The things we miss at Capri Hotel

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To no one in this city, Havana native or visitor, goes unnoticed the 1957 building, very close to the iconic National Hotel of Cuba and the popular Coppelia. And that building is El Capri, which boasts 220 rooms and all the legend of its Salon Rojo.

The hotel, which has a wonderful view to the sea through its highest balconies, was reinvigorated in 2013 and is now managed by the Gran Caribe chain and from February 2014 on, by the NH Hotel Group.

The latter, along with its Cuban partner Gran Caribe, took charge in 2018 of a typical 20th-century large house (1928) located in El Vedado, and partially renovated it in 2016 and became the intimist and fancy Hotel Victoria.

Technically, we could describe this complex —made up of several facilities— as an ideal option to those who like to enjoy urban tourism and live, indeed, in the present Havana, its streets, its inhabitants, the daily routine of a new city, but you can go to the old side of the city —very near by the way— and enjoy the spirituality and charm of the Old Havana.

It also boasts every comfort that today's hotel standards foresee. The NH Capri is perhaps the sole hotel in Cuba where you can book duplex rooms. A formal introduction would also include rooms for disable people, no-smoking rooms, two spacious suites with an unparalleled outside view (In fact, all rooms boast outside view and natural lighting), with exquisite carpentry and fine art works and colored-glass pieces or ceramics decorating the place.

Swimming pool? Of course, Both have it. The NH Capri on the top floor and the NHC Victoria in the inner courtyard of the original house which is divided, today, in 31 rooms as well as the rest of the routine services in a hotel facility.

However, we do not talk solely about these subjects when interviewing Yamina Pla Barbeito, Deputy General Director of El Capri-Victoria complex. She knows the complex very well since the days every worker needed to enter the facility wearing hard hats.

"I am sorry. I am not properly dressed up and I am wearing a pair of tennis shoes. I came here in formal dress, but as soon as I walked through the door, I changed clothes and went to NHC Victoria to do cleaning. We are getting ready to welcome the first clients and you know, everyone must help. This way, everyone teams up."

Of course we understand her and, in the process, we found out one of the things they had been missing at El Capri in this time of pandemic: *"the team."* A crew of workers engaged, little by little, in domestic tourism and clients who spend their isolation time there. How did it go?

"So far so good. NH Capri is open since February. We have welcomed clients under isolation —32 positive cases, but no Covid-related outbreaks have occurred, luckily— which show all measures have been successfully applied. Moms with little kids has resumed working activities as they feel now safer, aware that, if all hygienic and safety protocols set are properly followed, there will be no risks."

The NHC Victoria is already in service for domestic tourism. We toured both hotels as we chatted. What is going on with the Internet connection? How many TVs without remote controls? She pays attention to every single detail. She knows everything about her workplace. This place means personal fulfillment and pride for her and the rest of the team:

"According to Tripadvisor, NH Capri ranks 9th and NHC Victoria 3rd, which is the first hotel as the others are rent houses. To us, this is the result of a philosophy of total focus on customers, even those in isolation. The service

must be equally attentive, friendly, unafraid because necessary measures are all set. We all work to achieve a better image so clients can be treated more humanely, and it involves courtesy, discretion, and solve clients' problems immediately. In our work environment, complaints are opportunities to improve our weaknesses. They never mean embarrassment."

And they improvise to solve issues. Right now, where initiatives such as *"mad photo"* or the *"babied customer"*, consisting of one client chosen randomly who gets the best possible treatment: the client can develop their own cocktails and present it, get dancing lessons, have breakfast in his/her room or perhaps enjoy a fancy dinner from a specialized restaurant…Well, we have now decided to shower clients with "*imaginary*" hugs like these posters *"Hearts about five feet away."*

If you notice the hotel in the dark one night, it is not that there was a blackout or there is a breakdown, clients must be certainly enjoying La hora del Planeta (The Earth Hour), an experience all clients share. They stage pleasant environment with candles, and insist on giving the Environment a break, at least for an hour:

"We invite them to become aware and participate and most of them do. They even share the pictures in social networks and write beautiful posts like ***the wonderful world I want for my grandchildren*** *and things like that."*

Besides, they help a kindergarten in the community: *"We always celebrate with them the Teacher's Day and every January 28th we pay tribute to José Martí and workers donate toys…"* In 2020, they went to a shelter for children without parental protection in Playa municipality and celebrated the birthdays of two 15 years-old girls.

But that's not all, Yamina takes a break a wiped out some tears when she talked about the visit to the Oncology Hospital: *"We go there every year. Some workers dress like a clown or we just hire a professional. Everyone contributes with something to give children. We have fun. That is the most important thing. Parent are grateful and it has had a profound impact on our feelings."*

We miss all these things at Capri hotel nowadays. Not only the usual rush to satisfy clients. We miss welcoming the kids from *La Colmenita* for a special event, the kids from any surrounding school in the community. We even miss the collection of raw materials, which would seem a heavy work.

Perhaps, that is why they are among Gran Caribe's hotels in Havana that formed an alliance with the Súmate Campaign and already make plans to visit the Oncology Hospital next February to celebrate Saint Valentine's Day or just be part of any idea that contributes to build a better city, a better nation, which results in contributing to the achievement of the development goals drawn in the 2030 Agenda of the UN. Recycling, women's empowerment, struggle against all sort of discriminations, and the responsible consumption of alcoholic beverages, health…are some of the subjects addressed by the *Súmate* Campaign. The workers from Capri hotel complex are already engaged in these activities.

Technically, this is corporate social responsibility and is one of the elements —in addition to efficiency— that has helped that team be granted the National Vanguard Staff recognition. However, this is also humanism, solidarity, commitment…

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