The Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa
From Marriott’s Autograph Collection

Towel Tracker elevates towel service and attains 98 percent towel return rate at historic Gulf Coast resort

The Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa sits on 550 acres next to beautiful Mobile Bay in Point Clear, Alabama. Built in 1847, it was originally a small hotel that served as a military hospital during the Civil War and a military training base during World War II. Since then, the Grand Hotel has grown significantly, and its amenities today include 405 guest rooms and suites, 3 swimming pools, a water slide and splash pad, a beach, 2 golf courses, a 20,000 square foot spa, a marina, and a daily historic cannon firing. Known as “The Queen of Southern Resorts”, the Grand Hotel has been named one of the Top 500 Hotels in the World by Travel & Leisure, and one of the Top 121 Golf Resorts by Conde Nast Traveler. Notable guests have included Barbara Bush, Colin Powell, and Margaret Thatcher.

The Towel Situation
Every year, the Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa welcomes many thousands of guests who enjoy the resort’s various water amenities. According to the resort’s General Manager, Scott Tripoli, guests wanting pool towels were previously required to sign them out and then back in when they were done with them, at a poolside towel concierge desk staffed by several employees. This process was time consuming and often resulted in long lines during peak season. Despite this system, guests did not always return their pool towels—many were left lying on deck chairs, while others simply disappeared.

When Tripoli assessed the pool towel situation, he thought of Towel Tracker, which he had successfully deployed in his previous position as General Manager of a large resort in Orlando, Florida. Tripoli explained, “That resort had three swimming pools in three different locations, so we battled the loss of pool towels. We installed Towel Tracker, one unit at each of the three pools, and it solved all of our problems. We had minimal towel loss and guests loved it.”

The Solution
With the aforementioned experience in mind, Tripoli discussed Towel Tracker with his supervisor and the owners of the Grand Hotel, and he obtained their approval to install two Towel Trackers. The first sits on the main pool deck, near the gate that leads to the Mobile Bay beachfront, and the second sits near the splash pad, water slide, and pool area entrance.

Benefits
Following are benefits that the Grand Hotel has experienced since installing Towel Tracker:

• 98 percent towel return rate
  The two Towel Trackers dispensed a total of 76,715 towels during the first year after they were installed, and of those towels, 75,196 (98 percent) were returned. With Towel Tracker, resort management also knows exactly which guests did not return their towels and can follow up in any way they wish. Tripoli commented, “Towel loss is significantly less than we’ve seen in previous years.” This in turn has led to a corresponding reduction in the need to purchase replacement towels, which is beneficial to the resort’s bottom line.

• Guests like Towel Tracker
  When introducing Towel Tracker at the Grand Hotel, Tripoli was very mindful regarding the needs of the resort’s unique clientele. He explained, “This is a generational resort that’s been around for 170 years. You may have a guest that’s been here for 70 years in a row, and their daughter and son are here, and now their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren are (continued on back)
Benefits (continued):

here. So you have generations of the same families coming to the Grand year in and year out." Thus, he stated, “Anytime you introduce something new here, you have to be careful to make sure guests understand the importance of it and why you’re doing it." This conscientious approach yielded positive results. Tripoli observed, "From day one, Towel Tracker was a simple device for guests to understand how to use, and it was a resounding success. People looked at it as, 'Wow, this is new technology, this is pretty cool! I can give my kids the key and they can go get their own towels.' Now guests can easily get as many towels as they want, then simply return the towels to Towel Tracker."

• Keeps pool decks cleaner
Before Towel Tracker, an unsightly hamper full of dirty towels sat at the entrance to the main pool. In addition, guests frequently left their used towels on deck chairs surrounding the pool. “Our staff would go around and pick them up, and we’re a full-service resort, so we don’t mind doing that,” explained Tripoli. “But on a busy day, guests would walk around looking for a pool chair, see a towel on it and think, ‘Oh, that’s occupied’, when in fact that guest left two hours ago, but we didn’t know they were gone.”

Today, guests know their towels are being tracked with Towel Tracker’s RFID technology. As a result, Tripoli stated, “Guests are taking their towels, bringing them back to the Towel Tracker when they’re done with them, and leaving a fresh set of empty deck chairs for other guests to use.” The overall result is a better organized pool deck that stays sparkling clean and free of towel clutter.

• Redirected labor hours
The previous pool towel management process was labor intensive, with 3-4 employees responsible for bringing clean and dirty towels back and forth from the laundry, folding them, signing them in and out, and periodically walking around the pool decks and the beach to pick up dirty towels. With Towel Tracker, this process has become much simpler. Tripoli explained, “Our towels are sent to an outside laundry company that does all the laundry and brings them back. We simply take the towels that are already folded, load them onto the carts, and slide them right into the Towel Tracker machine. Guests use and return them, and the system just repeats itself.” According to Tripoli, this streamlined pool towel process has freed up staff members to take on job duties that are more customer-focused. He elaborated, “They can take time walking around the pool entertaining guests, speaking to guests, cleaning up the pool deck better—they have more time to do that.”

Summary
Installing two Towel Tracker units at the 170 year old Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa has resulted in elevated guest service, a 98 percent towel return rate, redirected labor hours, and cleaner, more organized pool decks. Most importantly, the resort’s unique generational clientele has responded very positively to Towel Tracker’s high tech towel service. Tripoli explained, “I was concerned about people saying, ‘I can’t believe at the Grand Hotel I have to go get my own towels.’ But we never really heard that. I think guests like the fact that, ‘Hey, I can get my own towels, I don’t have to worry about anything, I can put them away. I think people like to have that freedom, they like to be able to do their own thing and not have to wait in lines to get towels anymore. So I think from that perspective, it was a winner for us.”

When asked if he would recommend Towel Tracker to other hotel and resort managers, Tripoli replied, “Would I recommend Towel Tracker? I have recommended Towel Tracker already, so yes, absolutely! We’re saving labor, it’s bringing an overall better organization to the pool deck, and our guests love it.”

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