

Blog: Food For Thought - Mauritius service

by Justice Malala (Guest Author) on 2011-05-05 11:25:00

Mauritius is a country built on the hospitality industry, and good service is at the heart of the economy. Our (South-African) cabinet ministers should really visit this little island. From the airport right through to the resorts and their restaurants, the service is not just good. It is excellent.

If you fly Air Mauritius to OR Tambo International, you may have to take a bit of a walk to the immigration desks. It's the luck of the draw. Sometimes you get parked far from immigration and sometimes you are quite close.

On my return from Mauritius last week, I was unlucky — or lucky, depending on how you look at it. I had the long walk, and it was all rather pleasant, what with my new health-consciousness and all.

Then my fellow passengers and I nearly died. In broad daylight, right in front of a huge load of international and local passengers, was a demonstration of why this country is not getting anywhere fast on economic growth and other development criteria.

It was 2.35pm, and right in front of us were nine airport workers — asleep.

Most were fast asleep, snoring into the heavens, while others were just in various positions of repose. This was the sight that greeted international visitors to our country on a working day last week. It was incredible. I wanted to take a picture with the caption "SA: a country asleep on the job". I wanted to weep, I wanted to scream and shout.

I don't mean to knock our country but, really, we need to do something about this. What made the whole thing even worse was the fact I was returning from Mauritius, a country we in SA should adopt as an example of how to do business.

This was my fourth trip to Mauritius in about 12 years. Every time I go there, I am amazed at the hospitality industry. People actually work.

Let me give you an example. I have on most occasions stayed at these huge tourist resorts. This is not my choice, but I have children, and the facilities are perfect for people like me. You can outsource your offspring to skilled staff who will engage in activities with them and keep them happy while you enjoy a massage.

Now, what interests me about these establishments is that you usually pay a flat fee, which is inclusive of airport transfers, meals, rooms, drinks — the works. It is only when you want to have expensive hard tack or champagne that you pay extra. The food is good and the drinks are decent.

This means that you can arrive in Mauritius, spend up to 14 days there and never have to handle cash. Of course, that is the blurb but, believe me, you will handle cash because anyone in their right mind would begin to go nuts just staying in the hotel, which is when you start going out and exploring a bit.

The crucial point is that, in the resort itself, money never changes hands. Not once do you ever have to worry about tipping.

Yet here is the joy: service is excellent throughout. Waiters start running to you as you enter the restaurant area. They offer tables, drinks and food. They are attentive. I started feeling weird. I would think about wine and my wine would be poured. I had to beg these guys to lay off.

They are not trying to impress to get tips. They all earn a basic salary and that is what they work so hard, so

consistently for. They do not start smiling and giving good service because of what they can get from you.

Back home in SA, unfortunately, even the prospect of a tip cannot seem to galvanise some of our hospitality industry workers to, well, just move.

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Here is an example. I have flown our national carrier and Air Mauritius to the island. On SA Airways the cabin crew were rude and unhelpful. Asking for a glass of milk for a baby was considered the height of outrageousness. On Air Mauritius a polite and attentive cabin stewardess ran to bring fresh milk — for tea. Other passengers asked for all sorts of things. Service was provided with a smile.

Which brings me to those workers sleeping and dozing in full sight of their seniors at OR Tambo last week. We can talk till the cows come home about how we have become members of the Brics bloc and so on. But talk is what it will remain if we don't start doing something about the culture of sloth that prevails in this country.

Source: Financial Mail

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