

## The best hotel management system for independent hotels

### Stating your independence:

Tips for operating an independent hotel in a world of global brands

Situated amongst Central New York's Finger Lakes, hotelier and restaurateur **Michael Casper's Private Hotel + Pure Food** delivers a level of hands-on hospitality and guest satisfaction that is unrivaled and appreciated by visitors from around the world. Competing in an industry where branded, chain hotels are supported by multi-million dollar marketing budgets, operating a 6-room bed and breakfast on an secluded 115 acre estate south of Ithaca is challenging. However, rather than make concessions to increase occupancy or bolster revenue, Michael relies on a surgeon-like attention to detail and personalized, "whatever the guest wants" level of service to maintain a sterling reputation highlighted by a **#1 TripAdvisor rating**.



To learn more about on how he navigates today's competitive lodging industry, we spoke with Michael about the challenges and advantages of operating an independent hotel as unique as Private Hotel + Pure Food. Here's what he had to share:

#### What are some of the areas where you believe chain hotels have an advantage over their independent competitors?

There are three areas where chain hotels typically have an advantage: advertising budget, guest services and employee talent. But they can be overcome by independents, if they choose to take on these challenges.

For example, I spend 10% of my gross revenue on advertising. I have a small property in a unique location, so I have to spend more to attract guests, but it works. We're the #1 rated Bed & Breakfast / Inn in Ithaca, New York.

Regarding guest services, I work 16 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure my guests have the highest quality experience possible. I also have a part-time staff of four, but my guests can count on me being available throughout their entire stay.

And regarding hiring, independents usually struggle because they don't have the budget or name recognition to attract the best talent. However, this can be overcome if existing employees commit to providing the best possible guest experience.

## Why do you believe some guests opt to select chain hotels versus independent hotels?

It's hard for me to speak for other independent hotels, but for my property it's usually due to price and local availability. My rates start at \$300 per night, so they're higher than many hotels in the area. However, when availability in Ithaca is low, we get bookings from guests who need to stay in the area and are willing to pay our rates. And I'm proud to say that these guests are always pleasantly surprised by the hospitality and service they receive during their stay.

## What specific techniques do you use to separate the Private Hotel + Pure Food guest experience from other hotels?

I rely on my experience and focus on delivering an exceptionally high level of guest service. I've visited and lived in some of the world's most historic independent hotels, including The Stanhope Apartment Hotel, New Yorker Hotel, The Hotel Elysée, The Plaza Hotel and Gramercy Park Hotel. I remember when they were truly independent and each had their own personality, so I try to provide my guests with an experience that they'll only receive at an independent hotel.

I make sure my guests receive the best of everything. Upon arrival, they're usually "wowed" by the natural surroundings and the museum-quality pieces that decorate the property. Each room has its own unique character, so every guest has a different experience when staying here. Along with personalized service, my guests receive the highest quality products, from Bvlgari amenities to on-property and locally grown foods and ingredients. Of course, providing this level of hospitality comes at a cost. I could lower my rates to attract more guests and bring in more revenue, but I enjoy knowing that my guests leave having received a truly unique experience.

## Do you believe that independent hotels can truly compete with chain hotels?

Yes and no – it depends on how they are compared. For chain hotels, room rates, room quality and service are standardized, so guests have more of a sense of what to expect from the hotel. With independents, it's harder for guests to gauge the experience they will receive, but I view this as an opportunity to surprise them with an unexpected level of quality and service.

Overall, for independent hotels to compete with chains, it depends on the general manager (GM) and the staff. The GM needs to understand the varying levels of quality and how to take care of guests. Every year, I partner with the Cornell School of Hotel Administration and help train students who want to get into the hotel business. Even though I run a small hotel, I teach the Ritz-Carlton Gold Standards and stress to students that it's our job to always meet the needs of our guests and make their experiences memorable.