

UNIT – 2 FRONT OFFICE AND GUEST HANDLING

The hotel industry provides food and lodging to guests. It is the responsibility of hotels to ensure that their guests do not face any kind of problem during their entire stay at the hotel. There are various stages or phases of interface between a guest and a hotel -

1. Pre-arrival
2. Arrival
3. Stay
4. Departure
5. After departure

All these phases are collectively called Guest Cycle.

What is the Guest Cycle in a Hotel?

The guest cycle is the complete experience that a guest goes through in a hotel: from making the booking to departure and the interaction with the hotel even after departure.

Phases/stages of guest cycle-

1. Pre-arrival:

The interaction between a guest and a hotel before the guest arrives at the hotel forms the pre-arrival phase of guest cycle.

Reservation is the most important pre-arrival activity.

During this phase, the guest first selects a hotel for stay. The guest's choice about a particular hotel is affected by factors like advertisements, recommendations from family and friends, previous experience with the hotel, reputation, location, etc.

Once a hotel has been chosen, the guest or a person designated by him, on behalf of the guest contacts the selected hotel through telephone, e-mail, or fax for reserving room/s for a future period. The reservation request is received by the reservation staff, whose efficiency and competence in handling the request creates a first good impression of the hotel in the mind of the guest.

Before confirming a reservation, the hotel may ask for a credit card guarantee or an advance payment/ deposit from the guest.

The hotel also makes note of any special arrangements to be made, like a wheelchair, or airport pick up, or extra bed in room, etc.

Thus, the functions of the front office in the pre-arrival phase include-

- a) Processing the reservation request of the guest.
- b) Creation of guest folio (in case the hotel has received any advance payment).
- c) Blocking the room for the guest.
- d) Making special arrangements for the guest (if required).

2. Arrival:

Guests have their face-to-face interaction with the hotel staff on their arrival at the hotel. This is a crucial stage as guests form an opinion about the standards and services that the hotel can provide to them

The functions of Front Office on the arrival of a guest includes-

- a) Reception and welcome of the guest (aarti, tilak, and garlanding, or offering welcome drink as per the policy of the hotel).
- b) Registration of the guest
- c) Room rate and room assignment to the guest
- d) Handing over the room key to the guest
- e) Luggage handling of the guest by bell desk
- f) Delivering the mails and messages that the hotel has received on behalf of the guest.

3. Stay:

During this stage, the guest gets a first-hand experience of the facilities and services offered by the hotel. These services and facilities are the most important part of a guest's overall experience at a hotel.

The stay phase is the most important phase in the guest cycle for the hotel, as guest's comfortable and pleasant stay at the hotel would bring repeat business and positive feedback from the guest. The front office is the interface between the guest and the other departments of the hotel, so it must coordinate well with other departments to ensure that the guest receives smooth and efficient services and facilities.

The functions of the front office during stay of a guest includes-

- a) Handling guest accounts: The creation and maintenance of guest accounts by the front desk cashier and the daily auditing of guest accounts by the night auditor.
- b) Message coordination: Receiving messages or guests when they are not in their rooms and ensuring the delivery of the same on their arrival by the information assistant.
- c) Key handling: Accepting the room key when the guest goes out of the hotel premises and returning the same to the guest when he comes back to the hotel. Some hotels also issue a key card to the guest at the time of accepting the key, and ask the guest to present the key card at the time of collecting the room key. These days, hotels issue Card keys to guest at the time of arrival, therefore key handling, as mentioned above, in large hotels is not required.
- d) Guest mail delivery: Accepting mails of guests and delivering the same to them. When a guest is not in his room, the front desk receives his mail, keeps it in the room and mail key rack, and delivers it to the guest when he returns to the hotel. If the hotel receives mails for a guest who has a reservation in the future, the mails are sent to reservation section and kept in the reservation docket attached to the reservation form. The mail is later attached to the GRC (Guest Registration Card), which is handed over to the guest at the time of registration.
- e) Guest Paging: Locating a guest in the specific area of the hotel when he is not in his room.

- f) Safety deposit locker: Providing the locker facility to guests to keep their valuables like important documents and jewellery. Safety lockers are located in the back office.
- g) Guest room change: Changing the room of a guest, in case the guest's preference of room could not be fulfilled at the time of check-in due to unavailability of such a room. The room can also be changed if there is any defect in the room that requires extensive maintenance work or in case of upgrading. Upgrading is allotting a room of a higher price band without any extra charge from the guest.
- h) Handling guest queries and complaints
- i) Providing information about the hotel, its products and services.
- j) Providing information about the city.
- k) Making intra and inter- city travel arrangements for the guests, if required.

4. **Departure and Post Departure:**

The front office should try to cover up any unpleasant episodes during guest's stay by ensuring smooth and hassle-free departure of the guest.

The functions of front office at the time of departure are as follows-

- a) Preparation and presentation of guest bills: The front desk cashier prepares a guest's bills on the basis of financial transactions between the hotel and the guest recorded in the guest folio. The bill is presented to the guest for settlement.
- b) Settlement of guest account: A guest's account is settled by zeroing the guest folio balance. The folio balance may be debit or credit. If the guest folio balance is in debit, then the required amount of money is received from the guest to make the balance zero. If the balance of guest folio is in credit, then the balance amount is returned to the guest to settle his account.
- c) Luggage handling by bell desk
- d) Left luggage handling
- e) Sales and Marketing activity for future reservation: Giving promotional materials to guests, informing them about upcoming offers, and making future bookings in the same hotel or sister concerns in other cities.
- f) Warm farewell

It is important to keep in touch with guests even after their departure, generally done by sales and marketing team, which sends flyers with special offers or discounts, gift vouchers etc and wish guests on their important life events.

Bibliography

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