Marketing Strategies for Resort Restaurants

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Whenever I stay at a hotel, I never eat a the hotel's restaurants. I tend to look for a local restaurant nearby, which, I believe, offers local authentic food, tastier, fresher and more interesting at a reasonable price than that at the hotel. However, in terms of all-inclusive resorts, guests have fewer choices to eat out because of the resort's remote location and pre-paid packages that already include meals. When I travel, I enjoy local dining in addition to spectacular natural landscapes and experience activities. Therefore, restricted food choices at resorts may reduce their guest bookings because the guests cannot ask the resort for a refund if the food is not delicious. As shown in the photo, a buffet is common dining but its tastes and variety of dishes might not satisfy the guests at a resort. Unlike free-standing restaurants, guests might not know the menu prices of their food at some resorts as it is part of the package. Therefore, I think it is challenging for guests to judge food quality as there is no price signal before consuming it in this case. Pricing might communicate some valuable information for customers, such as food quality expected and a competitive level of a restaurant for food quality, so it can be used to make customers' purchasing decisions to some extent. Also, online customer reviews might be hard to search for a particular resort restaurant, which might not have a name advertised like free-stand restaurants. Most all-inclusive resort food reviews might come from travel agencies, who provide resort restaurant ratings based on personal and other guests' experiences and word of mouth. Generally, I do not expect high food quality at some resorts; if their food quality is high, it must be expensive as there is low competition in the area where the resort operates.

Let's now clarify my assumption about resort restaurants' marketing and operations about food quality against research. How can the top resort meet customer expectations for food quality assurance through marketing strategies? I will refer to a case study conducted by Karson & Murphy in 2013 for the restaurants, located inside the Orlando Resort and Spa in the Walt Disney World Resort Area, Florida. The resort has 2300 rooms with 18 restaurants and lounges, serving 75% business and 25% leisure.

To meet customer expectations of food quality assurance, the resort has an excellent service design. That is, in addtion to operate its own restaurants, the resort has partnered with a wel-known, Italian fine dining restaurant, *Prelibato Italian Trattoria,* founded in Manhattan for over 20 years. Guests, therefore, will easily to find information about this

resturant online to judge its food quality before booking with the resort.

Another marketing strategy to meet food quality expected by guests is the two-level decision-making of the marketing and operation functions. At a high level, the Director of Food and Beverage, Marketing Manager, and Sales Team set marketing goals and targets for restaurants in the resort. At a lower level, restaurant managers in the resort create tactics to implement these goals and targets. This is a decentralized structure because the resort management understands that the front-line restaurant managers are more effective in evaluating customer needs and expectations. "[Restaurant managers] edit winelists, make menu changes, generate incentives, and develop promotions to continually attract guests into their restaurants" (Karson & Murphy, 2013).

In addition, the restaurant managers know better than the upper-evel management of the resort about the restaurant's target markets and dining trends. The marketing department knows at which time of the year, the restaurant should target local, non-resort customers instead of resort guests and what their tastes would be different, based on market research. From these target customers, the restaurant managers will implement menu changes and promotions to attract and serve them. The restaurant actually opens to both local customers and resort guests but would give priority to serve the latter when room bookings are full. Indeed, the coordination and integrated horizontal communication between marketing and operations at the resort is the key to the restaurant's success in meeting customer expectations in food quality at the resort.

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