



Of Ritz-Carlton Montreal: Katie Piccolino, public relations & sponsorship director & Andrew Torriani, president/CEO & general manager

Creative & custom-made: The Ritz-Carlton Montreal

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Britney Hope

For Andrew Torriani, president, CEO and general manager of the Ritz-Carlton Montreal, a stay at a luxury hotel is only as good as the experience that comes out of it.

"People think it's all about the product," he said as he settled into a booth at a coffee shop in Toronto. "But that's a misconception. For us, it's all about the service."

Torriani, who was recently in town to spread the word about the Ritz-Carlton Montreal's latest winter promotion, 'The Colder the Better,' would know. The son of a South African hotelier, he actually first began his relationship with the Ritz as a dishwasher and busboy, an experience he said taught him a lot about how big ideas from the top trickle down to effect the staff on the ground – and, in turn, the guests.

As a result, the hotel, which needs no introduction with its CAA/AAA Five Diamond Award and five-star status, operates on a principle of service based on tailor-made experiences.

"We want guests who visit to feel like we actually know who they are," Torriani told PAX of the approach, which includes things like a phone call from the Ritz-Carlton Montreal guest experience team prior to a stay, in order to gather client likes, dislikes and preferences.

Examples of personalized experiences, according to Katia Piccolino, the hotel's public relations & sponsorship director, can be anything from a ski-doo tour of the region or a horse-drawn carriage ride throughout the city with stops at hand-picked restaurants along the way. In one particular instance where a client had a rigid budget of \$20 for an anniversary surprise, a staff member purchased a booklet of Post-Its and created a heart-shaped collection of love notes on the couple's bathroom mirror.

"Being successful at this mean evolving with the client," Piccolino explained. "And meeting their needs and wants in creative ways."

It's also a style-based approach, made possible by the unique Canada-meets-Europe feel of Montreal, and according to Torriani, it works.

"Montreal has the friendliness of Canada and the distinctiveness of old Europe," he says of the location, citing the winning combination as a draw for the Ritz's Canadian clientele, which makes up 40 per cent of the hotel's customer base visiting the city weekend getaways, for bachelor (and bachelorette) parties, or for special occasions.

The renowned hotel, which originally opened in Montreal in 1912, underwent a \$200 million restoration in 2008, reopening again in May 2012 with what Torriani described as a new mission: to appeal to a more varied client base.

"Typically, you think of the type of people who stay at the Ritz, they tend to be in their 50s," he said. "We wanted to be able to provide a luxurious experience for all ages."

It may sound like a tall order, but with a ratio of three employees to each of the hotel's 96 guest rooms and 33 suites, having family-friendly services such as leaving cookies and milk for kids and the only Dom Perignon bar in North America, the Ritz is more than up to the task.

Building relationships with Canadian agents also helps; Torriani shared that the Ritz is a Signature and Virtuoso member, and that his team visits every agency they can, as a good chunk of their overnights come from cruise clients who are headed to New York and are looking to begin their adventure a night or two early.

Part of endeavouring to provide something for everyone also means finding creative ways to attract new clientele, and in true Canadian style, the Ritz-Carlton Montreal is celebrating the onslaught of winter with its newest package, 'The Colder the Better.'

The promotion is designed to provide guests with a percentage discount off their room rate, dependent on the day's temperature.

"The colder it is, the better the discount!" Piccolino said, going on to explain that if the mercury reads minus 25 outside when guests check in, they'll save 25 per cent off their room.

The package includes suite accommodation with fireplace; herbal teas or hot chocolate; chocolate-flavoured marshmallows and spiced *Speculoos* cookies in-room; cocktails and breakfast at Maison Boulud; complimentary parking; complimentary late checkout; plus, a discounted room rate based on the below-zero temperature outside on the day of arrival.

The package will be available from January to April 30, 2015, and advanced reservations are required.

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