



THE STAR

Media release

Chief Concierge delivers the love on Valentine's Day thanks to global network

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Champagne, flowers, chocolates, and grand declarations of love are all synonymous with Valentine's Day – but there's no-one who knows more about romance than The Star Gold Coast Chief Concierge Christian Espino, with links to an exclusive global hotel concierge network originating from the world's most renowned city of love, Paris.

Mr Espino is one of only 52 hotel concierge representatives located in every state of Australia that is part of *Les Clefs d'Or Australia*, an exclusive and elite group of hotel concierge affiliated with the Paris-based *Union Internationale des Concierges d'Hotels*.

"Les Clefs d'Or Australia is a friendly society of hotel concierge that is part of a worldwide network originating in France, which features close to 4000 of the world's top concierge professionals," Mr Espino said.

"In French, *Les* means 'The', *Clefs* means 'Key', and *d'Or* means 'Gold' – representing 'the golden keys' – which is why we wear distinct gold crossed keys so that travellers around the world can easily identify us."

Mr Espino said receiving 'the golden keys' is internationally-renowned as the highest honour a concierge professional can attain.

"It is such an exclusive network that you have to be invited to apply, before undergoing a rigorous assessment, which I was able to achieve in 2006," Mr Espino said.

"As a member, it enables us to call upon another member of the network from anywhere in the world to discuss or exchange ideas about a service request, provide support, and help develop future concierge professionals."

Mr Espino said being part of the exclusive global network had helped pull off some glamorous and extravagant romantic ideas for guests looking to spoil their loved ones.

"Throughout my career, I've received all kinds of weird and wonderful requests – from helping to arrange helicopter engagement proposals to discreetly organising a Lamborghini arrival on property as a birthday gift," Mr Espino said.

"And that's when being part of Les Clefs d'Or Australia helps – we always say that a miracle is a phone call away – it helps us bring that global panache to the table and create thrilling experiences for our guests.

"When I worked overseas, a prince from the Middle East came up and told me he had just tasted the best burger he'd ever had at one of our restaurants – and then jokingly asked me to send one to his brother who was back home.

"I replied, *Of course Your Royal Highness, would you like cheese on that?*

"The lesson here is that no matter what you get asked, you never say no to a guest as a service professional – you might suggest an alternative solution – but you're always problem solving to ensure you can find the best outcome."

Today, Mr Espino manages a team of nearly 50 employees across The Star Gold Coast's two hotels, and has a strong passion for sharing his global experience and knowledge through his Les Clefs d'Or Australia network to help train the property's concierge leaders of tomorrow.

Although he has seen a lot of change in the hospitality industry since starting his career 26 years ago, the word 'change' isn't one he's fond of using.

"I don't call it change, I call it progression to global standards – I teach my team that we improve, we train, we tweak, we evolve," Mr Espino said.

"No matter where you work, you will learn the city and the hotel, but the vision of how to get world-class service – how to read the guest, how to participate, how to provide that 'next level' – that's the cherry on top and that's what I teach.

"Anyone can take a booking – but asking a guest *What was memorable about your stay?* instead of common questions like *How's your stay?* will help engage the guest and continue growing your hotel's reputation."

Born in the Philippines, Mr Espino studied Fine Arts majoring in Advertising Arts before moving to Melbourne in 1993 where he worked his way from a housekeeping role at a high-end hotel to a reception role.

He moved into the concierge team in 2002 but it was in 2009 that his career took a major leap forward.

"I was asked to work on a two-month secondment in Macau as chief concierge for the opening – and pre and post events – of my then company's Macau hotel," Mr Espino said.

"It was a defining moment in my career as it eventually led to a move to Hong Kong in 2010 for another company where I held a dual role as chief concierge and duty manager for a re-opening and re-branding of their hotel.

"I remained in this role for five years before returning to work in Australia in 2015 in a chief concierge position, and then joined The Star Gold Coast as the chief concierge across both The Star Grand and The Darling in July last year.

"Traditionally, concierge is a progressive role – many start out as a porter who delivers luggage, to a valet attendant who park cars, a commissioner who supervises the smooth operation of the porte cochere, and then to concierge.

"Each hotel is different but most five and six-star hotels offer a similar range of concierge roles – concierge attendants, concierge supervisors, assistant chief concierge, and then my role as chief concierge."

Mr Espino will travel to France to represent The Star Gold Coast at the 66th *Les Clefs d'Or International Conference* in Cannes on 22 to 27 March 2019.

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