

## Current Event Article September 2011: Hotel & Tourism

### Best and Worst Travel Industry Responses to Hurricane Irene

www.shermanstravel.com 8-31-2011 By: Liz Webber

As Hurricane Irene raged up from the Caribbean to the Northeast last week, many displaced travelers were left in its wake. Some airlines and hotels really stepped up to accommodate their storm-battered clients – others, not so much. Here, we present the best and worst responses to the storm.

#### **Airlines**

As the storm headed north, a number of airlines waived change fees for flyers headed into or out of the hurricane's path. However, trying to get a hold of a customer service agent last weekend was a different story.

On Friday, STELLAService conducted a survey of airline response times to requests via phone and Twitter. Again, some clear winners and losers here. While U.S. Airways averaged just 2 minutes 38 seconds of hold time, American Airlines callers waited an average of 1 hour 32 minutes to talk to someone – almost a full hour longer than Delta customers, the next worst airline.

However, Delta was the timeliest in responding to flyers' Twitter messages, averaging a response time of just 14 seconds and answering all tweets directed at the airline. On the other side of things, AirTran did not respond to any of the tweets STELLAService sent their way.

Bear in mind that the results of this survey were based on random samples of an average 8 phone calls and 12 tweets to each airline, so may not tell the whole story. For its part, American Airlines released a statement refuting the findings: "We handled more than 100,000 calls on Friday, and during the period in question our customers waited an average of 21 minutes – far less than alleged and in line with most of our peers."

#### **Hotels**

We were hard pressed to find hotels that left guests in the lurch as a result of the storm, but some of our favorite NYC properties went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure travelers felt comfortable while they waited out Irene. (Thanks to Hotel Chatter for pointing out a couple of these.)

- Eventi gave guests free breakfast, lunch, and dinner on Saturday and Sunday.
- The Surrey prepared amenity bags for guests and gave out Champagne in the lobby.

- The Waldorf-Astoria was prepared for a potential power outage with flashlights for every guest – and 3,000 glow sticks! The hotel also had the only open Starbucks on Sunday, according to one Twitter user.

Post-storm and a bit farther north, Basin Harbor Club on Lake Champlain is offering free stays (plus a requested \$10/night service fee) to guests booked at other Vermont hotels that are closed or inaccessible as a result of Irene's wrath.

## Current Event September 2011 Reading Guide - Hotel & Tourism

1. As Hurricane Irene headed north, what did many airlines waive to make getting home easier and less expensive for travelers?
2. What was the name of the company that conducted a survey of airline response times to travelers?
3. What communication and social networking service does the article discuss as a way to get information and change air travel plans?
4. What airline had the quickest response time according to the survey?
5. How many minutes did the average American Airlines customer have to wait? How many more minutes was that than the company who came out first in the survey?
6. Delta was the timeliest airline using what form of communication?
7. After reading the information about the sample size and the statement from American Airlines, in your opinion, was this survey fair? If not, what could have been done to make it more fair?

8. What did the Bason Harbor Club do to help guests booked at other hotels?
  
9. List three things the other Hotels did to help travelers stranded because of Hurricane Irene.
  
10. Imagine you are the manager at a hotel effected by a natural disaster. List 3-4 practices your hotel would engage in (before during or after the disaster) to help guests effected by the disaster. Make sure you list different activities than those discussed in the article.
  
11. This article discusses using Twitter to give and receive information regarding travel in an emergency situation. Name at least one other social networking site or mode of technology that could be used, and discuss specifically how it would work in the event of a natural disaster or other emergency.

## Article TEKS Alignment

Principles of Hospitality and Tourism 130.222

1A, 1B, 1D, 2B, 7B

Hotel Management 130.223

1A, 1D, 1E, 4B, 4D, 6E, 11C

Travel and Tourism Management 130.225

1A, 1E, 1F, 2A, 3B, 6G

Hospitality Services 130.228

1A, 2B, 5A, 5C, 7D, 8B, 8J

Practicum in Hospitality Services 130.229

1E, 4C