

Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group continues to spearhead the employ of deaf staff in South Africa

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Clinton Thom, Cluster General Manager of Radisson Blu Le Vendome Hotel and Park Inn by Radisson Cape Town Newlands, says; "We feel honored to be able to make a difference in the lives of our deaf and hard-of-hearing staff, giving them an equal opportunity in the working field."

For Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, diversity and inclusion are two of the core pillars of its employee value proposition. When it took over the Deaf South Africa (DeafSA) building to construct the Park Inn by Radisson Cape Town Newlands, it saw a chance to uplift and employ deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

When the Park Inn by Radisson Cape Town Newlands opened, it had a deaf and hard-of-hearing staff complement of 30% — the first hotel in Africa to have back-of-house and front-of-house deaf and hard-of-hearing staff. Currently at Park Inn by Radisson Cape Town Newlands, 26% of staff are deaf or hard-of-hearing, with some of the staff having been transferred to Radisson Blu Le Vendome or two of the group's most recent South African additions, Park Inn by Radisson Polokwane and Radisson Blu Hotel & Residence, Cape Town with the same employment policy.

"We are thrilled to be able to broaden our compliment of deaf staff and currently have almost 41 deaf and hard-of-hearing staff members within our South African properties. The Radisson Blu Hotel and Residence in Cape Town employs 12 deaf and hard-of-hearing staff while the Park Inn Polokwane has two deaf staff members who have relocated from Cape Town. Continuing our momentum of diversity and inclusion within the group, we actively seeking to employ additional deaf staff in Africa's first Radisson Red hotel, scheduled to open in Cape Town within September this year," said Gyrieyah Slemming, Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group's HR Director for Africa & Indian Ocean.

Park Inn by Radisson Newlands has been recognized for its efforts, winning the 2015 Guardian Sustainable Business Award for Diversity & Inclusion in London. Since then the hotel and the group has continued to champion this initiative.

DeafSA own 51% of the Park Inn by Radisson Newlands hotel. The building was previously a DeafSA building, which was not being utilized. While the DeafSA building was on a piece of land earmarked for the hotel, the group then decided to incorporate the building as part of the hotel that would serve as an additional income generator for DeafSA.

Additionally, Carlson Rezidor saw the opportunity to create several jobs and allocate a portion of its workforce to the most underemployed group in South Africa and create opportunities that they wouldn't ordinarily receive. The group showed true commitment to making this employment policy work through various proactive initiatives.

National Director of DeafSA Bruno Druchen says, "With unemployment levels rising, jobs are few and far between. For the 1,6 million hard-of-hearing and deaf individuals in South Africa, it is even more difficult to find employment. One of the main reasons we have seen tremendous success has been providing deaf or hard-of-hearing staff with interaction tools during interviews."

The Rezidor Hotel Group believes that having leadership that truly wants to make a difference is key to successfully employing and retaining deaf or hard-of-hearing staff.

Thom says, "This is a great model for other corporates to follow. DeafSA will provide an interpreter for interviews for potential candidates. The option of interpreters is available and corporates should use it because the rewards are immeasurable. It's also important to note that deaf people or those who are hard-of-hearing can communicate in several ways, such as lip reading, basic sign language or writing down their thoughts, so in some cases, it's easier to communicate, even without an interpreter."

While a few changes need to be made to accommodate deaf and hard-of hearing staff, it is important to note that they do not want to be treated differently. All they want is to be treated with the respect that shows they can do their job.

On recruitment, DeafSA provides the hotel with a list of candidates that they have screened and the hotel advises DeafSA of the hotels available positions.

"They work mainly in the food and beverage departments, housekeeping and finance," Thom said.

If deaf or hard-of-hearing staff show interest in other jobs within Carlson Rezidor, they are given the opportunity to learn the required skills.

"If a deaf staff member wants to be a baker for example, he or she will be trained if they have a positive attitude towards learning," said Thom, "They must be willing, committed and prepared to work hard."

Deaf staff are required to wear a badge that reads, "I am deaf" to help guests identify them and prevent any misunderstandings. Guests are also informed about the presence of deaf staff at check-in and are also briefed on how to interact with them.

In terms of educating hearing staff on deaf culture and what to do and not do when interacting with deaf staff, DeafSA brings in an interpreter annually or when a new hotel opens. Interpreters are also used for mandatory training and staff meetings.

Thom adds that relationships between hearing and deaf or hard-of-hearing staff are excellent and they have developed their own unique way of communicating with each other.

DeafSA's Druchen said he couldn't be happier with the outcome of the initiative, "Wherever we go, deaf people either want employment or have given up hope of being employed; we use Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group as an example of a great partnership," he said. "The experience has had such a positive spin-off. We want to continue spreading this wonderful story."

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About The Rezidor Hotel Group

The Rezidor Hotel Group is one of the most dynamic hotel companies in the world and a member of the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group. The group features a portfolio of 480 hotels with over 106,000 rooms in operation or under development in 80+ countries.

Rezidor operates the core brands Radisson Blu® and Park Inn® by Radisson in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), along with the Club CarlsonSM loyalty program for frequent hotel guests. In early 2014 and together with Carlson, Rezidor launched the new brands Radisson RED (lifestyle select) and Quorvus Collection (luxury). In 2016, Rezidor acquired 49% of prizeotel. Rezidor has an industry-leading Responsible Business Program and was named one of the World's Most Ethical Companies by the US think-tank Ethisphere.

In November 2006, Rezidor was listed on the Nasdaq Stockholm, Sweden. HNA Tourism Group Co., Ltd., a division of HNA Group Co., Ltd.—a Fortune Global 500 company with operations across aviation, tourism, hospitality, finance and online services among other sectors—became the majority shareholder in December 2016.

The Rezidor Hotel Group and its brands employ 43,700 people in EMEA and is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium.

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