



Andy Banner-Price

E: stay@the25.uk W: www.the25.uk

THE
25
BOUTIQUE
B&B



Maureen talks to Andy Banner-Price co owner of Torquay's multiple award winning hotel

Q1 what encouraged you to go into the hospitality sector?

It was completely random – we were both looking for jobs following redundancy and we'd finished doing our house up so we were also looking for a new home. Having wasted another evening not being able to find all three in the same travelling area I decided to look for businesses instead with a view to us doing something together with accommodation attached. A county house hotel in North Wales was literally the first thing to come up and we just fell in love with it. How hard could it be?! We were there for over 7 years but it was initially a very steep learning curve.

Q2 Why did you pick Torquay?

We decided to downsize to remove the need for staff and wanted to just do B&B. Having a restaurant and also doing weddings and functions at our last hotel took over our whole lives. We were looking all over England and Wales and stumbled across properties in Torquay. It was initially more about the property – it needed to have enough space for comfortable luxury bedrooms, plentiful parking, & walking distance to good eateries. Our current property ticked all the boxes. We also fell in love with Torquay. There are so many things to do, beautiful scenery, lots of tourists, thriving theatres and history. It had everything we wanted.

Q3 What do you think has been the reason for your success with awards?

We're perfectionists. We continually strive to be better and even since winning "Best B&B in the World" last year out of more than a million properties, we haven't stopped making improvements since.

We will never have a finished property. We always put ourselves in the customers' shoes and ensure everyone has the best time possible.

Q4 What do you see as the best opportunities over the next 3 years?

I think the "book direct" message is finally starting to hit home and more and more guests realise they can get a better deal by cutting out the likes of Booking.com. However, unless you're in a strong position with plenty of direct bookings, if Booking.com went bust tomorrow, you're soon going to be struggling. We work hard to build a loyal following on social media, have an informative and up to date website and good SEO so we appear in lots of searches towards the top. Accommodation businesses also doing this will see an opportunity to continue to grow, plus less reliance on third party websites means you're paying less of your potential profits on commission.

"Boutique" means different things to different people but I still feel there's a shortage of our kind of property. When I go away, once I've got the basics like location and parking, it's the little things that I'm looking for. I want a great breakfast, fresh milk in the room for my tea along with a homemade biscuit or cake. I'd like quirky décor so I know I'm not in a corporate hotel and friendly and chatty owners. I want Netflix so I can watch a film after dinner and an honesty bar so I can have a drink if I fancy one. We struggle when we want to go on holiday for a few days ourselves, and I think only a little step up with a few tweaks could make a big difference to so many people's businesses.

In lockdown I started producing an on-line training course for people wanting to go into the B&B industry. I plan to launch over this winter. I'd ultimately like to start doing consultancy work.

Q5 What are the biggest challenges

Unfortunately, a lot of the challenges we face are out of our direct control. As perfectionists, we'd love to control everything and have every single

aspect of the guests' experience exactly how we wish it. I'm therefore in regular contact with our council to try and get things like our flowers beds and seafront lights looking good. I'm always litter picking or weed killing around the property and managed to get our local post box repainted as it was looking pretty shabby. I can ensure our guests have a fabulous time at The 25, but if they don't enjoy the area for some reason then they still won't come back. I want them to have the best meals, go to the best bars, see the best scenery, visit the best shops and attractions and go home raving about the whole of the English Riviera, not just The 25.

Q6 what would your advice be to anyone thinking of buying a hotel?

Don't overstretch yourselves. It's very easy to get carried away and end up spending more on a property than you think but you'll need lots of money when you move in. Even if you don't need or plan to do a big refurb, even small things soon add up. If the TVs are out dated and you need new ones at £400 each, that soon mounts up when you have eight rooms. Even small things like a new bin for each bedroom is another £100.

I'd also suggest getting some training or experience. Due to the prevalence of on line reviews, you don't have the luxury of finding your feet as you learn on the job like we did thirteen years ago. Getting a few average reviews at the beginning can keep your scores low for years. If you want your property to be spotted on the first couple of pages and a reputation for being a nice place to stay, you need to be getting the excellent reviews from day one.

Do your research. Know the area, the market and your customers. Read all the on line reviews – is there anything negative anyone mentions and can you fix it? Ensure you purchase the right property – a lovely property in the wrong location is just a house. A poor property in the right location can become a successful business.



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