

Expert Attention

Concierges make your Vegas vacation a success

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Move over David Copperfield. There's another kind of magician in town. They make sold-out show tickets appear, all of your travel problems disappear and pull hard-to-get restaurant reservations out of thin air.

Part tour guide, part travel agent and definitely part magician, hotel concierges know how to make the impossible happen for their guests.

According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor's Authority, there were almost 39 million visitors staying in more than 130,000 hotel rooms in Las Vegas in 2006.

With the massive number of hotels and guests in Las Vegas, the concierge has become an important fixture at many resorts on the Las Vegas Strip.

According to a U.S. Department of Labor May 2006 report, there were more than 300 concierges in the Las Vegas area and, with the addition of more hotel rooms in the past year, that number has likely grown and will continue to grow.

Concierge 101

Many hotel guests don't know exactly what a concierge does, but concierges can be a great resource for first-time visitors, conventioners, business travelers or any tourist who needs assistance while on vacation.

Concierges typically give directions and recommendations, help guests make restaurant reservations, procure show tickets, plan special events, make travel arrangements and help with just about anything else a guest might need.

"There are those uncommon requests that we look to fulfill as well – such as getting a bride's dress cleaned or pressed at a moment's notice or planning a bachelor party," said Jason Baker, concierge manager for Casino Travel and Tours, which staffs concierge desks at the Palms, Harrah's, Flamingo, Rio, Luxor, Mandalay Bay, Excalibur, Monte Carlo, THEhotel and many more locations around Las Vegas.

Some of the other uncommon things concierges can help with include arranging for babysitting, replacing items a traveler might have left at home and helping with shopping.

Jered Hundley, lead concierge at the Palms, said he has been asked to carry out some slightly strange requests as well.

"I've had requests for people who wanted to purchase tractors to take back to Africa," he said.

"One man asked if there was anyone in town who could do a plaster mold of his girlfriend's body so that they could fill it with butter for a sculpture," Hundley said.

While it's not humanly possible to fulfill all requests, Baker said concierges always give it their best shot.

"The rule of the concierge is to never say no, however you always offer alternatives," Baker said.

Hundley said when faced with a difficult request he tries to never say no or act surprised.

"I always try to take it in stride and say 'this is something I'm going to need to research for awhile but let me take a call back number and I'll do my best to find some information for you and get back to you today.'"

Keep in mind there is a limit to what a concierge will do for a guest – they won't help with anything that's illegal or immoral.

Of course if you're asking your concierge to go above and beyond the call of duty, tipping is always appreciated, although it is always up to the guest's discretion.

While a concierge can certainly help you with things while you're in town, it can be a good idea to contact them before your trip as well.

"Las Vegas has become more popular – a lot of people are recognizing the need to actually call in advance to make their arrangements prior to arrival so when they arrive at their hotel they can go and print out a confirmation of their itinerary from their concierge and they can be on their way," Baker said.



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— Jason Baker,
Casino Travel and Tours
concierge manager

Illustration by
Chris Morris

History

Concierges got their start in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.

With the dawn of rail and steamship travel, the international tourism industry experienced a tremendous boom. Switzerland's hotels, looking to satisfy the needs of these travelers, created the concierge position.

They were responsible for everything from meeting the guests at the station in a horse-drawn carriage to assisting them with every detail of their stay and they were soon a fixture in upscale hotels across Europe.

The term concierge was relatively unknown in the United States until the mid-1970s when they began appearing more frequently at hotels in major cities like San Francisco and New York.

Hotel concierges have their own professional association: Les Clefs d'Or (the golden keys). The association was formed in France in

1929 and now has members in more than 50 countries. It's easy to spot a member of the prestigious group – they wear the gold keys on their lapels.

Baker, who has earned the Clefs d'Or, said it is the ultimate goal a concierge looks to obtain in their career and it is not an easy feat to achieve.

In order to receive the honor, a person has to have five years experience in the hotel industry and at least three years experience as a full-time lobby concierge in a hotel, get two active Les Clefs d'Or members to sponsor them and take verbal and written tests.

What makes a good concierge?

While there are no prerequisites to become a concierge (there's no special schooling necessary) Baker said there are traits that a good concierge must possess including the passion

to serve. They must also be humble, gracious and courteous.

"A lot of people think the 'servant' word has a negative connotation but that's not the case at all. If someone's willing to serve and they have the passion to do so, anyone can be a concierge. They just have to have the tenacity and the willingness to go out and make it happen," said Baker.

"You have to really want to be there and you have to have the desire to really want to help them with their needs and concerns," Hundley said. "Because you can put on a smile and you can use the right language and you can act that way, but if they can sense that you're not sincere and that you don't really have the desire to help them, I think they know that and it doesn't come through as a positive experience that it might have been otherwise."

Since Las Vegas is a huge destination for international travelers, concierges also must know how to deal with people from other cultures and many concierges are multi-lingual.

Concierges are able to fulfill many of the requests they get by having a large network of colleagues all across the city that they can call on for help.

"It's not a job that you clock in and out for, it's a lifestyle. It's who you are," Baker said. "You're always looking and wondering 'who can I make a connection with where I can make this happen ultimately for the guest?' And that's the goal. The goal is to always have the networking and the contacts readily available so you can go ahead and give them a call and make it happen for your guests."

While the job of a concierge can be demanding, Hundley said at the end of the day, making the guests happy is worth it.

"[The most rewarding part is] providing that wow factor, if you will. They know they're going to come into a nice hotel and they know that they're going to expect a certain level of service, but to have them leave with them experiencing something that maybe they didn't expect – that you went above and beyond and you provided something to them that maybe was even more than they were hoping for – then they leave with a memory that they can take home."



A concierge serves guests at Mandalay Bay with a smile.

File photo