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Service for millennials

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Service for *Millennials*

Joan Chang of Lloyd's Inn relates the importance of branding for a younger audience and the changing landscape of service in boutique hospitality.



Tucked away in the outskirts of Somerset lies Lloyd's Inn, a 34-room boutique hotel that's almost always fully booked. With its grey and white palette, warm wooden accents, light-filled rooms, and tropical outdoor showers, it's hard to imagine Lloyd's Inn was once a neglected budget hotel established in 1990.

The Lloyd's Inn of today was revived by Joan Chang and her team of architects and hospitality professionals in 2014. Bolstered by the immense success of their Singapore location, Lloyd's Inn has since opened in Bali in late 2018, and is set to open in Kuala Lumpur in 2019. Joan also recently opened Cara Cara Inn in Bali, a new hospitality concept straddling the conventional hostel-hotel divide. Terming it a 'hostel-tel', Cara

Cara Inn, much like Lloyd's Inn, speaks of Joan's ambition for shaking up the industry.

Although she entered the industry at only 24, Joan has leveraged her youth by cleverly identifying the gaps in regional markets to build accommodations for millennial travellers: affordable, centrally located places with strong ties to local culture, interiors that remain perennially Instagrammable — the number one source for millennial travel inspiration — and services streamlined to suit younger, more independent needs.

Welcome to the new age of boutique hospitality.



Joan, Lloyd's Inn has a very strong social media presence. Can you tell us how you built it?

I am a strong advocate of social media and it has worked well for us because we were one of the first few boutique hotels in Singapore to pioneer experiential marketing back when social media marketing was still relatively new. Experiential marketing is about conveying how your brand is experienced on social media — from the caption to visuals.

I feel like [social media] is very personal, so I continue to handle it even though I have an assistant now. I continue to see every tag of us — everyone who uploads photos, tags us, hashtags us, location tags us — which helps me stay in touch with the brand on the ground.

Manpower is a challenge, so even though we've diversified the brand, I've kept social media to one account. That way I'm less busy but also able to exercise more quality control over what's posted.

Lloyd's Inn has a few surprising differences. For example, there's no in-house F&B; instead you provide complimentary breakfast at Kiliney Kopitiam or a subsidised breakfast at Freshly Baked.

Space was a constraint for us, and in a small compound, we felt the presence of F&B might instead be a disturbance to guests. Business-wise, we would also need to consider how to manage the noise, the overheads, the manpower, so we decided to keep it clean and focus on our hospitality.

We are in a location that offers great shopping and cafes at your doorstep, and if you look at traveller demographics and profiling, most people want to go out to try other kinds of food. We offer outsourced breakfast vouchers with the nearby Singaporean cafes because we see this as an added advantage — guests can come here and experience local culture on their own time.



You guys are also big on promoting local brands within the hotel — you offer a robe designed by homegrown fashion brand, Ying The Label, for instance.

We want to support other local brands because we are also a local brand. At the end of the day, the travel industry is now moving into a different era where the younger generation is more savvy. When we travel, we like to search for local experiences on TripAdvisor, unlike the older generation who is interested in tours and sightseeing. I think there is a huge growth market here, so we see our promotion of local brands and experiences as a value-add to guests.

Is this idea of ‘value-adding’ how you define service excellence at Lloyd’s Inn, or even at Cara Cara Inn?

I think service excellence is a point in the service experience that people feel exceeds their expectations of the price or positioning they paid for. I think this point is always relative to each brand.

For example, Cara Cara Inn in Bali is a combination of a hostel and hotel. Bali is saturated with hotels and hostels, so I think Cara

Cara fits into that gap between the concepts because all rooms come with an ensuite bathroom, which is rare for hostels. At the same time, our average price per night is about \$30, so while we can't afford to have the extra manpower to do things like remembering our guests' names, we focus on providing service excellence by enabling our guests to be self-sufficient and move more efficiently. We educate them on how to serve themselves: we have a self-service system where people collect their own breakfasts and return the trays, and instead of a concierge, we answer questions on our website and put up recommended places to visit on Instagram.

So, service excellence really is dependent on the brand and its respective positioning, and identifying where the line is that you can value-add before you start comprising on your manpower and profits. Because Lloyd's Inn is a smaller boutique hotel, we can afford to go the extra mile and have staff attending to our guests' requests on check-in. There's less emphasis on creating self-service systems and more on training our staff to adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs). But because we don't enjoy economies of scale, it's difficult for us to pursue things like digital solutions.





Manpower is quite expensive in Singapore, so it can be costly for us to pursue service excellence especially when service excellence requires more guest relations officers to attend to the needs of people. What we do is to actively take on our customers' feedback on how we can improve, and implement it into our SOPs if feasible. For example, when we received feedback that some rooms are humid, we solved the problem by getting dehumidifiers. If guests cite that they are unwell, we note down their concerns and try to go that extra mile by getting them medicine.

Lloyd's Inn is also a popular staycation venue, right? Have you noticed a difference between the expectations of Singaporean and international guests?

Yes, different cultures expect different things. Some cultures, especially those from the West, are more easy-going and fine with self-service concepts. I think

Asian cultures generally expect a little more people-led service, in that they need somebody to serve them. But of course we see differences in expectations within cultures as well.

How do you think you will continue to innovate and remain competitive?

I think to innovate you must adapt so you can always stay in the game. The hospitality ballgame and what is relevant will change in 5-10 years. Although we can't be sure of what will change exactly, it's our job to engage on the ground to stay in touch. 📞

"...we focus on providing service excellence by enabling our guests to be self-sufficient and move more efficiently."