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FRONT OFFICE OPERATIONS

The main function of any hotel is to sell rooms which contributes the maximum towards revenue of the hotel. This job is mainly done at the reception counter which is also called the front office. Front Office Department is one of the most important departments of any hotel because for a guest, it is the first point of contact with the hotel staff. It performs various functions such as reservation, registration, check-in, check-out etc. It takes care of all the requirements of guests during their stay in the hotel. In this lesson, we will try to learn in detail about the significant functions and the responsibilities of the front office.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the basic concept of a front office and its role;
- classify the room types and list their tariffs;
- describe the reservation process;
- describe the sections of front office and
- handle telephone, guest mails, messages, luggage and emergency situations.

21.1 FRONT OFFICE AND ITS ROLE

As you know that a hotel is a place where travellers can be given accommodation and food, provided that they are able to pay for it. There are various types of hotels in India as well as other countries. Almost all good hotels have a Front Office Department.

The front office is always the key point for processing reservations, registering guests, settling accounts and checking-out guests. It also handles the distribution

of guest room keys, mails, messages and providing other information to guests. These functions require diplomacy as well as situation handling skills. Many different types of guests come to a hotel and handling them requires a special type of professionalism.

21.2 ROOM TYPES AND TARIFFS

21.2.1 Types of Rooms

Single: This type of room usually has a single bed and is meant for 1 person.

Double: This type of room has a double bed and is meant for 2 persons.

Twin: This type of room has 2 single beds and is meant for 2 persons.

Twin Double: This type of room has 2 double beds and is meant for 2 families.

Lanai: This room has a good view as it generally has a balcony overlooking a garden or scenic beauty. Such rooms are generally there in resort hotels.

Suite: This type of room consists of a drawing room which is connected to one or more bedrooms. It has many extra facilities (expensive furniture, complimentary fruit basket, chocolates, kitchen facilities etc.) in comparison to other rooms. It is expensive as compared to other rooms.

Penthouse: This type of room consists of a set of rooms situated at the top most level of the hotel. It has an open view of the sky.

Adjacent: These are 2 rooms with private connecting doors. These doors permit access between rooms without going into the corridor.

Efficiency: This type of room has kitchen facilities attached to it. These are generally found in resorts where guests stay for a long time (1-2 weeks or more).

Duplex: This type of room has 2 different levels which are connected by a staircase. Generally the drawing room is at the lower level and the bedroom is at the upper level.



INTEXT QUESTION 21.1

1. Mention any three main functions of the Front Office.
2. Differentiate between a double room and a twin room.
3. Why is a suite more expensive than other rooms in a hotel?



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21.2.2 Different Room Tariffs

The term tariff basically means ‘rate/charge’ and when it is applied to hotels, it means room rate. There are different types of room tariffs e.g. corporate rates, government rates, group rates etc. If a hotel room is not sold on a particular day that revenue is lost forever. Therefore different room tariffs have to be set. Room tariffs are decided by the management of the hotel.

The following are the various types of room rates:

- a) **Corporate Rate:** This rate is offered to companies who send their executives for meeting to other cities. Usually a discount of 10-20% on the standard room rate is offered as part of corporate rate.
- b) **Crib Rate:** This rate is offered to families who have a child below 12 years of age with them. An extra bed called ‘crib’ is provided for this purpose.
- c) **Group Rate:** This rate is offered by the hotel to those travel agents who make a group reservation at the hotel. A group usually has a minimum of 15 people.
- d) **Tour/Travel Agent Rate:** This rate is offered by the hotel to travel agents who make individual reservations at the hotel. Usually travel agents get discounts from hotels because they give bulk business to hotels in the form of many reservations.
- e) **Seasonal Rate:** This rate is offered by hotels when they have high business during the peak tourist season.
- f) **Off Season Rate:** It is meant to attract guests during the low season.
- g) **Government Rate:** This rate is offered to government officials who travel for official work.
- h) **Airline Rate:** This rate is offered to the staff of different airlines as they have to stay in different cities/countries during their duty.
- i) **Complimentary Rate:** This rate is offered to V.V.I.P.’S or other people who might be important for a hotel’s image. Basically, it is meant for providing rooms for free.
- j) **Rack Rate:** It is the maximum rate at which a room can be sold. Basically, the rates which are advertised by the hotels on their website and cards are the Rack rates.



ACTIVITY 21.1

Visit any three hotels in your town/city. Find out the types of rooms and rates they offer. Make a comparative list to establish if the facilities provided are matching the rates offered.



INTEXT QUESTION 21.2

1. What is meant by the following room rates?
 - (i) Seasonal
 - (ii) Complimentary
 - (iii) Government
 - (iv) Rack

21.3 RESERVATION

The term reservation can be defined as ‘An agreement between the guest and the hotel in which the guests rent the room from the hotel at a given time, for a fixed period of time.’

The reservation section is an important part of the front office department of a hotel. Its main function is the sale of guest rooms by taking future room bookings. In this way it generates income for the hotel. It is located at the back of the front office.

Reservation can be made through various methods such as the telephone, letter, email etc.

The importance of the Reservation Section:

- (i) It sells the main product of the hotel i.e. the rooms and therefore increases the income of the hotel.
- (ii) It helps the hotel to match the needs of the guest with available rooms.
- (iii) It helps in estimating the level of business that a hotel might get in the future.

21.3.1 Sources of Reservation

Sources are the different people or organisations that make reservations, such as:

Individual Guests who independently make reservations with the hotel on their own.

Travel Agents include travel agencies who make reservation on behalf of guests who are travelling on tour packages.

Companies who have separate travel departments who make their booking when they travel for official work.

Hotel Sales & Marketing Executives include staff of the hotel that approaches various business Houses. They try to sell the services offered by the hotel.



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21.3.2 Types of Reservation

There are different types of reservations:

Confirmed – A confirmed reservation is a reservation in which the hotel has accepted the room request of a guest on a particular date for a specific period of time. Also it is able to guarantee the guest that the room will be available on the requested date and in the desired category. Usually, such a reservation involves payment of some advance by the guest for guaranteed availability.

Unconfirmed – An unconfirmed reservation is a reservation in which the hotel has accepted the room request of a guest but is not able to guarantee the availability of the room on the specific date due to unavailability of the requested guestroom.

21.3.3 Reservation Procedure

Reservation procedure can be divided into 2 types:

- a) Individual reservation
- b) Group reservation

a) Procedure for Individual Reservation

- The hotel first receives the reservation request from the guest either through telephone, letter or personally.
- The reservation assistant asks about the arrival and departure dates of the guest. Then information about the type of room and number of rooms is asked.
- The reservation assistant matches the reservation request of the guest with the room availability with the help of a computerised booking system.
- If the request does not match with room availability, other dates or types of rooms are offered to the guest.
- In case the request matches the room availability, the processing of the reservation is done by finding out other information from the guest. This includes name of the guest, position, company or home address, time and arrival details, billing details and any other special information. This information is recorded in the reservation form.
- Finally, the reservation assistant gives a confirmation number to the guests, which is proof of the confirmation by the hotel.

(b) Procedure for Group Reservation

- Firstly, the hotel receives the reservation request from the group either through a group leader or by personal meeting or some other mode.
- The reservation assistant asks about the arrival and departure dates of the group. Then information about the type of room and number of rooms is asked.
- The reservation assistant matches the reservation request of the guests with the room availability and with the help of a computerised booking system.
- If the request does not match with room availability, other dates or types of rooms are offered to the group.
- In case the request matches the room availability, the reservation assistant discusses with group leader about the number of rooms to be kept aside for the group and also the cut-off dates i.e. the last date till which the hotel will reserve the rooms for the group.
- The reservation assistant then starts processing the reservation request and takes other details such as name of the group, name of the group leader and group members, number and type of guest rooms required, date and time of arrival of the group, date and time of departure of the group, meal plans, billing details and any other special information.
- Finally, the reservation assistant gives a confirmation number to the group leader and then sends the confirmation letter.



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**INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.3**

1. Define the term 'Reservation'?
2. What is an unconfirmed reservation?
3. List any two advantages of reservation.
4. List the different sources of reservation.

21.4 SECTIONS OF FRONT OFFICE**21.4.1 Reservation**

This section is responsible for booking rooms for the guest in advance.

**Notes****Functions**

- Receiving reservation requests through different sources like telephone, fax, e-mail and website.
- Processing reservation requests from the hotel.
- Maintaining and updating reservation records to give accurate information about room status.

21.4.2 Role of Reception at Front Office

This section is responsible for receiving and welcoming the guests on their arrival.

Functions

- Receiving and welcoming the guest.
- Completing registration formality.
- Assigning rooms to the guests.

21.4.3 Information

This section is responsible for providing information to the guests.

Functions

- Coordinating guests' mails, parcels and couriers.
- Providing information about the city and hotel facilities.
- Handling guests' messages.

21.4.4 Communication/Telephone

This section maintains the communication network of the hotel. There is a computerised call accounting system which charges the outgoing calls to the guest account.

Functions

- Answering incoming calls.
- Providing information on guest services.
- Directing calls to guest rooms.

21.4.5 Bell Desk

This section is responsible for escorting the guests to their rooms and familiarising them with hotel facilities, safety features and in-room features.

Functions

- Handling guests luggage during arrival and departure.
- Making general purchases like medicines and postage stamps etc.
- Locating a guest in a specific area of the hotel. This is called paging.
- Keeping guests' luggage in the left luggage room, if required.

21.4.6 Concierge

This section is responsible for providing personalised services to the guests. Usually in hotels, a concierge assists guests with various tasks like making restaurant reservations, arranging for spa services, recommending night life, hot spots, looking transportation, procurement of tickets to special events.

Functions

- Making reservations in restaurants.
- Booking tickets for movies, theatre and sports events.
- Arranging special transportation by luxury cars, helicopters and aircraft.

21.4.7 Cash and Bills

This section is responsible for recording all financial details of the guest.

Functions

- Opening and maintaining guest accounts.
- Preparing bills at the time of check-out.
- Handling credit card, debit card, cash and traveller cheque settlements.
- Organising foreign currency exchange.

21.4.8 Travel Desk

This section is responsible for making travel arrangements of the guest.



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**Notes****Functions**

- Arranging pickup and drop services during arrival and departure.
- Providing taxis for guests.
- Organising site seeing in the city.
- Arranging for guides and translators.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.4**

1. What is the role of reception?
2. Which section is responsible for providing personalised services to guests?
3. Which section is responsible for answering incoming guest calls?
4. What are the functions of the cash and bills section?

21.5 HANDLING PROCEDURES

Guest handling should be done in such a manner that no guest has a reason or opportunity to complain. In case of a complaint, the process should be to listen carefully and patiently to the guest and take immediate corrective action if possible. However, in doing all this, the hotels' interests and needs should also be kept in mind.

21.5.1 Telephone Handling

Rules of Telephone Handling

- Always answer the phone within 3 rings.
- Always answer the phone with a greeting by saying good morning/good afternoon/good evening according to the time of the day. Then mention the name of the hotel and ask the caller's need. e.g. The XYZ, how may I help you?
- Always talk politely to the guests. Never be rude.
- Always listen attentively.
- Always keep a notepad and pen/pencil to note down important information.
- Always talk slowly and clearly so that the guest can understand every word.
- Always have a friendly and helpful attitude.
- Always be patient.

- Always take messages in case the other person is not available. Make sure that the message is delivered as soon as possible. In case of a message, take the following information – callers name, message, and phone number.
- Always close the call politely. e.g. thank you, have a nice day.

21.5.1.1 Rules for Incoming Calls

- I. All incoming calls should be answered within 3 rings or according to the standard procedure of the particular hotel where you are working.
- II. Business calls should always be answered with a phrase like, “Greeting according to the time of the day, ABC Hotel, May I help you?”
- III. Never put a caller on hold, but if you have to, be sure to check back with them every minute or so and ask if they would like to continue to hold. To let them know that they have not been forgotten, and that you are attending to their call.
- IV. Speak clearly, slowly and with confidence so that the person on the other end has the feeling that you know what you are doing.
- V. Never be rude to a caller, no matter how rude they are. Always remember to handle yourself in a professional manner. This includes handling the situation in a calm and cool manner.

21.5.1.2 Rules for Outgoing Calls

- I. Speak clearly and slowly.
- II. When calling another company, always give your name and the company’s name you work for to whoever answers the phone.
- III. If you dial a wrong number, say sorry to the person who answers the phone, do not just hang up.
- IV. When leaving a message, always state your name, company phone number and reason for calling.



ACTIVITY 21.2

Make an unconfirmed reservation at any hotel of your choice. Observe how they answer the phone and which information they ask you. How far does this information conform to the telephone handling code?



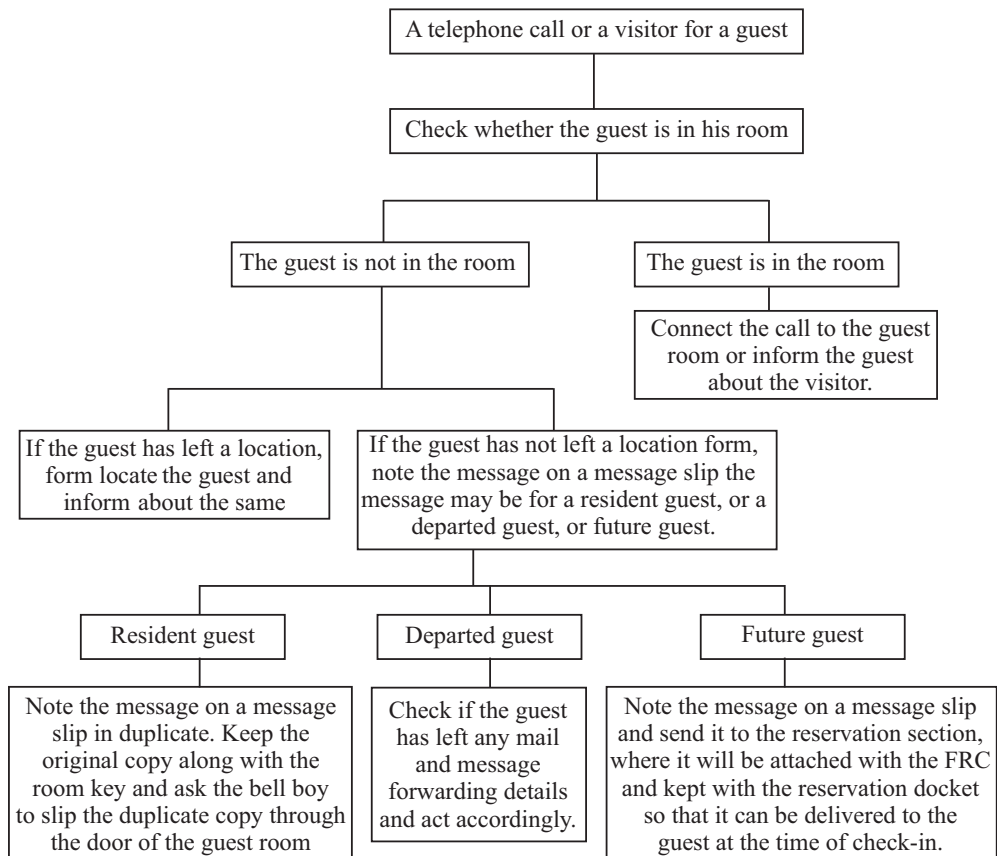
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21.5.2 Message Handling

Sometimes there are telephone calls or visitors for a guest when they are not present in the hotel. In such situations, the front desk staff takes the message for the guests and delivers the same to the guests, when they come back. The process of receiving and delivering messages to guests is known as message handling. The immediate and timely delivery of messages to guests reflects the degree of professionalism of the hotel.



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21.5.3 Luggage Handling

Arrival Procedure

- The guests arrive at the hotel entrance, where the doorman welcomes them.
- Then the bell boys take their luggage and escort them to the reception.
- While the guest checks-in, the bell boys will wait with the guest luggage at the bell desk.
- After the guest has completed all the check-in formalities, the bell boy takes the guest’s luggage from the lobby to the guest room.

- The bell boy will assist the guest in opening the room, placing the guests' luggage on the luggage rack (just next to the door) and also explain the various electronics and other equipments in the room.
- Then, he will wish the guest a good stay and report back to the bell desk.

Departure Procedure

- When the guests are leaving, they will phone the bell desk to get help with their luggage, if required.
- The bell boy will report to the guest room, take their luggage and escort the guests to the reception.
- The bell boy will wait for the guests to check-out. The luggage will be kept at the bell desk.
- Once check-out is completed, the bell boy will keep the guest's luggage in their vehicle (taxi/tourist bus) and wish the guests goodbye.
- Then, the bell boy will report back to the bell desk.

21.5.4 Situation Handling

For responding to various types of emergency situations such as bomb threat, death, theft etc. each hotel has its own procedures. The management should review all such procedures on regular basis so that the staff is able to respond quickly and efficiently. Staff training is helpful in avoiding panic, damage to property and loss of life. Some of the common emergency situations are:

Fire

- The first thing is to inform the Fire fighting department. Give exact details about the location and size of the fire as the fire tenders will need that information.
- Give your identification and department.
- The front office should alert all guests and inform them to use the staircase and not the lift.
- The telephone department staff should be alert during the fire to coordinate communication.
- The front office staff should make sure that old and handicapped guests are located and helped to leave the hotel.
- They must guide the guests through the staircase and help in extinguishing the fire by using fire extinguishers.
- After coming out of the building report to a central area so that a roll call can be made.

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ACTIVITY 21.3

Organise a mock drill to handle a situation of fire accident with the help of some hotel nearby or Interview them as to what they will do in such a situation.



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Death

- After getting information about a guest’s death, the front office staff should:
- Inform the general manager, the security office and call the hotel doctor.
- No noise about the death should be made to avoid panic among other guests.
- The general manager may decide to call the police.
- The body must be removed through the staff entrance and the room sealed till all police formalities are over.
- Family members/relatives/friends of the dead person are contacted through addresses entered in the registration card.

Sick Guest

- For minor sickness problems, the staff should be well trained to handle first aid. All hotels should have a first aid box available.
- In case of any major sickness a doctor should be called.
- Try to make the guest feel comfortable till the doctor comes.

Bomb Threat

- Raise the alarm.
- Call the security and other staff.
- Announce that all people should leave the building.

Theft

In order to avoid thefts in the hotel following steps are taken:

- Having security features in all guest rooms. e.g. automatic closing doors, door chain, peephole.
- Avoiding giving guest information such as room number to visitors.
- Proper guest key handling. The staff should never give the guest’s room keys to any unauthorised person.
- Having professional hotel security staff who take regular rounds.
- Keeping all entrances, corridors and staircases well lit.
- Reporting immediately any suspicious character.

Always Remember: The ‘silent complainer’ never comes back whereas the guests who complain openly give a chance to the hotel to make improvements.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.5

1. List the steps in handling a sick guest.
2. What is the first step in handling a fire situation?
3. Why is message handling important?
4. List the most important three rules of telephone handling.



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

- The Front Office Department is the central point of all activities that take place between a guest and a hotel. The employees of this department are the first employees of the hotel to talk to the guest. This guest contact starts with the processing of the reservation and ends when the guest leaves the hotel. This department is organised into sections on the basis of jobs performed by the employees of each section.
- Sections like reception, information, bell desk, travel desk etc. are located in the lobby, close to the entrance of the hotel. Other sections which do not need to have direct guest contact like telephone and reservation, are located at the back of the department.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Define the following:
 - a. Reservation
 - b. Government rate
 - c. Pent House
2. Write short notes on:
 - a. Luggage Handling
 - b. Reception
3. Explain the steps involved in a taking and processing a group reservation.
4. How will you handle the following situations?
 - a. If a fire breaks out in the hotel
 - b. A theft case in a room.
5. Explain the role of the front office and its importance in a hotel.
6. What are the various sections of the front office?



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**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****Notes****21.1**

- (i) Reservation
(ii) Registration of guests
(iii) Settling accounts
- A double room has a double bed whereas a twin room has two single beds.
- A suite is more expensive because it has more space, more facilities and some complementary facilities also.

21.2

- Seasonal:** This rate is offered during peak tourist season when the hotels have a high business.
- Complementary:** Rate offered to V.V.I.Ps who are important for a hotel's image.
- Government:** Rates offered to government officials who are on official work and stay in a hotel.
- Rack:** The maximum rates which are advertised on their website and tariff cards.

21.3

- Reservation** is an agreement between the guests and the hotel in which the guests rent the room from the hotel for a given time and for a fixed period.
- Unconfirmed Reservation:** In this case, the hotel accepts the room request of a guest but is not able to guarantee the availability of the room on the specific date.
- Advantages of Reservation**
 - It guarantees the availability of the room.
 - It ensures the hotel authorities also about their income.
- Sources of Reservation**
 - Individual guests
 - Travel agents
 - Companies

21.4

1. Reception is responsible for receiving and welcoming the guests on their arrival. It completes the registration formalities and assigns rooms to the guests.
2. The Concierge section provides personalised services to the guests.
3. Communication/Telephone section
4. Cash and Bill Section

Opening and maintaining guest accounts. Preparing bills at the time of checking.

Handling credit card, debit card, cash and traveller cheque settlements. Organising foreign currency exchange.

21.5**1. Sick Guests**

The staff should be well trained to handle first-aid in case of minor sickness. Every hotel must have a first-aid box. In case of major sickness, a doctor should be called.

Try to make the sick guest comfortable till the doctor arrives.

2. The first thing is to inform the fire fighting dept. and give them the exact details about the location and size of the fire as the fire tender will need that information.
3. The message handling shows the professionalism of a hotel. The immediate and timely delivery of message to guests is always highly appreciated.

4. Important Rules of Telephone Handling

1. Always answer the phone calls within 3 rings.
2. Always listen attentively, and talk politely.
3. Always talk slowly and clearly so that the guests may understand every word.

**Notes**