



Best Accommodation Experience – Standard Hotel
HANGOUT@MT.EMILY

GOING BEYOND THE 'BUDGET' TAG

AS ALL economy style travellers know, backpacker horror stories of budget hotels are the stuff of their itinerant nightmares. Dirty, scary, and dodgy are just some of the words used to describe their experiences.

But there's one budget hotel – Hangout@Mt.Emily – that turns conventional wisdom on its head.

Featured in Lonely Planet guidebooks as a top budget hotel, this no-frills concept hotel, located at 10A Wilkie Road, is a world apart from its dowdier counterparts.

A hip, trendy ambience welcomes the guests once they walk into the minimalist lobby.

According to hotel manager Ms Jacinta Glass, they often remark that the hotel gives out a “home away from home” aura, and – as if to demonstrate how “at home” they feel – many walk around the hotel lobby barefooted.

“We provide simple basic accommodation, but no frills does not mean no service,” said Ms Glass.

It's not surprising, therefore, that Hangout@Mt.Emily has won the Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) Best Accommodation Experience – Standard Hotel award for two straight years.

“A reason why we're nominated, why we won, is due to the people in the hotel, they make that difference,” said Ms Glass.

Despite its budget hotel tag, the hotel staff strive to offer the best service possible, and every single staff member has been sent to attend the STB's Go the Extra Mile for Service training course.

But it is not the training alone that gives them the edge, it is the staff's own gregarious personalities that add the special touch to each guest's stay.

“The bottom line in service is that you have to be friendly, you must want to help people, and it must come from your heart,” said Ms Glass.

With back-to-back wins in the Standard Hotel category, it seems the staff at Hangout@Mount Emily have got their priorities right.

Uniquely Singapore Award
SINGAPORE HERITAGE FEST

THE HERITAGE OF A UNIQUE IDENTITY

THE Uniquely Singapore Award is one of the new categories in this year's Tourism Awards. It is awarded to individuals, organisations, events or projects that best embody the essence, personality and inspiration behind the Uniquely Singapore branding.

This year, that coveted award has been given to Singapore HeritageFest 2006.

“We are delighted and proud to have won the Uniquely Singapore Award. This award is also a tribute to our sponsors, partners and well wishers who truly believed in us and the festival and what it stands for,” said Mr Michael Koh, chief executive officer, National Heritage Board.

Singapore HeritageFest 2006 revolved around the theme of identity, hence the tagline “What Makes You, You”.

“The Singapore HeritageFest is all about getting people to discover and appreciate our rich, diverse and vibrant heritage – the key to our very own unique identity,” said Mr Koh.

The 12-day festival sought to raise awareness and appreciation of the Singaporean heritage and culture through a series of initiatives and events.

“We want to show that living in a multi-cultural society is a wonderful and

enriching experience and that the vibrant cultures we have contribute to the attraction of living in Singapore,” said Mr Koh.

The Festival Hub at Suntec City fused the modern world together with the Singaporean culture through a blend of song, dance, fashion, and martial arts.

There were over 150 activities organised with the assistance of over 220 heritage and private industry partners.

Members of the public had a wide variety of activities to choose from, with cultural performances, outdoor events, public forums, and exhibitions dispersed throughout the festival.

The event garnered a lot of support from local ethnic communities and arts group, thereby providing authentic and unique experiences throughout the festival.

“Besides allowing visitors to explore their own identity, the Singapore HeritageFest 2006 was also designed to introduce tourists to a side of Singapore they never knew,” said Ms Thangamma Karthigesu, festival director and director, public education division, National Heritage Board.

Singapore HeritageFest 2006 was a big success, with locals and foreigners making up a record 1.165 million participants.



Best Tourism Host – Hotel
ARIS AZHAR

(assistant front office manager, Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel)

BEST SMILE FORWARD

THE Singapore Tourism Awards 2006 has proven to be third time lucky for Aris Azhar.

The assistant front office manager at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel has finally bagged the Best Tourism Host – Hotel award in this year's STB Tourism Awards.

“It is certainly an honour to be nominated, let alone win. But it will not change a thing – I will continue to give my best like I always have,” said the 32-year-old Mr Azhar.

The 16-year veteran of the hotel industry had been previously nominated twice, and although they were not the top awards, they were enough to inspire him to provide simple, yet friendly and sincere service.

His humble beginnings as a cleaner give him a deep appreciation of his current status.

Having started at the bottom he has the right mindset to face the daily challenges of being a senior frontline staff.

“To me, the service has to be honest and sincere. I believe in giving my best with-

out holding anything back,” said Mr Azhar.

Mr Azhar has been in the industry long enough to notice that some hotel staff have somewhat scripted, robotic greetings.

“To me, being friendly and sincere simply means greeting with a smile,” he said.

The young staff have the natural flair, commitment, and confidence levels needed in them.

— Mr Azhar, who grooms and mentors younger staff members

That sincerity seems to have had an effect on a particular guest who has “followed” him from hotel to hotel over the past 10 years. He first met the guest while working at another hotel, and he was so touched by Mr Azhar's warmth that he makes it a point

to stay only in the hotel where Mr Azhar is employed.

Despite his relative youth, he is already a mentor to the younger staff members at Grand Copthorne. And he is happily grooming the future Aris Azhars of the business.

“The young staff have the natural flair, commitment, and confidence levels needed in them. They have got the basics to move on in this business,” he noted.