

IN-STORE

Ritz-Carlton's edible architecture, themed trees bring Christmas cheer

December 2, 2015



Exterior of The Ritz-Carlton, Bachelor Gulch

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

The Ritz-Carlton Hotels is building gingerbread houses at properties across the United States to envelop patrons in the Christmas spirit.

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The hospitality chain is decorating a dozen of its locations in festive dcor to inflect seasonal joy in its guests and locals. Holiday promotions offer hotels a chance to show their creative and relatable sides and create strong impressions on traveling families.

"As much as it is a religious holiday, Christmas is also a celebration of the season that can be enjoyed by all," said Taylor Rains, managing partner at [Flugel Consulting](#), Charleston, SC. "The lights, the displays, the whole winter wonderland motif are by and large universally enjoyed.

"It's important for Ritz-Carlton to partake in a seasonal celebration for a number of reasons," he said. "First of all, guests have come to expect seasonal dcor and offerings from properties during this time of year. In addition, the properties located in major merchant districts will be competing with other hotels and retail spaces for overall visibility and attention; it's important that these properties stand out among the rest.

"Finally, it allows Ritz-Carlton the opportunity to promote unique seasonal offerings to its potential guests."

Gingerbread Christmas

Among the eye-catching decorations are what is being called the world's largest gingerbread pirate ship and a hand-sculpted sand tree. The 20-foot sand tree will be adorned with seahorses, sand dollars and starfish in Key Biscayne, FL, east of Miami, while the gingerbread pirate ship will be docked in the lobby of the Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, FL, until Dec. 27.



Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne sand tree

Gingerbread is a common theme this year, particularly in Florida. It is also a major part of Ritz-Carlton Christmas dcor in South Beach Miami, Sarasota and Naples, FL, as well as San Diego, New Orleans and Westchester, NY.

Among the most creative offerings, the Bal Harbour, FL hotel will decorate its tree in local fashions; the gingerbread castle in New Orleans will beckon entrants, who will be treated to glass displays of scenes from Disney's wildly popular film "Frozen"; the ART Hotel in Denver, CO will adapt a pop-art theme for Andy Warhol-inspired trees, and San Diego, land of sunny winters, is being promised real snow for two hours a day in half hour increments.



Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island pirate ship

The inclusion of Frozen-themed dcor shows that Ritz-Carlton is targeting families. Holiday memories from childhood are often cherished in later years, meaning that Ritz-Carlton has a chance to make a lasting impression on future consumers and show today's consumers that it cares about family values.

It is commonplace for many hotels to decorate for Christmas and offer seasonal promotions, so sitting out the tradition would mean losing patrons to competitors. Travelers, particularly those with families and/or young children, know that such dcor will enhance the mood and are therefore likely drawn to hotels promising a festive spirit.



Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park

"One thing Ritz-Carlton is doing exceptionally well this season is catering its holiday dcor and promotions to the individual property," Mr. Rains said. "The Bal Harbour is taking a fashion-centric approach to seasonal dcor while the Amelia Island location is leveraging its seaside location and history with a gingerbread pirate ship. Approaching promotions and dcor in such a way makes them more of a unique, seasonal celebration of each property."

By the same token, going beyond expected or traditional decorations by giving a tree a creative edge or crafting large gingerbread houses showcases Ritz-Carlton's personality. Rather than merely giving consumers what they want, it provides an authentic touch that suggests innovation, and delightful surprises are hallmarks of the brand.

Winter wonderlands

Other Ritz-Carlton hotels are painting broader strokes to reach holiday travelers.

For example, the Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park, is hoping to prove to its patrons that it really is "the most wonderful time of the year."

From Thanksgiving through New Year's, the hotel will be offering a variety of holiday-themed products, packages and experiences to help its patrons enjoy the winter wonderland. Given the sentimental attachment so many people have to the holiday season, a wide-ranging attempt to appeal to those guests could make Ritz-Carlton an integral part of a memorable year, holiday or experience for entire families at a time ([see story](#)).

Other hotels have also rolled out creative holiday-themed promotions.

For example, The Peninsula Hotel has redesigned its annual SnowPage holiday fundraiser to include "golden tickets" as a thank you for those who have purchased over the years.

Since its inception in 2003, Peninsula's yearly SnowPage effort has generated more than \$1.5 million dollars for the Make-A-Wish Foundation through the sale of the toy. Given its success, Peninsula has reworked the effort to include 10 limited edition SnowPages for 2015, each modeled after a specific hotel in the brand's portfolio ([see story](#)).

Recently, the hotel chain has expanded on its SnowPage promotion with a festive microsite that includes a list of holiday offers and other festive activities in each hotel, as well as a behind-the-scenes video. The interactivity and design of the site will strengthen the bond with consumers and position a holiday stay at a Peninsula hotel as a memorable experience ([see story](#)).

"Promotions are a fantastic way to showcase a property's unique offerings and demonstrate to potential guests the breadth of experiences available there," Mr. Rains said. "By keeping their clientele and their properties at the center of their promotions, Ritz-Carlton ensures that the brand remains strong and consistently resonates with its target market."

Final Take

Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York