driver returned the guest’s camera to the Palace Hotel. Knowing there

were two entryways to the train station and not knowing which one the guest would enter, Yoshioka and a bellman hightailed it to the station by taxi, jumped out of the cab, and raced to the two entrances. They located the



guest and returned his camera before his train departed for the airport.

When you are traveling on business in a foreign country, a concierge can give you guidance on custom-related questions, especially imperative in a country such as etiquette-sensitive Japan. “We can teach you some simple phrases, show you how to give and receive business cards, and tell you where and when to take your seat during meetings,” says Kazushi Kawamura, Assistant Chief Concierge of the Palace Hotel Tokyo. “And if you need advice on what to give your Japanese clients and business partners as tokens of appreciation, we can advise on what might be appropriate, where to buy the gift, how to wrap it, and when to give it.”

When a guest from the United Kingdom arrived at the Shangri-La Hotel, Sydney, and turned on his computer to

study a presentation he was to make shortly, he couldn’t access the information he needed. The in-house IT team was unable to fix the problem. Chief Concierge Colin Toomey called a 24-hour service center. Closed. With time running out, Toomey called a concierge who was a friend of his and also a Webmaster. The colleague raced to the hotel and fixed the laptop just in time for the guest’s presentation.

“The best way to maximize the concierge/guest relationship is to utilize us,” says Chief Concierge Jonathan Nicholson of Boston’s XV Beacon Hotel. “We have the ideas, firsthand experience, and we know how to make the impossible happen.”

Do you tip? “A concierge does not expect to be tipped,” says

Nicholson. “Our responsibility is to assist our guests to the best of our ability. A smile, a note, or a sincere heartfelt ‘Thank You’ gives us immediate satisfaction. If guests choose to tip us, whatever is offered is a gift and deeply appreciated.”

“The tipping culture in Australia,” says Toomey of the Shangri-La, Sydney, “is discretionary. If the service provided is exemplary, then a gratuity should be offered to acknowledge the consideration shown. The amount should reflect the effort put in rather than being a percentage of the bill.”

Award-winning travel journalist Margie Goldsmith is also a runner, biker, hiker, and blues harmonica player.

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