

Not long ago, Mrs McDivot and myself decided the unrelenting stress of being, necessitated a much needed vacation...

Service industry



As it was the middle of the winter months and we were in great requirement of some change in scenery and temperature, so we chose the ever-popular semi paradise known as Tenerife and one of those late deals that allocate your destination upon arrival.

Allocation on arrival always fills me with the fear of the unknown but as we had stipulated a four star hotel we were reasonably confident of meeting with a degree of success. I am glad to say we were not disappointed, as we discovered our stay was to be in a small resort in the most agreeable Hotel Los Gigantes, an establishment that catered for the mature guest and was as a result totally devoid of screaming little urchins and marauding teenagers desperate for some nocturnal activity.

We therefore settled down to a delightful week of sunbathing, coastal walking and the occasional sojourn in our little hired car to another part of the island. This particular activity I found to be most entertaining, as it involved heading in a roughly vertical direction for about half an hour up the side of a mountain along a highly precipitous road with a drop of about a thousand or so feet down the unprotected side.

Some of these roads, particularly when we got to about 7,000 foot were in places already starting to make their own way down the mountainside. This added greatly to the amusement value, especially when confronted as we were on a regular basis, by oncoming vehicles approaching at about 60 mph on the wrong side of the road or dirt track as it became. I must say some of the locals seemed to inject a great

Right: Hotel Los Gigantes' resident house band, Blackjack in full flow

deal of humour into their motoring, something that was not altogether shared by Mrs McDivot as we narrowly avoided our imminent demise on several occasions.

As we continued to survive each approaching hairpin bend and the weather and vegetation became indistinguishable from that found in the Scottish Highlands, I could not help but wonder if the local government officials had normally embraced the concept of risk assessment with quite the enthusiasm as we greenkeepers.

But when we got back to our hotel, we were always greeted by the inexhaustible politeness and charm of the hotel staff and a gargantuan evening buffet that invited a degree of indulgence not normally associated with life at home. It was at the end of one of these feeding frenzies, that Mrs McDivot came over somewhat faint and proceeded to pass out in front of about 200 other diners.

The next day having regained her health, we went down to breakfast and were greeted by a number of the hotel waiters all of whom showed genuine concern for her well being following the previous night's drama. Her own investigation of the causes of her blackout, revealed that a rare virus with an exotic sounding name like Camilla or something, had blown in on a Saharan sirocco causing a temporary lowering of her blood pressure. Personally I attributed the episode and resultant £50 doctors fee, to the effects of her success in fulfilling her personal ambition of sampling every one of the 20 or so puddings on offer that night. But using her usual powers of persuasion, it transpired that the romantic African microbe was the cause of her unconsciousness and not my theory of undiluted gluttony.

Following the evening's culinary extravaganzas, we made it our practice to partake of the odd cognac and cafe con leche to aid the digestive process. This we did along with all the other guests in the lounge area while listening to the syncopation's of "Blackjack", the hotel's resident musical duo. Aided only with a guitar, and a few thousand megabytes of Yamaha keyboard, this Swedish husband and wife team could, knock out orchestral masterpieces such as "Chirpy, chirpy, cheep cheep", "Quando quando quando" and Dawn's immortal, "Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree".

We would then be utterly amazed at how many of the hotels senior citizens would actually get out of their wheel chairs and dance the night away with seemingly boundless energy.

It was while listening to I believe a rendition of "The last waltz" which they chose to sing without quite the same vocal force as deployed by Englebert Humperdinck, that I realised we were metaphorically speaking, a little further away than the 2,000 miles that separated us from the golf clubs of Britain.

The service at this hotel was on a totally different level. If we required refreshment, I did not have to go to the bar and spend ten minutes or so trying to draw the attention of the barman while he moans about the house committee to some wearied member. I did not have to ring a bell and wait for some acne ridden gormless teenager to materialise from the recesses of a darkened kitchen and produce an unintelligible grunting noise. None of your twenty minutes of pugilism here that are required to purchase a half-pint of lager following the June medal back home. No, the technique needed to get served at Hotel Los Gigantes was to glance around and raise a digit for about one second before an immaculately dressed head barman would glide over, smiling to the other guests as he went and produce a note book ready to take your order. He would then pass this to one of the many barmen that were omnipresent yet inconspicuous and within the minute they would reappear with your drinks, complete with paper doilies and a sparkler in the wife's cocktail.

Now to my recollection, I have never once visited a British golf clubs clubhouse and received the same level of service that we received in this, a very pleasant but otherwise unexceptional hotel in Tenerife. Is it a question of economics, or is it a case of tradition being the immovable obstruction to progress on this front.

As "Blackjack" embarked on a medley of poignant 80's arias, starting with Ottawa's "Hands up", a song that unbeknown to me had an entire dance routine associated with it, I reflected on the quality of the headwaiter at Hotel Los Gigantes. In fact as we watched all the septuagenarians going through the routine of raising and lowering their arms in expert synchronisation as the Swedish Duo



sang "Gimme your heart, gimme, gimme", I could not help but notice how the maitre d'hote greeted many of his more regular female guests with a kiss on the cheek.

Was it the holiday atmosphere that had them swooning as he did so, or was it his polished Latino charm that enabled him to carry it off with such elegance? As I further observed the headwaiter's skills, I began to notice the little secrets that he had at his disposal. One of them was to never choose the pretty or younger females as the focus of his attention. They were the ones that did not need the boost to their confidence that came with his smiles of affection. More astutely it was the less attractive, slightly older women that became the subject of his charm treatment and I could see they loved every second of it, as they convinced themselves that his affection towards them was genuine. But the question I asked of myself was, could his technique with the ladies be imported to our shores? Certainly the thought of some of our nations club stewards slobbering all over their Lady Captain as she comes in for her toasted tea cake, did conjure up visions of knee being firmly dispatched to groin area, but maybe my lack of confidence in their natural allure is misplaced.

"Blackjack" were now completing their medley by trying to do justice to the profound lyrics of the Russ Abbot's timeless classic "Atmosphere" and as

they did so I asked myself, would the day arrive when we could walk off the 18th green on a summers evening, sit down and a waiter would immediately hand us a menu and enquire whether we requested any drinks. Would that menu ever include something a little more imaginative than sausage, egg and chips? Would the salad garnish that comes with the breaded plaice ever differ from lettuce, tomato and cucumber? Would the teatime gateaux selection ever extend beyond fruitcake and scones? I have seen it done in Japan, on the Continent of Europe and in the States, in fact in these places such service is the norm but in this country, I fear it has passed us by. Of course I realise that such advanced catering methods would be of little value in some of the cheaper traditional members clubs that we have dotted about this land of ours. In fact I would even venture to say, a great deal of their charm lies in their antiquated ways. But could it not happen in some of the more select clubs, the more progressively thinking establishments, those proprietary owned places that are looking to provide that little bit extra that will set them apart from the masses. Could it happen here, or is it just I and the rest of the World, that have missed the point entirely.

Sandy McDivot: Head Greenkeeper, Sludgecombe Pay and Play.