

THEFT IN HOTEL

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Introduction

Theft can do a lot of damage. They create enormous publicity (sometimes), they create a state of fear, they are demoralizing, create embarrassment and most scaring that theft can bankrupt an otherwise prosperous business. Therefore in hospitality industry or in hotel business theft is not a pleasant topic.

A thief can be anybody. He or she can be an employee, guest or even the supplier. The person can be working alone or in cooperation with others. They can impromptu or planned. Some time people steal for the pure joy of doing it or just plain “nuts”. Many also report their valuables missing only to make a false claim or mere taking advantage of the hotel culture “customer is always right”

Gentlemen, In view of that this short paper is to share knowledge with those present today that theft in hotel is a major security issue in the Hospitality industry.

Theft in hotel

Hotels are vulnerable to incident of theft. Theft can occur in many places in the hotel. It can occur in the guest room, ballroom or conference room, restaurants, rest room, lobby and the reception area. At the back of the house theft can occurs in the kitchen, store room, cold room, laundry, staff cafeteria and offices.

Guests who are not careful with their valuables while in the rest room can become victims of grab and run theft. Areas around the lobby are often used by criminals to stage pickpocket and also pick and run. The reception counter and the restaurant cashier counter is also a place where stealing of money and information particularly from credit cards can occur either by staff or an outsider

Police statistic

The Kuala Lumpur Tourist Police classify cases involving lost of property in hotel into the following section of the penal code.

Section 380: any report of lost of property in hotel room committed by anyone

Section 379: report related to any lost of property in Hotel public area. Public area includes restaurant and conference room.

Section 381: report related to any lost of property involving staff.

Beside investigation papers opened under the above section interesting to note that Kuala Lumpur tourist police has also classified reports on lost property or valuables into NOD (No Offence disclosed), NFA (No Further Action) and ROA (refer other agency).

A report will be classified as NOD when a complainant was not sure where he or she had lost their property whether inside or outside the hotel. NFA cases are cases where complainant made a report that he or she had lost their valuable in the room or in the public area but there wasn't sufficient evidence to proceed further with the report and ROA cases are cases where complainant lodge a report of missing property for the purpose of claiming insurance or for replacement of the missing item.

The following are statistics of incident of missing property in hotel under various classifications for the period of 2001 and 2002 until the month of September obtained from the Kuala Lumpur Tourist Police.

Year 2001

Month	379	380	381	NOD	NFA	ROA
Jan	2			18	8	
Feb	6	4		23	19	
Mar	1	3		21	18	2
Apr	1	1		21	14	3
May	1	4		15	15	2
Jun	2	3		18	14	2
Jul	2	2		35	23	6
Aug		3		24	34	3
Sept		4		16	17	1
Oct	2	1		26	22	4
Nov	2	4		10	13	1
Dis	2	4		18	21	2
Total	21	33		243	218	26

Year 2002

Month	379	380	381	NOD	NFA	ROA
Jan	3			10	12	2
Feb	1	4		8	13	1
Mar	1	5		12	30	7
Apr	1	6		7	4	7

May	5	2		10	18	5
Jun	1	8		8	20	3
Jul		6		18	14	10
Aug		9		8	17	2
Sept		3		11	10	11
Oct						
Nov						
Dis						
Total	10	46		92	138	48

From the above figure we can observe that cases under section 380 of the Penal code are quite common. In the year 2001 there are 33 cases of theft in hotels rooms around Kuala Lumpur and in year 2002 until September there are 46 reports classified under section 380 of Penal code. The figure above also shows that theft in hotel public area is something not to be ignored.

The police have also classified large numbers of cases of theft under NOD and NFA. The number of reports made by complainant for the purpose of claiming insurance and for replacement of their personal belongings (usually passport, credit card, identification card and driving license) are also numerous.

Theft in hotel sometimes can be genuine. However there are cases where reports are made by guest especially those who are frequent traveler and knows that hotel of five-star status will always 'take care' of their customer will take advantage to make a false report for their own benefits. It is the duty of the hotel to investigate and to proof that the valuables were not lost through the hotel negligence. This is the most difficult job of the Hotel Safety and security Manager.

Is The Hotel Operator Protected against Theft in the Hotel?

To some extent the answer is yes. Section 4 of the Innkeeper Act 1952 (revised 1981) protects the hotel operator. Section 4 of the act states that

“ No innkeeper shall be liable to make good to any guest any loss of or injury to goods brought to his inn, not being a horse or other live animal, or any gear appertaining thereto or any car or carriage, to a greater amount than the sum of five hundred ringgit, except in the following cases:

- (a) Where such goods shall have been stolen, lost or**

injured through the willful act, default or neglect of

such inn-keeper or any servant in his employ:

**(b) where such goods shall have been deposited expressly for
safe custody with such innkeeper or his manager:**

Provided always that in the case of such deposit it shall be lawful for such innkeeper or his manager, if he thinks fit, to acquire, as a condition of his liability:

(i) that the guest shall at the time of such deposit declare the value of such goods,

(ii) that such goods shall be deposited in a box or other

receptacles fastened and sealed by the person depositing the same:

Provided always that the innkeeper or his manager may refuse to receive for safe custody under this section goods of any one guest the declared value of which exceeds five thousand ringgit, and that he shall in no case be liable for loss of or injury to goods so deposited by a guest to an amount exceeding the declared value thereof.”

(Ref: Law of Malaysia Act 24.8)

In most hotels, at the reception counter whether five star or otherwise will display the Innkeeper Act to inform guest of the Innkeeper's liability and the guest responsibility. For large sum of money and valuables the hotel provides safe deposit box at the reception counter. In the room notice are placed at strategic locations to advise guest on the safety and security procedure and the usage of the safe box provided in the room. All these are measures taken by the hotel to ensure the guest comfort and safety and the security of their valuables while staying in the hotel.

Experience in my Hotel

My hotel is a five star hotel with world renowned brand located in Jalan Sultan Ismail. I like to share some of the challenges faced by the Safety & Security Department in addressing issues pertaining to report of missing items in my hotel (room and public area).

Being an international hotel our guest are majority from overseas particularly from Australia., New Zealand, American and some European Countries. We also have guest who comes from the Asian countries like Singapore, Philippines and Japan. We also received large numbers of seasonal guest from the Middle Eastern countries.

Like all other hotels in the world our business depends on customers and most important of all is repeat customers. Therefore our corporate culture is caring for our customer, our business and our associates (employee). Our principle is we will always take care and pampered of our customers. Our Customer knows these very well.

The hotel is not spare with reports from guest missing their valuables in the rooms, restaurant and the public area. For the year 2001 we received 5 reports of missing valuables in the room and 1 report in the public area (conference room). In year 2002 until middle of October we had received 4 reports of missing valuable in the room and 4 reports of missing valuables in public area.

The security department upon receiving such report will conduct an immediate investigation and the out come of the investigation must be submitted to the management within 24hrs after the incident is reported. For the incidences that occurred in the public area usually will point to our customer's negligence. However customers are never satisfied with the investigation finding and some of the customer demanded compensation claiming lack of security.

From the 5 reports of missing valuables in the room in year 2001, our investigation managed to solve one case of stolen laptop computer. The laptop was immediately recovered within 15 minutes of the item reported lost. The laptop computer was hidden in the fire riser cabinet in the fire staircase two floors below the complainant's room. Looking at the modus operandi we believe only an insider could carried out the job. Further investigation led to the dismissal of our engineering staff. The case was not reported to the police as the culprit voluntarily agreed to give a written confession of the whole incident.

In this case, theft had occurred in the room because the main door was not secured when he left the room. He left the room for 15 minutes but had to return immediately to do his prayer where he discovered his laptop was not on the writing table. He lodged a report immediately and investigation was conducted. The success of this investigation was due to the immediate report made by complainant and luck.

In year 2001 we also managed to solve another case of missing laptop computer in the conference room. Our employee stole the laptop during lunchtime. A police report was not lodged because the culprit who is a foreigner from one of our property in overseas voluntarily agreed to give a written confession and admitted that he stole the laptop computer.

The success of this case was due to report made immediately by complainant. The investigation revealed that the theft can only be carried out by insider. The laptop was found hidden in the ceiling in the pantry near the conference room. Interrogation of suspect reveals that the pantry ceiling seemed to be a favorite spot for hiding for certain employees.

In year 2002, we received 4 reports of items missing in the room. One interesting case was a report by a Swedish guest who claimed that he had 8 pieces of USD 100.00 hidden between his t-shirt placed inside his unlock sport bag reported that 4 pieces of USD100.00 was missing. Investigation revealed that the key card lock reading was normal and the main door and lock system showed no sign of tempering.

On the day in question the room was cleaned by two housekeeping maid. One of the maids was on a part time assignment. She had just joined the rank of the housekeeping maid for one week. Interrogation of the fulltime maid revealed that a procedure was breach. The part time maid who claimed that she had experience in some hotel before requested that she be given to do the bed instead of the bath room (the hotel procedure states that part time maid will only do the bathrooms).

This breach of procedure put the part timer as a suspect and her absence on the following day further add to the suspicion. Her background was check and her previous hotel was called. She had work in one of the prestigious 5 star hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Information received from the hotel is that she was dismissed after a plea bargain. She had voluntarily admitted that she had stolen 4000 yen.

We managed to trace her and advise her to report to the security office to assist in our investigation but she did not turn up. A police report was lodged. A police party raided her house but she was not in. The next day she appears at the security office and admitted of stealing the money from the room. Her case was handed over to the police. For goodwill the guest was compensated with one free stay. The innkeeper act still applies.

These are some example of successes. Among the reports mentioned above there are cases where investigation comes to a dead road. Guest reported that they lost cash and valuables in the room. Investigation revealed that there is no abnormality or irregularity on the key lock reading. There is also no sign of tempering on the door. All the entries into the room are authorized. Interrogation on all the employees involved in the room showed no evidence that they have taken the valuables or cash.

The guest will demand compensation and sometime threaten to publicize the incident to the media. This situation normally ends up in a dilemma for the hotel. Is the guest speaking the truth that they have lost the valuables or cash in the room? Is our employee the culprit? With witnesses nobody can answer this question. The best advice to the guest is to lodge a police report. If they choose to lodge a report the hotel will assist them in whatever means. The case than becomes a police case.

Preventive Measures

In order to prevent and minimize incident of theft in the hotel particularly in rooms, beside the standards security measures, the following additional measures is also implemented:

1. Security department will interview all new hire of the housekeeping department.
2. Reviewing of master key issuance every 3 months
3. Requiring housekeeping maid to report to the security department and their desk clerk of any visible valuables or cash found in the room before beginning their work in the room.

4. Strictly to make sure that only the senior staff cleans the room and do the bed. The junior staffs or the part timer only does the bathroom.
5. To create awareness among the staff that crime does not pay the related punishment in law
6. Provide on the spot recognition and reward for honesty
7. Conduct at random check on all staff lockers.
8. Implementing an anonymous tip program

Conclusion

Is theft in hotel real? Thefts in hotel in security standpoint can occur any time. In hotel, incident of theft, particularly those involving guest is very demoralizing, create embarrassment and sometime very costly in non monetary value. Hotels are vulnerable to theft. There are plenty of valuable to steal whether it belongs to the guest or to the hotel. Hotels are vulnerable to theft. Theft can be committed not only by employees but also by the guests themselves.

Among the challenges of investigating incident of theft in the hotel is the collection of evidence. Therefore pro-active measures must be installed and implemented in the hotel in or order to prevent and minimize theft in the hotel. As a security practitioner, you must agree with me that theft will occur if the elements of the crime triangle are allowed to exist.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Mior Roslan Mior Jaafar , has a Diploma and Advance Diploma in Strategic & Security Studies (UKM), Diploma in Personal Management (MIPM). Currently is pursuing his Master program on Defense and Strategic Studies with the University of Malaya. He has served in the Royal Malaysian Police Force for 18 years and has specialized skills in which include special forces operation, terrorism, underground militant movements, trade union, intelligence as well as high profile executive protections. He has also served as the Personal Security Officer for His Highness the King of Malaysia and had extensive exposure to criminal investigations.

He went for an early retirement to take over the position of Corporate Security Manager at Puncak Niaga and soon after assume the position of Safety and Security Manager at Sheraton Hotel

(This paper was presented during the 2 nd Security Practitioners' Meet on 28-29 October 2002 at the Cititel Hotel MidValley, Kuala Lumpur)

