

7 Hotel Traditions that Add Spunk to Your Stay

BY ALLISON MICHAELS | JULY 14, 2014



In a crowded hospitality market, hotels have to offer more than just a place to stay — they need to provide one-of-a-kind experiences. To distinguish themselves from competitors, many properties embrace traditions and rituals, such as nightly tiki torch lightings or warm cookies at check-in, that bring extra character to any getaway. Many of these traditions date back decades, while others are new ventures designed to create a sense of place.

Preferred Hotel Group's Senior Vice President of Development Rob Cornell recognizes that, regardless of their origin, memorable touches are invaluable to guest satisfaction — and to marketing. "Trying to come up with a competitive advantage these days is really challenging," Cornell said, adding that quirky traditions are a big part of Preferred Hotel experiences. "How do you get people to come and look at your property and decide to have a meal or to stay there? You have to do unique things; you can't just sit there and wait for it to happen."

For many hotels, traditions and special events offer a chance to gain extra publicity; inimitable experiences translate well to social media (think artfully designed entrees or Champagne spectacles). As Cornell put it, "What you post on Instagram and Pinterest is almost more important than where you were and what you did."

To help you make the most of your accommodations (and gain extra social feed material), U.S. News compiled some of the most noteworthy hotel traditions to experience on your next getaway.

The St. Regis Aspen Resort – Aspen, Colorado

Champagne sabering

Every evening at 4:45 or 5:15 p.m. (depending on the time of year) in the hotel's courtyard, the St. Regis Aspen Resort hosts a toast-worthy spectacle for its guests. To commemorate the transition from day to night, the resort's sommelier, Paul Alexander, uses a saber to sever the top of an ice-cold Champagne or sparkling wine bottle. As a token for watching the Champagne sabering — a ritual that dates back to John Jacob Astor's 1904 founding of the St. Regis New York — each guest receives a complimentary glass of bubbly. This tradition isn't limited to Aspen, Colorado: St. Regis butlers across the globe are trained in this technique, so if the outpost you're staying at doesn't offer a nightly display, order your own bottle and request it be opened via saber.

The DoubleTree by Hilton – Worldwide

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Chocolate chip cookies



If you've ever checked into a DoubleTree by Hilton hotel, you're probably still drooling over the warm chocolate chip cookie you received at check-in. A tradition that began in the 1980s as a gift for notable hotel guests, DoubleTree cookies — baked daily at each of the brand's more than 370 worldwide hotels — have helped distinguish the hotels ever since. The recipe remains a secret, but the taste is familiar to more than 300 million people who have sampled the cookie to date. In addition to providing a memorable check-in experience, the cookies also play an important role in the brand's philanthropy: DoubleTree regularly donates cookies to service members, homeless men and women, and various community caregivers.

The Ritz-Carlton, Washington D.C. – Washington, D.C.

Presidential cookies

Yes, more cookies. But these sweet treats have a fun twist perfectly suited for their location. In the lobby of the The Ritz-Carlton, Washington D.C., guests can taste different freshly baked cookies, each made from a current or former U.S. president's favorite recipe. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's preferred indulgence? Shortbread sugar cookies. President Abraham Lincoln's beloved treat? Dried fruit and orange cookies. Next to the bakery-fresh display, guests will find recipe cards so they can recreate the patriotic treats at home.

Four Seasons Resort Hualalai at Historic Ka'upulehu – Kailua Kona, Hawaii

Tiki torch lighting

Guests of the Four Seasons Resort Hualalai can spot a bare-chested Hawaiian man running around the grounds as the sun sets in Kailua Kona on Hawaii's Big Island. Not to worry, this is all part of a popular nightly ritual at the resort. Lighting the property's tiki torches as he runs, the hotel staff member also stops to blow a conch shell at resort areas like the Beach Tree Bar to signal sundown. Though conches were once blown in Hawaii to symbolize the coming and going of royalty, today the sound of the conch serves to bring attention to something notable — in this case the end of the day and the onset of nighttime.

he Ritz-Carlton, Central Park – New York City

Horse feeding



The Ritz-Carlton, Central Park takes advantage of its prime location adjacent to the world-renowned Central Park: The hotel adorns select rooms with books about Central Park's history and telescopes overlooking the sprawling green space. In 2005, to further capitalize on the hotel's coordinates, The Ritz's employees began feeding the horses that pull the park's iconic carriages as the animals waited for riders. Shortly after, guests were invited to accompany the hotel staff each day at noon to help treat the horses to midday snacks — a tradition that now takes place at The Ritz-Carlton, Central Park every day.

Marco Beach Ocean Resort – Marco Island, Florida

Turtle Turndown

Each summer between May and August, Loggerhead sea turtles (named for their large heads) find their way onto the beaches of Marco Island, Florida, to begin nesting. Sixty days after the turtles lay eggs on the beach, hatchlings — or baby turtles about 2 inches in length — are born. To celebrate the annual nesting period, Marco Beach Ocean Resort caters to its family visitors with the Turtle Turndown tradition. Each turndown service features a story of the turtles' annual nesting event, tips to keep the creatures safe and a turtle-themed keepsake for the kids.

The Brown Hotel – Louisville, Kentucky

The Hot Brown



Courtesy The Brown Hotel, a member of Preferred Hotel Group [See more photos](#)

The recipe for this one-of-a-kind indulgence may be posted on The Brown Hotel's website, but for a full Hot Brown experience, you've got to order the famed sandwich in its native Louisville, Kentucky, locale. Still on the hotel restaurant's menu today, the open-faced sandwich combines flavors of turkey, bacon, tomato, Mornay sauce and Texas toast to tell a story that dates back to 1926. The hotel's chef at that time, Fred K. Schmidt, sought to satisfy the taste buds of the nearly 1,200 guests who partied into the wee hours at the hotel's nightly dinner dances. Naturally, these hungry guests retreated to the hotel restaurant for breakfast and soon the Hot Brown was born.

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