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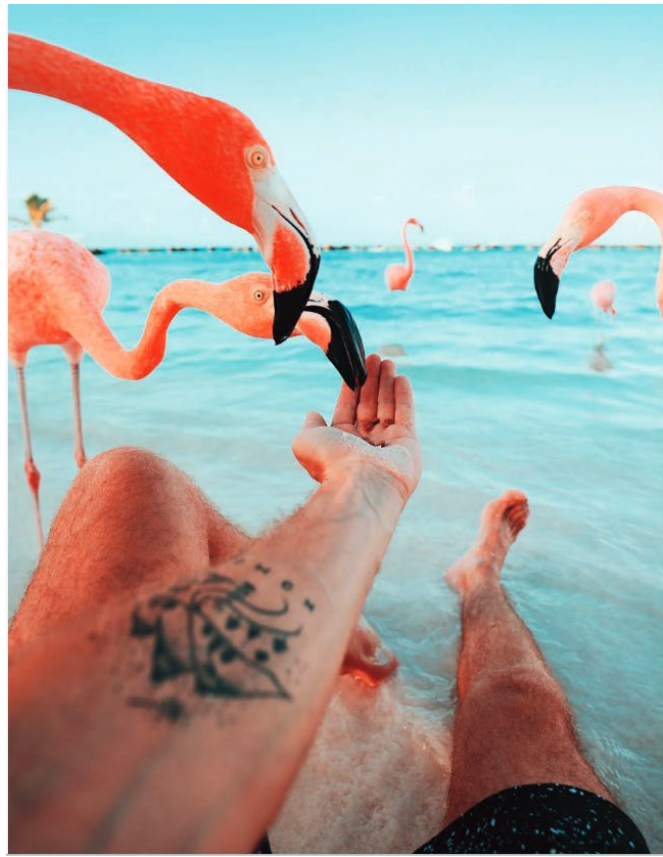


Special Forces

From flamingo whisperers and genealogy butlers to professional witches, hotels are creating unique jobs to enhance the guest experience

By Ramsey Quinn

Marine biologist Mariyam Thuhufa is an expert staff member at Siyam World resort in the Maldives



Hotels employ a lot of people to keep the operation running day and night, but some are getting creative with those they have on staff. In addition to the essential housekeeper, bellman, front-desk clerk and concierge, other workers you encounter on your next trip may surprise you with their unique talent or special skills. Here are some of those unexpected jobs and how they make guests' travel experiences more memorable.

IN AT THE FOUR Seasons Resort Tamarindo in Atlitlan, Mexico, for example, in-house insect expert Dr. Pavel Kirillov leads after-dark tours to explore the jungle's soldier ants, camouflaging caterpillars and scorpions. Each tour is unique, as Kirillov unravels the unfolding drama of the insect world. "When I take guests out at night to explore the jungle and the many creatures within it, I always know that we're going to find something," he says. "I just don't know what it will be."

Meanwhile, the Renaissance Wind Creek Aruba Resort has its own flamingo whisperer who cares for the pink birds that freely roam the property's beaches. The resort is home to the only private island in Aruba, which is perfect for beach picnics and spending time with the birds. The property also facilitates flamingo yoga and feeding sessions with guests, who love snapping selfies with the pink-feathered animals. Part of the job is to ensure that the birds are not scared by loud noises.

In Hawaii, the Four Seasons Resort Lanai employs a resort aviarist, Bruno Ambly, who is responsible for its bird-rescue program. He's often seen around the property showing off one of the many birds he takes care of. When one is injured or separated from its normal routine, it is hard to reintegrate it into its regular behavior. The aviarist's job is to look out and care for these animals so they can continue to live a healthy life. While on property, guests can interact with the birds and learn more about them.

"A bird has to know to trust you," says Ambly. "I enjoy grooming them, petting them and feeding them. If you don't care for them, they'll bite, stress out and pluck their feathers. They'll feel like no one loves them."

In the island nation of the Maldives, the Siyam World resort has Mariyam Thuhufa, a marine biologist, on staff to help it navigate its conservation and preservation efforts. This includes protecting the coral and marine life while also involving and educating guests in the process. It's a great way for people to gain appreciation of the natural habitat. Activities include scuba diving to explore the coral

and even the opportunity to plant your own coral as a way of giving back. "It is immensely gratifying to witness guests' enthusiasm, knowing that together we are positively impacting the future of our oceans," says Thuhufa.

"By promoting a deeper connection between individuals and the underwater world, we can inspire a global movement toward responsible tourism and a sustainable future for our planet," she adds. Back on shore, Cass Marina and The Roach resorts in Key West have their own and sculptor, Marianne van den Broek, who leads design workshops for guests to recreate anything from their family pet to their favorite actor. Over the course of a year, she says she works with more than ten tons of sand. Farther north in Florida at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, a sandcastle concierge teaches guests how to build their own architectural masterpiece on the beach using tried-and-tested techniques.

BELOW: Aviarist Bruno Ambly at the Four Seasons Resort Lanai, Hawaii
OPPOSITE: Renaissance Wind Creek Aruba Resort employs a flamingo whisperer



LEFT: COURTESY OF RENAISSANCE WIND CREEK ARUBA RESORT; ABOVE: COURTESY OF THE FOUR SEASONS



On the culinary front, the barbecue butlers at Dream Nashville add flavor to guests' stays by coming to the Terrace Suite to prepare a feast. They set up a grill and cook whatever you like, from your own recipe to one of the local favorites. It's quite the alternative to traditional room service while also enjoying the panoramic vista.



Four Points by Sheraton has a chief brew officer (CBO), who oversees the brand's "bed and brews" program that brings local craft beers from each destination to the hotel's bar menu. The CBO attends beer festivals and conferences around the world to determine which brews to feature.

In France, the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa has its own champagne concierge, Lise Legrand, who provides guests behind the scenes access to the region's many champagne houses. Her goal is to showcase the family winemaking traditions that locals have been cultivating for generations through relationships with local winegrowers. The hotel itself offers a wine list of more than 800 varietals. If you desire access to a special vineyard or winemaker's showroom, Legrand can make it happen.

Curious about your heritage? Pay a visit to genealogy butler Helen Kelly at The Shelburne in Dublin to retrace your family tree. Instead of doing all the legwork yourself, let Kelly do the research by pouring through historic records to find any long-lost relatives from the Emerald Isle. Many guests leave rather surprised with what she can uncover.

TOP: COURTESY OF FRANKINCENSE; MIDDLE: COURTESY OF THE BEE; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF THE BEE

"All my life I have been searching for my calling, and I have finally found it."

On a more practical front, the Kaya Palazzo resorts in Turkey employ sunglasses butlers who roam the properties wiping clean guests' glasses. You'll find them at the pool, on the beach and even in the restaurants to make sure guests can see the magnificent views of the resort all around them. Visiting their ski location? No problem—there's a goggles butler, too.

The Westin Hotels brand is known for its running concierges who advise guests about the best running paths in each city. At some properties, they even run with you to point out interesting sights along the way. Hotels that participate in the Rise & Run program offer their staff the chance to lead the runs, which means you could be exploring the city with anyone from the front-desk staff to the general manager. Running gear is also available to borrow. When you return to the hotel, towels and chilled water are waiting, along with a health and wellness dining menu that offers the option of half portions if you're looking to cut calories. Many Westin hotels are also very active in a city's running community where they host local races, including the Boston Marathon.

Then there's the professional witch on staff at The James New York NoMad. Shawn Engel reads tarot cards, develops love spells, touches guests spell work and uses astrology to mentor them. Her goal is to demystify witchcraft, which she says has been demonized by misinformation. By using numerology, a pendulum and other techniques, she designs a personalized approach for each guest so they check out with a renewed purpose and lease on life.

At the Shangri-La Al Husn in Oman, frankincense sommelier Khalid Al Amri is an expert in the resin and its history and oversees the traditional Omani welcome at the property. The resort is home to 21 frankincense trees that guests can touch and smell.

"All my life I have been searching for my calling, and I have finally found it," says Al Amri. He shares stories and knowledge of frankincense with guests. Guests at The Ben in West Palm Beach, Florida, can receive the services of a book butler, who arrives bearing a silver tray with a specially curated title



ABOVE, FROM TOP: Frankincense butler Khalid Al Amri at Shangri-La Al Husn, Oman; book butler at The Ben, West Palm Beach, Florida; Four Seasons Resort Temorindo, Jalisco, Mexico, employee on insect expert; The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Florida, has a sandcastle concierge

from a local bookstore. The book is free to keep and comes with a bespoke bookmark. Guests can also enjoy a themed snack from the Book Bites menu. The program has become extremely popular with repeat guests.

Finally, Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas features an orchid guru, Prem Pemithalaka, who tends to the property's orchid garden, featuring more than 1,000 blooms of 25 different varieties. Since 2015, he has been caring for the country's ornamental plants and is responsible for the more than 2,000 orchids that fill the islands. At Anantara, he leads guided guest tours of the garden and even hosts traditional afternoon tea among the orchids with both British and Maldivian sweets. All these unique occupations and options are proving that, as people return more and more to travel, the hospitality industry is responding with exciting new possibilities.