

## SECURITY SECRETS AND TIPS FOR HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS

**Guests in hotels and restaurants and tourists in general are frequently easy targets for criminals. Unfortunately some of the criminals are working in the industry because they know how easy it is to steal from guests. But sometimes the guests are the crooks. Hotel & Restaurant editor Andrew Moth looks at the problems and offers some useful tips.**



While it's murders, cash-in-transit heists, bank robberies and raids on casinos and shopping centres that attract the headlines, the workplace is the single most common crime scene. And this applies as much to hotels and restaurants as it does to any other workplace.

Hotels, restaurants and other tourism businesses are of course the scenes of violent crimes that make global news. The murder of David Rattray and suspected murder of cricket hero Bob Woolmer are the most obvious and recent examples. However, theft, fraud, assault, child abuse, prostitution, drug dealing and money laundering all occur in South African hotels – from the smartest and biggest establishments to one-star rural hotels, B&Bs and self-catering establishments.

Staff and guests can be either victims or perpetrators, but the scale of the problem is massive. The frequency and bizarreness of some of the incidents is astonishing. And then there is the management time and resources that are spent on dealing with the problems.

### **Over the years *Hotel & Restaurant* has been given examples of:**

**Theft:** Some guests will steal anything – bathroom fittings (from bath-plugs to showerheads), linen, curtains, pictures, TV remote control batteries, TV sets, light bulbs etc, etc. And much the same applies to staff – bottles of champagne ordered and paid for by outsiders for friends who are staying in the hotel, furniture (for French polishing) in a scam set up by a deputy GM and the day's cash takings (to feed a GM's drug habit).

**Fraud:** With guests this can range from using stolen or cloned credit cards, sneaking away without paying at all, inviting outsiders to stay as guests, replacing the contents of 50ml whisky bottles in the mini-bar with cold tea, and shaping soap into a chocolate bar and re-using the wrapper. For staff the range of offences is as wide – using the wrong exchange rates, over-charging foreign guests, substitution of alcoholic beverages in the bar, stealing blank cheques from guests and allowing friends to enjoy high tea for free.

**Malicious damage:** Holes burned into carpets deliberately or carelessly by guests using a housekeeping iron, curtains used to clean shoes, chewing gum jammed in to locks and doors broken off hinges.

**Child abuse:** Some foreign tourists are paedophiles and see South Africa as a hunting ground.

**Prostitution:** Escort agencies brazenly offer through daily newspapers the services of Megaboobs – a nurse – and an array of young ladies mostly called Li, Lee, Leigh, Tasha or Stacey, who are all happy to visit hotels with their toys. Some prostitutes base themselves in hotels and hotels rent rooms by the hour. About 30 known prostitutes were found at one time in a long-stay guest's room in a luxury hotel, presumably while he handed out service awards!

## THE LEGALITIES OF SCREENING STAFF

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record, is not only legal but can be of great benefit to the company, the staff and customers alike, says Jenny Reid, MD of GriffithsReid, a corporate security management company which specialises in pre-and post-employment screening.

However, says Reid: "A company must make sure it has adhered to the legalities of screening. These include a ban on discrimination on grounds of race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender. All screening tests have to take these basic elements into account."

"The most important rule is that all checks be carried out with the job applicant's written permission," she says. This should be made part of the formal application process that an applicant has to go through to be considered for employment.

In addition, companies should ensure that their employment policy is carefully explained, in writing, to any prospective employee before they are allowed to proceed with their application, namely that certain information may disqualify them.

The type of checks that can be done with ease include specific employment history; residence verification; telephone verification and educational background. Criminal history; driving record (especially for positions involving the use of company vehicles), and credit history reports are best left to professionals.

In addition, it has been shown that consumers overwhelmingly want workers to be screened. In the USA, a survey found that 61% of consumers said they felt "more comfortable" patronising a business that conducts employee screenings. "The implications this can have upon consumer confidence needs no imagination," said Reid.

"For a cost very often less than that of a new employee's salary for one day, companies can exercise due diligence, discourage applicants with something to hide, encourage honesty and limit uncertainty in the hiring process."

## **BUT WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT CRIME IN HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS?**

- 1. Background checks on all staff are essential.**
- 2. CCTV cameras discourage criminals, limit crime, prove that it has been committed and can identify the culprits. The cameras should monitor all public areas, corridors, back of house areas and carparks.**
- 3. Modern keycard locks are essential on hotel room doors, as are extra manual bolts that can be activated only from inside the room and in-room safes big enough to hold a laptop and small valuables.**
- 4. Guests must be warned verbally and in writing of the need to take care of their belongings at all times.**
- 5. Quick disciplinary action must be taken against staff when there is evidence of theft, fraud and dishonesty. Share this information with other hoteliers, guest-house operators and restaurateurs.**

6. Forget uninformed media comment about cookie-cutter hotel rooms. How else will staff be able to see at a glance that the table-lamp or the old prints of colonial Durban or Johannesburg have gone?
7. Secure the perimeter of your premises. If you have large grounds, employ security staff or contractors. Razor-wire is not infallible or attractive, but it is a deterrent. Cottages or rondawels need burglar bars.
8. Guest registration cards are useful, but only if your guests are asked to present them when signing for meals or drinks or entering the hotel.
9. Share information and read media reports about crimes to gain an understanding of modus operandi and trends. DSTV's Crime and Investigation channel has highlighted how large gangs work to distract staff while access is gained to safes and cash and office equipment removed.
10. Install hooks for handbags under restaurant tables.
11. Station staff with metal detectors at entrance doors and use the time to record their details with CCTV cameras.
12. Watch for signs of drug use. The symptoms are often evident but drug-users also leave physical evidence such as straws, syringes, broken bottles and lightbulbs.
13. Don't regard smart clothing on men or women as a sign of honesty.
14. Encourage staff to report suspicious behaviour by their colleagues or guests and reward those whose reports lead to the prevention and solving of crime.
15. Are those three men in overalls or dustcoats actually what they seem to be?
16. Exterior lighting or lights activated by motion detectors are a good investment.
17. Assign your most trusted and experienced staff to manage by walking around.
18. Beware of long-service employees who are reluctant to take leave.
19. Get a drop safe if you handle large amounts of cash and do everything you can to create the impression that large amounts of cash are not kept on the premises.
20. Pay for a risk analysis or expert advice from professionals such as Coin Security, follow the advice of your insurers and stay in touch with colleagues in other hotels or restaurants, anti-crime initiatives and the police