

# Working in the luxury hospitality industry

 By [Brian Berkman: contributing editor, travel](#)

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Brian Berkman, Contributing Travel Editor, had a chat to Gaby Gramm, Graham Beck hospitality manager For Steenberg (Voted by Condé Nast *Traveler US* on its 2012 Gold List as one of the Top 500 Experiences in the World). He asked her what are her 10 things she loves about working in the luxury hospitality industry. A great deal, it seems.



## By Gaby Gramm: Graham Beck Hospitality Manager for Steenberg

1. *Being able to be creative and innovative:* Running a boutique luxury property allows a fair amount of flexibility for creativity and innovation. We work with ever-changing guest needs and it is exciting to be able to create a product that is sought-after in the luxury travel industry.

2. *Relationship building:* I have learned that cultivating good relationships with others in the industry is priceless, as we don't operate in isolation. I think this is one investment that has really paid off over the years in terms of credibility in the market place, and enabling us to build on our customer base and gain loyal support. I find this extremely rewarding. Discretion is a key requirement in our industry, in particular in our dealings with guests and service providers and this increases loyalty too.

3. *Developing others:* This has always been one of my main motivators - to assist in addressing the skills gap in South Africa and getting people involved in the hospitality industry and opening doors for them, through sharing and teaching. Also as a way of attracting highly skilled staff to our property. Leading staff and instilling a sense of ownership in them for the organisation and its vision, and creating the conditions for them to do so is one of my key driving forces. Staff needs to be fully engaged with and empowered so that they can draw from this framework for the guest experience they provide.

4. *Working in beautiful surroundings:* Representing a property which is as beautiful as Steenberg is a perk and I so often hear people comment that 'it can't be considered hard work to be able to be here every day and run this place'. Of course in a sense that is so true.

5. *The variety that the job brings with it:* This is probably true of a lot of other professions too, but in ours especially so, due to the nature of our guest and provider relationship and interaction. Every day is different and one meets the most extraordinary people along the way. I realise now that I should have started capturing some of the stories years ago - it would make for some good reading! To oversee an entire operation that encompasses every aspect from Housekeeping to creating and maintaining the website, as well as making sure that the Marketing is continuously driven, certainly adds to the variety of the job.

6. *Networking with like-minded people:* A Luxury Hotel and its brand gives us access to a variety of people and industries and we discover like-mindedness in many ways. It is fantastic to be able to synergise through a diverse product like Steenberg through our link to wine, golf, eco and environmental matters, skills upliftment and community involvement. There are a lot more interesting angles to promote the property and connect people with each other. To be in touch with people in this industry from all over the world on a daily basis adds an exciting dynamic to my work.

7. *Representing much more than a luxury hotel:* To work with a luxury property which mainly speaks to the international market, one becomes an ambassador for the city and country we operate in. I enjoy nothing more than promoting our exciting city and country as one of the most sought-after to visit in the world. I find that the fact that I am not South African yet having chosen SA as my base for the past 17 years certainly helps to generate more interest for the destination.

8. *Driving attention to detail and striving for perfection:* I believe in taking a frequent, hard look at the facility, the product and the service and how we manage the 'touch points' and moments of truth related to the guest experience. We do tend to look for perfection but want to do it by still maintaining the very unique sense of place of our property. Our best resource is undoubtedly our guest. They travel, they see and they tell you fairly fast what they want and what they do not want (anymore). We draw from their comments and shared feedback, not only to enhance their experience and better it for their next visit but also to improve our standards continuously. What might have been good enough a year ago may no longer be sufficient this year. I believe that is fundamental to providing a world-class service.

9. *The travelling:* You get to travel quite a bit when trying to secure new business for the property and one of the perks is getting to experience other properties all over the world. While the travelling part is not always as glamorous as it might sound, to see what is out there and to experience first-hand the new trends and also hotels we are competing with across the world, is not only interesting but also very valuable. I have learned a lot from this and have implemented standards and practises here at Steenberg, as a result of my own experiences.

10. *The absence of routine:* This is not a 9 to 5 job and one needs to be on the ball constantly, seven days a week, if need be. To be successful in this business as an hotelier there is no scope for 'paper pushing'. The need to be very curious and passionate about what is done, how it's done and whom it is done for, is a prerequisite for the job. Luckily I thrive on this.

For more information go to [www.steenberghotel.com](http://www.steenberghotel.com).

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