

The financial crisis has affected differently the 3,4 and 5 star hotels. The 5 star hotels were the first that reacted to the sudden decline of the occupancy degree and started the rate cut, followed by the 4 and 3 star hotels. The negative effects of this strategy will be obvious when the hotel market resumes growth and the hotels will need a long time to get back to the initial prices. “On a market with declining demand and increasing offer, the tariff cut will not generate demand. Moreover the demand on the business segment is inflexible against the decline on the leisure segment.” stated for Bucharest Herald Costina Gandac, general manger of Golden Tulip Times Hotel (www.goldentuliptimes.com)

BH: In January you were talking about a 20 per cent decline of the occupancy rate, to 45 per cent, against January 2008, when the occupancy rate was of 65 per cent. The signs on the hotel market indicate an increase of the occupancy rate in September and in October. What was the situation in the case of Golden Tulip Times hotel?

Costina Gandac: The upward trend is valid in the case of Golden Tulip Times hotel as well, with the mention that the differences in terms of occupancy degree were quite high against 2007 and 2008. The market proved, surprisingly, very volatile. All the increases of the occupancy degrees in 2007 and in 2008 were lost rapidly in January, February and March 2009. The signs of the occupancy rate drop appeared in October and November 2009, but we did not imagine that we will face such steep decline. It was a “w” shape evolution with a significant decline of the occupancy rate in August and a come back in September and in October.

BH: Was there a balance between the decline of the business tourism and the increase of the leisure tourism to offset the losses?

Costina Gandac: Golden Tulip Times hotel relies on the business tourism and we could not compensate the losses registered on this segment with the weekend or leisure tourism. Bucharest is not a destination able to offer entertainment attractions. In the Eastern Europe area we cannot compare ourselves with capitals such as Budapest, Prague or Vienna, in terms of attractions for the leisure tourism, which have been highly promoted in the past years.

BH: What are the solutions for the attraction of other types of tourists, besides the business tourists?

Costina Gandac: The events segment should be developed, because the tourists come here if something happens. All the hotels around the Palace Hall- Romanian Atheneum area were full during “George Enescu Festival”. We can not rely only on the promotion of the historical side of

the Capital, because we have a very high competition in Eastern Europe. There is not and there has never been in the past 20 years, a coherent strategy to promote Romania or Bucharest as a tourism destination.

BH: What were the main strategy mistakes made by the hoteliers during this period?

Costina Gandac: The first impulse of any hotelier who is facing such a decline of the occupancy rate is to cut the rack rates to increase the occupancy degree. This is a huge mistake. On a market with declining demand and increasing offer, the tariff cut will not generate demand. Moreover the demand on the business segment is inflexible, against the decline on the leisure segment. If in the case of the leisure tourism the trips can be postponed, those who have to travel to Bucharest for business, must book a room in a hotel irrespective of the price.

BH: What was your strategy?

Costina Gandac: When all the hotels on the 4 and 5 star segment cut the prices, we could not remain isolated. We cut the accommodation rates, but not by 30- 40 per cent, but by 8- 10 per cent during the week and by 20 per cent at weekends. If we had cut the prices more, we would have reduced the quality of the services as well and the long term profitability at the same time. But we introduced supplementary services in the existing rates, such as transport from the airport to the hotel or 20 per cent cut on the services of some gyms near the hotel.

BH: In the context of the financial crisis, the three star hotels have gained market share by cutting the prices and the 5 star hotels lost some of the customers because of the high rates, what was the impact of the financial crisis on the four star hotels? □

Costina Gandac: Surprisingly the market share of the 5 star hotel is higher than last year, because these hotels started to cut the prices. The five star hotels operated significant price reductions and they were able to attract the customers of the 3 and 4 star hotels. Some of the customers of the 4 star hotels migrated towards the 5 star hotels, that offer more services on lower prices. The problems will occur when the market resumes growth and the 5 star hotels will find it very difficult to get back to the initial rates.

BH: If in the past years the offer of hotel rooms was much under the demand, this year Bucharest has exceeded 10,000 rooms. Is there more room for other hotels on the 4 star market or, after we get out of the crisis we will realize that we have finally reached a balance between the demand and the offer? □ □

Costina Gandac: The fact that there were many talks about a need of hotel rooms, determined the development of several projects on the market, which is not bad. A positive competition among the services offered by the hotels was created. The problem is that these hotels opened in a moment when the market had entered in recession and did not need them. Right now, considering the demand for the next year, the Bucharest hotel market is saturated. There is still room for the two and three star rooms on the leisure segment.

BH: Are there signals that big international hotel chains are interested in the Romanian market?

Costina Gandac: All the hotel chains that come to Bucharest are thinking about profit and about image. At this moment the general political environment is unstable and the country rating is dropping. No international hotel chain opens a hotel if is not sure of the success. The notoriety of the destination, the legislative frame, the quality and the training of the human resources and the economical stability are important.

BH: What investments have you made this year?

Costina Gandac: This year we took advantage of the lower occupancy degree to change the elevators with elevators with higher capacity and speed. We invested in the renovation of the coffee shop at the ground floor that has a new and very trendy look. One of the advantages of the crisis was the fact that we could make investments with minimum impact on the guests.

Costina Gandac: “Cererea pentru turismul de business este inflexibila, iar reducerea tarifelor hoteliere este inutila”

Criza financiara a afectat in mod diferit hotelurile de 3,4 si 5 stele din Capitala. Hotelurile de 5 stele au fost primele care au reactionat la scaderea brusca a gradului de ocupare si au dat startul reducerii tarifelor, urmate si de hotelurile de 4 si 3 stele. Efectele negative ale acestei strategii vor fi evidente dupa ce piata hoteliera isi va relua cresterea, iar hotelurile vor avea nevoie de o perioada lunga pentru a reveni la tarifele initiale. “Pe o piata cu cerere in scadere si oferta in crestere, scaderea tarifelor nu va genera cerere. Mai mult decat atat, cererea pe segmentul de business este inflexibila, fata de cererea pe segmentul de leisure.” a declarat pentru Bucharest Herald Costina Gandac, general manger Hotel Golden Tulip Times (www.goldentuliptimes.com)

BH: In luna ianuarie vorbeati despre o scadere a gradului de ocupare de 20 la suta, pana la 45 la suta fata de ianuarie 2008, cand gradul de ocupare a fost de 65 la suta. Semnalele

din piata hoteliera indica o crestere a gradului de ocupare in septembrie si octombrie. Care a fost situatia in cazul hotelului Golden Tulip Times?

Costina Gandac: Trend-ul ascendent este valabil si in cazul hotelului Golden Tulip Times, cu mentiunea ca diferentele, in ceea ce priveste gradul de ocupare, au fost destul de mari, fata de 2007 si fata de 2008. Piata s-a dovedit, in mod surprinzator, foarte volatila. Toate cresterile gradului de ocupare din 2007 si 2008 s-au pierdut rapid in ianuarie, februarie si martie 2009. Semnalele scaderii gradului de ocupare au aparut in octombrie si noiembrie 2009, dar nu ne-am imaginat ca ne vom confrunta cu niste scaderi atat de mari. A fost o evolutie in forma de "w" cu o scadere semnificativa a gradului de ocupare in luna august si o revenire in septembrie si octombrie.

BH: A existat un echilibru intre scaderea turismului de business si cresterea turismului de leisure care sa compenseze pierderile?

Costina Gandac: Hotelul Golden Tulip Times se bazeaza pe turism de business si nu am putut compensa pierderile inregistrate pe acest segment cu turism de weekend sau de leisure. Bucurestiul nu este o destinatie care sa ofere atractii pe partea de entertainment. In zona Europei de Est nu ne putem compara cu capitale precum Budapesta, Praga sau Viena, in privinta atractiilor pentru turismul de leisure si care au fost intens promovate in ultimii ani..

BH: Care sunt solutiile pentru atragerea altor tipuri de turisti, decat cei de business?

Costina Gandac: Ar trebui dezvoltat segmentul de organizare de evenimente, pentru ca turistii vin aici daca se intampla ceva. Toate hotelurile din zona Sala Palatului- Ateneu au fost pline in perioada "Festivalului George Enescu". Nu ne putem baza doar pe promovarea partii istorice a Capitalei, pentru ca avem o concurenta foarte mare in Europa de Est. Nu exista si nu a existat in ultimii 20 de ani o strategie coerenta de promovare a Romaniei sau a Bucurestiului ca destinatie turistica.

BH: Care au fost principalele greseli de strategie pe care le-au facut hotelierii in aceasta perioada?

Costina Gandac: Primul impuls al oricarui hotelier care se confrunta cu o scadere a gradului de ocupare este sa micsoareze tarifele pentru a creste gradul de ocupare. Este o greseala imensa. Pe o piata cu cerere in scadere si oferta in crestere, scaderea tarifulor nu va genera cerere. Mai mult decat atat, cererea pe segmentul de business este inflexibila, fata de cererea

pe segmentul de leisure. Daca in cazul turismului de leisure calatoriile pot fi amanate, cei care au afaceri in Bucuresti trebuie sa isi rezerve camere la hotel, indiferent de tarif.

BH: Care a fost strategia dumneavoastra?

Costina Gandac: In momentul in care toate hotelurile din segmentul de 4 si 5 stele au redus preturile, nu puteam ramane izolati. Am redus tarifele la cazare, insa nu cu 30- 40 la suta, ci cu 8- 10 la suta in cursul saptamanii si cu 20 la suta in weekend. Daca am fi redus tarifele mai mult, am fi redus si calitatea serviciilor si profitabilitatea pe termen lung in acelasi timp. In schimb am introdus servicii suplimentare in tarifele existente, precum transportul de la aeroport la hotel sau reduceri de 20 la suta la serviciile unor sali de sport din apropierea hotelului.

BH: In contextul crizei hotelurile de 3 stele au castigat cota de piata prin reducerea tarifulor, iar cele de 5 stele si-au pierdut din clienti din cauza tarifulor ridicate, care a fost impactul crizei asupra hotelurilor de 4 stele?

Costina Gandac: In mod surprinzator cota hotelurilor de 5 stele este mai mare anul acesta decat anul trecut, pentru ca aceste hoteluri au dat tonul la reducerea tarifulor. Hotelurile de 5 stele au operat reduceri semnificative de preturi, astfel incat au putut atrage din clientela hotelurilor de 3 si 4 stele. O parte din clientii hotelurilor de 4 stele au migrat catre hotelurile de 5 stele care ofera mai multe servicii la preturi mai mici. Problemele vor aparea cand piata va reincepe sa creasca si va fi foarte greu pentru hotelurile de 5 stele sa revina la tarifele initiale.

BH: Daca in anii trecuti oferta de camere de hoteluri era mult sub cere, anul acesta Bucurestiul a ajuns sa aiba peste 10.000 de camere. Mai este loc pentru alte hoteluri pe piata de patru stele sau, dupa ce vom iesi din criza, vom constata ca am ajuns in sfarsit la un echilibru intre cerere si oferta?

Costina Gandac: Faptul ca s-a vorbit foarte mult despre o nevoie de camere de hotel a determinat aparitia mai multor proiecte pe piata, ceea ce nu este rau, s-a creat o concurenta pozitiva intre serviciile oferite de hoteluri. Problema este ca aceste hoteluri au aparut in momentul in care piata intrase in recesiune si nu avea nevoie de ele. In momentul acesta, la cererea previzionata pe un an de zile, piata hoteliera din Bucuresti este saturata. Ar mai fi loc pentru camere de 2 si 3 stele, pentru segmentul de leisure.

BH: Exista semnale ca mari lanturi internationale de hoteluri sunt interesate de piata din Romania?

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Costina Gandac: Toate lanturile hoteliere care vin in Bucuresti se gandesc la profit, dar si la imagine. In acest moment cadrul politic general este instabil, iar rating-ul de tara este in scadere. Niciun lant hotelier international nu deschide un hotel daca nu este sigur de succes. Sunt foarte importante notorietatea destinatiei, cadrul legislativ, calitatea si pregatirea resurselor umane, stabilitatea economica.

BH: Ce fel de investitii ati facut anul acesta?

Costina Gandac: Anul acesta am profitat de gradul mai redus de ocupare pentru a schimba lifturile cu unele de capacitate si viteza mai mare. Am investit si in renovarea cafenelei de la parter care are acum un look nou si foarte trendy. Unul dintre avantajele crizei a fost faptul ca am putut derula aceste investitii cu un impact minim asupra oaspetilor.