

23/08/1997

Business and leisure is resort hotel's thrust

Adeline Ong

WITH a name like Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel and located next to the largest surf pool in the world, one would not be wrong to assume that all the hotel provides is fun, fun and more fun!

But the leisure sector is not its biggest contributor. In fact, the sector makes up only 10 per cent of the hotel's total business.

The corporate sector contributes the bulk of the business at 65 per cent and meetings, international conferences and exhibitions 25 per cent, its general manager Mr Jurgen Ludwig told Business Times.

"With the word `resort' in our name, people think we are a leisure resort. But we are a very serious business hotel and it is very much reflected in the things we do," he said.

The acceptance of the hotel by the local business community is very encouraging.

The hotel, which had its soft launch in November last year, is already achieving 57 per cent occupancy. It will be officially opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on September 17.

"Although it is difficult to wear two hats at the same time - looking into business and leisure - we are accomplishing both rather well.

"The hotel is like your one-stop centre - there is a conference centre, resort, shopping complex and cinemas. It is a self-contained township," Ludwig said, adding that the hotel is constantly trying to upgrade its "caring attitude" by looking into its service.

About 5 per cent of its customers are long-staying guests, staying more than two months. The hotel gets a large portion of repeat customers too.

"That is why it is important to retain a happy staff. A happy staff would mean happy customers and also ensure that the customers will return," Ludwig said.

Exotic with Moorish styling, the hotel provides the right ambience for meetings, seminars, incentives and retreats of any kind.

It has everything in one place - meeting facilities, accommodation, food and beverage, shopping and entertainment.

The strategic combination appears to be paying off well for the resort. Since its soft opening, it has hosted hundreds of one-day meetings.

A variety of in-house meetings, seminars, workshops and retreats have also been held at the hotel by the likes of 3M Malaysia, Guinness Anchor Marketing, Cycle & Carriage, to name a few.

However, the highlight of the hotel must be when it successfully hosted the Asean Senior Officials Meeting, 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting, the Asean Regional Forum and the Post-Ministerial Conferences in July.

"With the Asean Ministerial Meeting, it indicated that we `had arrived'," Ludwig said.

Two more highlights will be the Incentive Travel and Convention, Meetings Asia (IT&CMA) exhibition, and the Asia Pacific Real Estate Congress (Aprec) which will hold its 8th biennial meeting at the hotel.

Ludwig said that 65 per cent of the hotel's market segmentation is corporate because entrepreneurs will want to do business in a conducive environment.

"Businessmen will want some peace and quiet and they choose Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel because the hotel understands their business needs," he said, adding that the hotel has an array of 41 venues both for large and small events.

Selection can be made from 18 column-free boardrooms, ranging from 60 to 158 sq m to accommodate up to 160 persons in theatre-style seating.

There are also two auditoriums of 90 and 240 sq m for 45 and 124 persons, respectively. In addition, there is the high-tech Grand Lagoon Ballroom (2,340 sq m) which can accommodate banquets of up to 2,200 guests.

"The ballroom can be partitioned into three separate, sound-proofed sections. Thus, simultaneous events in different sections are possible.

"Then, there is the state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment along with facilities for microphone discussion, simultaneous translation, an electronic voting system and international video conferencing," he said.

Ludwig said that since the hotel realises that many delegates need to continue attending to day-to-day business matters while they are at the hotel, every room is equipped with two ISDN lines, two IDD telephones, voice-mail system and facsimile hook-up line.

Additional services include secretarial assistance in the Business Club, and the rental of laptops and mobile telephone.

The hotel offers 439 rooms, including 37 Club Classic rooms, seven executive suites, 18 junior suites and one presidential suite at the hotel. All have tea- and coffee-making facilities, colour television with in-house movies and CNN, radio, personal safe, minibar and writing desk.

A unique feature of the hotel is its 36 themed rooms. These ranges from a fantasy-like Arabian night setting and the rustic interiors of a Malay kampung house, to the Wild, Wild West room that is complete with wagon bed and saloon chairs.

"Meanwhile, the leisure segment is more of a weekend market. The hotel is rather full on weekends," Ludwig said.

It would only be understandable because there are ample diversions at the hotel.

There is the health and spa facilities (which occupy two floors), a free-form swimming pool with cascading waterfalls and the world's biggest surf pool with waves over 2m high breaking onto a 170m long man-made beach.

Then, there is Sunway Lagoon with its Waterpark, Adventure Park and Fort Lagoon Wild, Wild West.

Those favouring indoor activities can choose from a range including a 48-lane bowling alley and snooker centre, a 10-screen cineplex and Malaysia's first open atrium themed ice rink.

For entertainment, nothing surpasses the Arena, an entire wing of the hotel encompassing karaoke, discotheque, a wine bar and a sports bar.

To further boost its occupancy, Ludwig said that the hotel has a stopover programme with Malaysia Airlines, and is looking for ways to work with Tourism Malaysia.

"We are at the right spot at the right time. In addition to that, we have had lots of support from the various ministeries and the Government as well.

"That is really wonderful because we are now on par with hotels that has been operational for 20 years. We are neck on neck with them now," he said.

Ludwig believes that training his 800-odd staff is crucial.

"We will include them into a decision-making process. Everyone likes to be appreciated.

"It is a two-way street, not a jalan sehala (one way street). At the hotel, we promote an open-door policy and I always make time for the staff.

"The management styles have changed over the years. The days of an authoritative manager is over. That is why I am so glad when some of my

staff call me papa. I am glad to have a good effect on young people," the 63-year-old manager said, adding that he treats people the way he wants to be treated.

"I have experienced five hotel openings and the pinnacle has to be Sunway Lagoon. It is like I am being rewarded for all those years in the industry," he said.

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