

Guestroom rates have been increasing steadily at the hotel. Prior to its closing, the ADR was between \$160 and \$170.

When Heinz Gartlgruber heard of the hotel and motel occupancy fee, the general manager of the 348-room Hyatt Regency Princeton was concerned. Combined with the MOT, customers had to be charged an overall 8 percent tax. "Needless to say, when you have to charge 8 percent more on your guestroom, it has an impact," says Gartlgruber of his first reactions to the taxes. As time passed, he was surprised that he didn't hear any negative feedback from customers. The simple answer for this, he says, is that all other hotels in other states have these fees and taxes in place. "Some areas even charge more," he says.

"I think New Jersey was just spared for a long time and now we have to pay just like everybody else. In terms of competition, we did have some advantage for a long time," says the Austrian native who, prior to joining the Princeton Hyatt more than six years ago, was general manager at the Hyatt Regency at Lake Tahoe and other properties around the world.

Princeton Hyatt prices, currently at an ADR of \$150, have actually gone down in the midst of the occupancy fee. Gartlgruber says the reason is not all due to 9-11-01. "Even before that, we were in a recession. September 11 just accelerated the whole situation," he says.

Immediately after the tragedy, he says there was a slight upturn in business for all hotels within a 100 mile radius of New York from displaced workers. "So, we did not feel (the impact) right away as other hotels on the East Coast. This has changed in the last year and a half as things have normalized and companies that came to New Jersey have moved back to New York," he says.

The Princeton Hyatt is currently undergoing an \$11.4 million renovation, to be completed by the end of this year, that will encompass guestrooms, meeting space, health club, the lobby and parking lot. The hotel offers 22,000 square feet of meeting space, with a ballroom that, after the renova-

EVENT PLANNING: Anatomy of a Corporate Meeting

It takes a lot of work to make it look easy...

By Jane Ann Hart

You receive the initial call from your client saying that they need to have a six-day meeting for 600 people in twelve weeks. The client wants you to research four different geographic locations for a hotel property that can accommodate the specific meeting space and sleeping room requirements for this program. The client needs the site-selection results with date availability and sleeping room rates emailed back to him in a spreadsheet format within 48 hours. The client will then narrow down the geographic location and appropriate properties. Next, pro forma budgets will be prepared for several properties for a cost comparison of the entire meeting for the selected geographic locations and properties. Room rate alone is never the deciding factor, rather the cost of the entire program. The budgets will include every cost, tax and gratuity associated with the entire meeting program, including sleeping rooms, food & beverage, ground transportation, airfares, recreation activities, off-site venues, dine-arounds, amenities, housekeeping, bellmen, business center, etc. Site-inspections of the selected properties that can accommodate all of the requirements for the meeting are scheduled. Once the site-inspections are completed and a property has been selected, a contract with the property is negotiated for all services including sleeping room block, function space, clauses for cancellation, attrition, acts of God, ADA compliance and litigation to name a few.

A Web-based registration form is created and posted to capture all the meeting attendees information - from name and email address to airline information to allergies, etc. This database will generate reports for the client, the selected meeting property and the planner to manage the meeting. Some sample reports include a master attendee list, rooming lists, meeting breakout lists, recreation activities lists, arrival/departure lists, ground transportation lists, VIP list, special needs lists, food & beverage guarantees, name badges, tent cards, hotel resume and BEO's, etc. for the meeting. Airline tickets will also need to be booked and the appropriate ground transportation arranged and coordinated to transfer the attendees to the hotel and back to the airport. The meeting planner must know who every attendee is and where he or she is every minute of the day for the duration of the program.

The meeting planners arrive on-site at the property at least two days prior to the meeting to meet with the head of every department at the property to ensure that every detail of every minute of every day of the meeting program has been scheduled accurately with each department. Before the attendees arrive, there are boxes of handouts, welcome packets, sample product, etc. to sort and organize. Every day the meal function guarantees, no-show and room cancellations must be managed as well as a daily meeting scheduled with the accounting department to review every hotel bill posted to the Master Account.

The meeting planner's role is to manage and coordinate the client's meeting agenda, budget and flow of attendees with the hotel's management staff. Six hundred attendees, 3,600 room nights, 10,800 meals, 1,200 flights to coordinate with appropriate ground transportation, several meetings going on simultaneously with different room setups and attendees moving between breakout sessions and the general session, 600 recreational activities and appropriate ground transportation, dine-arounds in 30 local restaurants for 600 people arranged and coordinated.

In the meeting industry the only constant is change. Once the meeting has started, it will be constantly evolving with agenda and meeting room requirement changes as well as "other challenges," such as the electrical power in the hotel going off for eight hours with no backup generator. The meeting planner must be well organized and prepared to multi-task, expect the unexpected, anticipate the implications of "just one more change," while at the same time be a nurse, tour guide, concierge and psychologist to the attendees. A sense of humor is a must.



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