

The way you make me feel - the true secret to hospitality

 By [Guy Stehlik](#)

2 Feb 2017

At a recent hotel industry function, I was asked which the best hotel was that I have ever stayed at. This has been a common question over the years and one that has an easy answer. It's also a question to which I enjoy watching the reactions to my reply. I suppose I am expected to mention the likes of 'The Ritz Carlton in Shanghai' or 'The Lanesborough in London', however, my decision is not based on six-star facilities or Michelin-rated restaurants, nor is my verdict based on white-gloved waiters or state-of-the-art cocktails. My choice is based on one thing – how the place made me feel.



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I was very fortunate as a youngster to escape the doom and gloom of the Cape Town winter, whisked off to one of the properties that my dad worked at - a highlight for me and my family. I will never forget how it felt, from the anticipation of our stay to the absolute joy and delight during our stay, to the disappointment of it all ending. San Lameer on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast gets my vote. The best hotel in the world!

Why?

The true secret to hospitality – be it at your home, in your office or at a hotel – comes down to “how did we make you feel”. I can honestly say that I don't recall the quality of the food or the style of the décor in the room, but I definitely remember the smell of the buffets and braais on the terrace, the sight of the Zulu dancers and the sound of the African drums. The intoxicating entertainment, leaving children and adults gasping in delight. I remember the staff and how they treated me, the hands-on manager – Andre Steyn – noticeably involved, evident even to a young boy of 8. We had a blast, and we created memories. There was so much stuff to do. Kiddies and teenagers were catered for and considered with respect. Adults had an entertainment program too, so everyone was happy.

Entertainment is key

Resort management is a tricky thing, believe me. And we have, at times, found ourselves wanting. It seems that modern-day resorts, apart from the likes of Umhlanga Sands and Sun City, don't necessarily give enough consideration to their entertainment. Making sure that they offer high-quality entertainment, across all ages and in a safe and secure environment, should be a key driver.

San Lameer was always busy, so you were never the only kid. We made friends at the disco and 'played it cool' with the DJ (who was always top quality, shipped in from Durban). We had a games room, with the latest and greatest version of Donkey Kong or Space Invaders, and a pool table that didn't veer off to the left top pocket. We played volley ball on the beach and couldn't take our eyes off the lifesavers. On rainy days we were bundled off on shopping trips to Margate (I kid you not!) The new arrivals or shy little ones hiding behind mom's skirt were enticed by a team of entertainment specialists, drumming up support for activities and getting everyone in on the fun. Our parents could rest their weary souls, knowing that their kids were going to have a blast.

The result: a no-brainer for your next family holiday. We would already start nagging my mom in the car returning to the airport if we could go back to San Lameer. And when she agreed, we wanted to know when. How soon?

Resort hotels have an opportunity in this country to reinvent themselves: what a terrific sales tool entertainment could be! I do understand the challenge – the cost and organisation of entertainment in times when the hotel is not busy. My retort? Just begin! Remember, the Pied Piper gathered the children of Hamelin one by one.

ABOUT GUY STEHLIK

Guy Stehlik is the CEO and founder of BON Hotels and Director of BON Hotels International West Africa. Having vast experience in all aspects of Hotel Management as well as having owned his own hotels, Guy created BON Hotels as an "owner-staff-community-guest" centric company to herald in and define an exciting new era in hotel management.

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