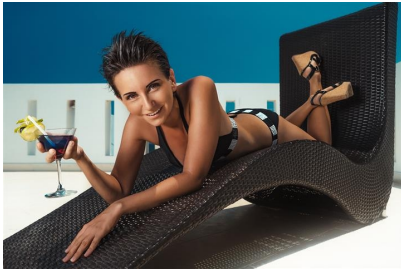


Luxury Hotels Offer Free Stays for Pictures on Social Media

In just a few years, social media have risen to become one of the most effective marketing channels, with the ability to reach millions of potential customers all over the world. It is thus not surprising that a new trend in the hospitality industry is emerging, where luxury hotels are giving away free stays to active people on social media, especially Instagram, who recognize their brands.



One such case of a social media blogger who travels and takes pictures about the properties she stays in is Marianna Hewitt from Los Angeles. She was given a free stay at the Mulia Resort in Bali, Indonesia. To receive the stay, Hewitt posted pictures of the resort on her Instagram account, and made positive comments about it. These posts reached at least 396,000 of her Instagram followers, and in exchange, the resort offered her a 5-day stay at their hotel, where rooms go for about \$400 to \$1,000 a night.

This was not the first time that Hewitt has been offered a complimentary stay in a hotel. In the past year, she has received a dozen similar trips, some free and others paid but with a stipend. Hewitt says her first visit was in Thailand, where Thailand tourism board offered her a complimentary stay for social media mention.

What do the hotels gain from offering complimentary stays? In the current digital world where everything is done online, including business, complimentary stays for social media recognition is one of the many ways in which hotels get mentioned and advertised while reaching people who love travelling.

This trend is becoming increasingly popular, and other huge hospitality brands such as The Ritz Carlton, Gurneys Montauk, and Triumph Hotels are also reaching out to people on social media networks. Some of these luxury hotels offer even up to one week of free stay for just a few flattering mentions on social media, and according to J Public Relations. This is a strategy that seems to be working well in their favor.

With most of these hospitality brands having very effective marketing teams, one would question what they stand to gain from using social media users to market their brands. According to a spokesperson for the Mulia Resort, social media users have their own unique and personalized styling, which cannot be matched by their marketing teams. Therefore, the photos posted by social media users provide an

accurate highlight of what a stay in the hotels would feel like (through the eyes of a guest), and thus have the potential to persuade potential customers to make a booking.



Most hotels do not have a set standard on what social media users have to do to receive complimentary stays. However, there are several factors that are considered by these hotels before picking a person to invite. According to the spokesperson of the Mulia Resort, their social media team goes through the posts of potential invitees to ensure that the recognitions made meets the image of their brand.

Some of the things they look out for include clean photos that depict the actual stay at the hotel, and a good number of social media followers. The number of followers is especially important, since more followers means that more people will be reached by the post, which will be of more benefit to the hotels.

In addition to the number of followers, hotels also consider the value of the followers you have. For example, if most of the fans you have are passionate about luxury travels, chances are you will receive more consideration. According to Allison Stich, Ritz-Carltons' VP for global public relations, this helps to ensure that the recognition they receive on social media is received by an audience that can be valuable to them.



How successful is this strategy? Most of the hospitality brands that offer complimentary stays have revealed very little about how much they spend, and there is no sure way of measuring the effectiveness of this promotional strategy. However, it is without a doubt that this practice gives luxury hotels a lot of publicity, especially among millions of people who might be inclined to travel and spend their vacations in luxury hotels. According to The Mulia Resort spokesperson, their brand is now easily recognizable as a result of some of the photos that have been posted by social media users on Instagram and elsewhere. The users are also happy to do their part, and most of them are willing to make flattering posts about luxury hotels for a chance of receiving a free vacation.

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