



Forbes Travel Guide Seminar

By YASUTOSHI ABE

On January 17, a joint seminar was held by Les Clefs d'Or Japan and the Japan Concierge Association at the Mandarin Oriental Tokyo. Two guest speakers from Forbes Travel Guide (FTG) were invited. It was the first open training offered in Japan by the FTG, the audience numbered 250



participants from hospitality industry from throughout Japan. The seminar commenced with a welcome speech by Mr. Paul Jones, the General Manager of the venue hotel who provided great support to the event. Followed by an speech from the President of Les Clefs d'Or Japan, Ms. Sumiyoshi. The first part of the seminar was by Mr. Ryo Koike, the VP of Asia-Pacific region. Having experienced working as a concierge, he began his speech with a memory of his childhood that made him decide to work in the industry. He explained, "What the FTG is", "How the rating standards for hotels are decided" and "How Japan's travel service compares to other countries in the world". The FTG is the first hotel rating system in the world with 60 years of history and almost every employee has more than 15 years of experience working in the hotel industry. They evaluate hotels in 144 cities based on 550 different criteria. While they inspect both service and facility, they emphasize the quality of service (75%) more than those of facilities (25%). In the end, he concluded, "There's no goal for hotels, because there's no goal for impressive experiences." The second part of the seminar was led by Mr. Jeff Wielgopalan, the VP of Learning Development. Mr. Wielgopalan frequently asked questions to participants and spent about 2 hours speaking about "Concierges who FTG values", "Why emphasizing concierges" and "Trainings regarding utilization of guests' preference data using case examples and role plays". Among the inspected sections, the concierge is the only section tested twice in a single inspection. This clearly shows that the FTG places high importance on the concierge's quality. Mr. Wielgopalan repeatedly emphasized the importance of smiling and calling guests by their names even if it was a difficult name and there was a chance of mispronouncing it. He also passionately added that it is essential for concierges to think ahead and provide services the guests would like to have. He said that concierges should recognize that the service provided by concierge is not a part of a routine work, but a special gift that the guests receive only once. The seminar closed with big applause from all the participants to the two guest speakers.

February Monthly Meeting

On February 21st, the monthly meeting was held at the Palace Hotel Tokyo with attendance of 29 members. After the reports from the committee, we invited staff from the Ministry of the Environment and had a mini-lecture on their "Project to Fully Enjoy National Parks".

Some attractive and notable elements of the selected 8 national parks were presented.



A Field Trip to Naoshima & Teshima

By KAORI KATO

11 members gathered in Naoshima on February 15th. It's one of the popular destinations among travelers to Japan.

Currently, this island is known for contemporary art works. In 1985, it was first developed as a campground and then the Benesse House Museum, the first museum on the island, opened in 1992. Since then, a number of museums and art works were created. The island welcomes 200,000 visitors a year now.

Day 1: We first visited the Chichu Art Museum, the second art museum opened in 2004 designed by architect Mr. Tadao Ando. The uniqueness of this museum is that it's built underground so that the concrete material will not conflict with the scenery of the Seto Inland Sea. You could only enjoy art works here by sunlight from the ceiling. Therefore, the impression of the art works may change depending on the weather and the season. Then, we visited the Lee Ufan Art Museum, a museum opened in 2010, and the Benesse House Museum. The art work by Mr. Jannis Kounellis was very impressive. He stayed in Naoshima for two weeks and created art work using various items he picked up on the island. At the end of the day, we visited the Benesse House Park which is a part of the Benesse House Museum and it's made of wood by Mr. Tadao Ando in 2006. We enjoyed a French dinner made by local ingredients and after that we had a night tour of the museum. We also took a cable car ride up to the top of mountain where the Oval Bar is located and had a great time.



Day 2: Mr. Ryoji Kasahara, CEO of the Naoshima Cultural Village, told us a history on island development and then visited three sites of the Art House Project in Honmura district that began in 1998. This project was started to protect homes and streets built over one century ago. After 20-minute ferry ride from Miyaura Port to Teshima Island, we had a lunch at the Teshima Kitchen. We then visited the Teshima Art Museum which opened in 2010. We also went to Les Archives du Cœur which contained recordings of heartbeats of human being. Lastly, we went to the Teshima Yokoo House built by Mr. Tadanori Yokoo and architect Ms. Yuko Nagayama.

We were able to expand our knowledge on the art works by support of the Benesse House. We have learned that the museums on the island only have permanent exhibits and that the museums have limited entry to preserve ideal viewing environment. We would like to make use of this field trip by recommending what we saw and experienced to our guests.

March Monthly Meeting

On March 14th, the monthly meeting was held in Nara with attendance of 16 members. After the reports from the committee, we invited Mr. Hirai and Prof. Nishiyama as guest speakers. Mr. Hirai is the person who triggered the shaved ice boom in Nara. Prof. Nishiyama gave a speech on the annual event held in Nara called *Omizutori*, the event for the confession of sins to *Juichimen Kannon*.

