

Case study

Languages and culture at work

The Alhambra
Hotel

Hotel reaps rewards from multilingual customer service – in person and on-line

Close to St Pancras station and the new Eurostar terminal, it's no surprise that Alhambra Hotel pays more attention than most to the needs of an international clientele. A family-run business which has been extending a multilingual welcome for over 30 years, the hotel enjoys an excellent reputation for customer service which is testified to on numerous hotel review websites.

Alhambra's team speak seven languages

Languages spoken by the team of 11 at the hotel include Portuguese, French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, German, Polish and of course English, matching closely their customer base who mostly arrive from continental Europe, with large numbers from France and Spain in particular. Having witnessed increasing numbers of Chinese tourists in recent years, Mandarin is a language they would like to add to their collective knowledge.

Hotel Manager Bruno Cabral, who speaks five languages himself, explained the difference that language skills can make in the hotel industry. "When we're dealing with guests over the phone, many of them can't speak English – we find this especially with our French customers. They're much more comfortable if you speak their language, and far more likely in our experience to make a booking straight away. Our approach to languages is a key factor in helping us to grow our international clientele, and secure repeat business."

Welcoming guests on the world wide web

Along with word-of-mouth recommendation, their website is their main marketing tool – and Bruno has ensured it provides an online welcome to new potential guests in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German and Polish. With more guests arriving now from China, they're considering offering Mandarin too in the future, and are in the process of implementing a multilingual reservation system. Crucial safety information in the hotel rooms is displayed in French as well as in English, and Bruno is also looking into translation of breakfast menus.

While many staff members are fluent speakers of different languages, Bruno believes you can make an impression with more basic knowledge. "Just a greeting, a please or a thank you in the customer's language can make all the difference. Don't be afraid to have a go – you can really impress your guests by practising the smattering that you learned at school or on holiday."



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