

## MAS TORRENT GROUP, SPAIN

### Where Visitors Feel at Home: Language Support and Training for Non-Native Staff

#### Introduction

Grupo Mas Torrent (The Mas Torrent Group) is a group of companies forming a conglomerate of restaurants, hotels, real estate agencies and hospitality service companies, all of which are located in the Catalonian region of Empordà. The group philosophy embodies that of its founder, and the whole Figueras family, namely to create environments in which visitors feel at home. By locating in idyllic settings, Grupo Mas Torrent aim to create perfect environments for both outdoor and indoor activities.

The hotels and restaurants belonging to the group are:

- Hotel Mas de Torrent: Part of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux chain, this exclusive five-star hotel, has ten rooms in the main building, an eighteenth-century masia (traditional Catalonian country house,) 22 bungalows with a private garden and 7 suites with private swimming pools in each of these;
- Hotel El Far: Situated on the outskirts of the village of Llafranc, this hotel is situated on the cliffs close to the San Sebastian lighthouse, overlooking the Mediterranean. These completely renovated eighteenth century buildings offer the visitor 9 rooms to choose from, all with panoramic views of the sea;
- Hotel Albons: Set on top of a hill in the Baix Ampurdà (the lower Ampurdà) with breathtaking views to Cabo de Creus (Cape of Creus) the Hotel Albons enjoys a spectacular all-year round backdrop;
- Mas de Torrent Gastronomic Restaurant : Considered one of the best gastronomic establishments in the whole of Catalonia;
- Resturante El Far: Reflects typical Ampurdán gastronomy which embraces local culinary seafood traditions. This restaurant boasts one of most spectacular vistas on the Costa Brava;
- Resturante Bistro: A new concept of informal cuisine based on the simplicity of Mediterranean cooking;
- Resturante el Mirador: Located on the shoreline of the bay of Palamós with excellent food and magnificent views from all tables.

#### Human Resource Management Practices at the Mas Torrent Group

The Mas Torrent group has an average annual staff of some 150 employees of which 20-25% of these are non-nationals. One of the key drivers of Human Resource practices at the Mas Torrent Group has been to live up to the ideals of its founder and deploy human resources effectively to create environments where visitors feel at home.

One of the principal challenges confronting the Mas Torrent Group is the need to attract and retain highly qualified staff who meet the needs and expectations of their clientele. The restaurants' dining halls is where recruitment and retention has been most problematic due to the fact that the professional waiting trade attracts so few young people into the profession and few new entrants possess key language skills.

One of the key challenges facing Head of Human Resources, David Rivas, who joined the group some seven years ago, was to find a permanent solution to resolve this problem. He was keen to avoid the spectre of constant work rotation and was also eager to create stable, cohesive work teams. He was also aware that in other countries there is a greater tradition and respect for the professionalism of waiting staff. Based on this realization, recruitment methods targeted countries outside of Spain, with press advertisements, employment agencies and other employment gateways utilised. The new strategy was deemed a success since it resulted in the recruitment of qualified personnel meeting both quality standards and management and clientele expectations.

However, contracting personnel from other countries posed a new challenge to the company, namely how to keep the personnel with the company, which depended directly on their level of adaptation and integration within the community. Due to the huge benefits these employees brought to the organisation, a reception and integration programme was established for these immigrant workers which included a number of support measures:

- Arranging the many, necessary legal procedures for the worker to come to Spain with the same rights as those of a Spanish worker;
- Finding an appropriate living space for the workers' needs;
- The firm has developed a reception guide for its employees which covers all the information necessary for the first six months of their stay within the country;
- A personalised monitoring of the adaptation process by the company management to detect and resolve any personal or professional conflicts at an early stage;
- Integration activities within the local community as well as with their co-workers inside the company;
- Spanish courses for the first six months for those workers with no knowledge of Spanish, in addition to normal job-related training provided by the company to all its employees.

Such initiatives have enhanced Mas Torrent's reputation internationally as well as building stronger ties within the local community.

## **Conclusion**

Contracting personnel from foreign countries is considered by Mas Torrent as yet another source of organisational wealth which sits alongside the wonderful landscapes and the excellence of the buildings in which the group's establishments are located. The reception and integration programme has been established as a commitment by the company to its employees, underlining the importance of the service provided by these employees to the organisation as a whole. However, the difficulties in carrying out this programme are manifold and require much time and effort. Indeed, the on-going monitoring of the company's 150 employees requires a high level of dedication. In spite of this, Mas Torrent recognises the contribution of these employees to its continued success and long-term sustainable growth.