



What I've learned... working as a five-star concierge

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We've held aeroplanes back for guests, and hopped on flights at short notice. If you see the Clefs d'Or golden keys on a concierge's lapel, it means we'll do anything legally and humanly possible for you. A celebrity staying with us created a hand-written poem for his wife in LA for their anniversary. Courier services were too slow, so we had to deliver it ourselves. After working an eight-hour shift, my colleague went straight to the airport. He was probably up for 50 hours straight.

When money is no issue, it's easier to make things happen. One Middle Eastern monarch wanted a Siamese cat with different-coloured eyes. That took a lot of research, as they are a freak of nature. We finally found a breeder. She said no initially, but eventually quoted around €12,000. A colleague at the Hyatt had a guest who wanted to export 120 cows to Qatar. Requests like this are always an adventure.

A good concierge fosters a network all over the city, helping guests access secret or booked-out places. For example, the Boros Collection is a contemporary art exhibit in a war-era underground bunker in Berlin. There's no sign, so it's easy to walk past. You can get an appointment to see it online. It's usually booked out months in advance; when you come and see us, we can get you in.

As part of Les Clefs d'Or, I can lean on the connections of concierges in other cities. A couple of months ago I called a concierge in Munich because we had a Mexican family staying with us who wanted to do a stadium tour of Bayern Munich. The tours were booked out but he was able to arrange one. I'd noticed the son had a jersey on with Robert Lewandowski's name on the back. We had the player sign the T-shirt for him. The young man was blown away.

The kinds of requests we get have changed. Twenty years ago, it was rare in a luxury hotel to see tattoos and piercings. Now I need to know where the best tattoo parlour in Berlin is. I recommend Blut & Eisen (blutundeisen.de), which has well-known, creative artists who can draw anything for you.

The internet has changed the way people use us, but they still value face-to-face insights. Nowadays people come to the desk with five restaurants they've found on TripAdvisor and want your opinion. But it's hard to find local recommendations online. I send people to places I go to myself, like Arminius Markthalle. It's one of the last remaining 19th-century market halls, with high ceilings and wrought iron typical of Prussian architecture. It's not glamorous but it's an authentic West Berlin experience, with specialities such as curry sausage, regional cheeses, and seasonal beers on draft.

Travellers increasingly want to become part of the community they're visiting, even if only for a brief moment. I had a guest who wanted to meet a refugee. I put them onto an association called Welcome Dinner Berlin that organises dinners with refugees in different locations. Refugees are a big aspect of the city at the moment, so the guest wanted to know about it. It's a nice gesture.

When I travel, I ask other concierges for their tips. In New York, I was sent to Maialino, a trattoria with heartfelt service and slow-roast suckling pig that's amazingly tender with a crispy skin. Google 'Italian restaurants in Manhattan' and you'll find 2,000 – places like this are hard to find unless someone personally recommends them. In Cannes, I discovered Le Pastis, which transports you to rural Provence, and in Salzburg, Zum Fidelen Affen, a rustic Austrian restaurant with fantastic hot cherry Kaiserschmarrn pancakes. People don't take advantage of concierges' local knowledge enough.

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To learn more about Les Clefs d'Or, see lescledsdor.org.