

Profile: Lalini De Silva

Dreams come true at Sydney's Star City Hotel



Lalini De Silva left and above with housekeeping team.

“I REALLY LOVE MY JOB,” SMILED LALINI DE SILVA, EXECUTIVE HOUSEKEEPER OF STAR CITY HOTEL SYDNEY HARBOUR. “THERE IS NOT ONE SINGLE DAY WHERE I HAVE STARTED AND THOUGHT ‘OH I HAVE TO GO TO WORK’.

“When we immigrated to Australia in 1987 I told my husband ‘I wish I could work for the biggest five-star property’ and when I commenced at Star City in 2009 I believe I fulfilled that dream,” said Lalini.

Lalini has had a dynamic career since her hospitality studies in Sri Lanka.

“After leaving high school in Sri Lanka I studied for three years at a catering college obtaining a diploma in housekeeping. We worked in reception and housekeeping and somehow I felt housekeeping was right for me,” said Lalini.

She started her hospitality career as a receptionist and continued as a housekeeping supervisor. The Taj Hotel group employed Lalini as a management trainee and sent her to India for 18 months for further studies in preparation for the opening of a Taj Hotel five-star property in Colombo.

On return, Lalini was in charge of public areas as an assistant housekeeper and when one of the other assistants resigned, she managed the guest rooms as well. A year later Lalini was appointed as the housekeeper of the Taj Samudra Hotel.

“That was my very first housekeeping position in charge of a five-star property where I stayed for two years. I was 25 and there were only a few young housekeepers at that time,” said Lalini.

After arriving in Australia Lalini continued her love of housekeeping working at a hotel in Rushcutters Bay, Sydney and, later, as the housekeeping supervisor at the Sheraton Wentworth (now Sofitel).

“I worked there as the housekeeping supervisor and within three months I was promoted to the senior supervisor and then took a break when I had my son,” said Lalini.

Lalini returned to housekeeping when her son was 2½ years at the Park Hyatt in Sydney as a housekeeping supervisor, then as second-in-charge at Quay West in Sydney.

“I joined the Mercure Grand at Darling Harbour for the opening of their property as the housekeeper,” said Lalini. “I enjoyed all that was involved in my job because that was my first hotel launch in Sydney.”

Lalini continued on to the Park Royal at Potts Point and to a sister property, Park Royal Airport, for six years (now Intercontinental Hotels Group).

After four years at Holiday Inn Darling Harbour and a year at Fraser Suites, Lalini started at Star City in 2009 as executive housekeeper, where she received a highly commended award in the hotel housekeeper’s category in 2010.

“At each new property I ensure every staff member is retrained and we have staff incentives such as monthly awards for staff that have the highest standard guest rooms. We maintain a score sheet, do a spot check of their rooms and give them a prize every month for the best person and runner up,” said Lalini.

Lalini believes in an open door policy for her staff. “They can come to me anytime and stop me anywhere and talk to me. I know all of my staff by name. Each day I visit one of the two Star City towers to keep in touch with staff,” said Lalini.

Presently there are five room attendants training to be supervisors. There are opportunities for staff to advance within the organisation.

Empire Hospitality supplies staff to Star City. Director and owner, Jeffrey Sacks, said “Lalini brings the best out of the staff and is very fair. She treats agency staff as if they are a part of her own staff. She will always lend an ear to them and their problems.

“It is very important to us that the staff are made to feel welcome and to feel a part of Star City. Everything that Star City does our staff will join in as part of the team,” said Mr Sacks.

International Hotel Services has been supplying staff to Star City for 13 months.

Lalini manages 85 Star City housekeeping staff with an additional 80 from both agencies when required and they are kept busy with 480 hotel rooms, including luxury suites and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments. Lalini manages the wardrobe for 40,000 uniforms.

“We give staff prizes for the best self grooming and prizes for the best maintained trolley because it is important to have a well presented trolley. We give another prize for the staff who receives the highest guest positive comments.”

Every month a huge birthday cake is shared among staff whose birthday is in that month; plus birthday cards, a two-dollar scratchy and a box of chocolates. Every three to four months staff enjoy an outing with ten-pin bowling being their favourite. Staff contribute to a multicultural lunch on-site every six months, even though there is a fantastic staff canteen and other departments are invited as well. On her days off Lalini communicates with her staff through emails and phone ensuring everything is running smoothly.

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◀ Lalini was one of the pioneer members of the Professional Housekeepers Association in NSW and was president in 2009.

PHAN was formed in 2005 by a group of Sydney executive housekeepers who wanted to encourage ambition and to inspire, train and mentor current employees for the future of the profession of housekeeping management.

"It is an excellent organisation and any executive housekeeper, assistant and prospective supervisor, who is not a member should join because it is great for networking and peer support," said Lalini.

PHAN organised the second *housekeeping olympics* last year with 18 hotels joining in the fun.

"At Star City the greatest reward for me is when the teams come together and want to do well while sharing the same goal and dream as me. That is the biggest achievement and satisfaction because I know that our team wants to achieve their best and it's not just me wanting that success. They want to achieve more as well," assured Lalini.

Right now Lalini is busy preparing for another Star City tower opening in the future and living her dream.

Marie-Clare De Vere - Industry Reporter



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