

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

The Pursuit of Luxury: Firenze Number Nine Urban Wellness Hotel

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Firenze NumberNine is hot

By **Lilian M. Raji**

Luxury means many things to different people. For some, it means price, for others it means time, and for yet another few, it means experience.

To achieve the bottom line for their companies, chief marketing officers and marketing directors at luxury companies are tasked with discovering how to interpret these multiple definitions into a strategy that drives business. This monthly column, *The Pursuit of Luxury*, will examine just how they do this.

Firenze Number Nine Urban Wellness Hotel

Florence, Italy

I arrived in Florence after what one could consider a whirlwind tour of southern Italy. From Rome to Naples to a self-chauffeuired drive with stops throughout the Amalfi Coast Pompeii, Ravello, Amalfi, Praiano, Sorrento and the glorious auto-free day in Capri I was quite ready to indulge in the promises of the *hammam* at my next hotel stop, Firenze Number Nine Urban Wellness Hotel.

Somewhere between my decadent seven-course sunset dinner at Rome's Hotel Splendide Royal's Mirabelle Restaurant and my midnight tour of both the Trevi Fountain and Spanish Steps, I discovered a credit card was missing. With no alarming new charges on my online statement save for the alarming amount of shopping I had done on Via Condotti I cancelled the card and thought nothing more of it.

That is, until I received an urgent "please call us" email from Firenze Number Nine while enjoying yet another decadent meal, this time at L'Antica Cartiera, the restaurant of my hotel *du jour*, or rather, *de la nuit*, or even more appropriate, *della notte*, Ravello Art Hotel Marmorata.

"We had a problem with your card," I was promptly advised upon calling.

"Yes. It went missing and has since been cancelled. I'd planned on giving you a new card on my arrival in a few days."

"We need the new card now."

I was a bit annoyed. After the harrowing drive from Pompeii to Ravello on the notorious *Costiera Amalfitana*, I

wanted nothing more than to sit on Hotel Marmorata's cliff-side terrace and stare at the glistening blue sea while enjoying a shot of the area's signature Limoncello. Instead, I needed to make sure I had a place to stay when I arrived in Florence in a few days.

I introduce Firenze Number Nine with this minor annoyance because, unbeknownst to me at the time, this minor annoyance would serve as reason I have chosen Elisa Tani, director of marketing and communications at Firenze Number Nine, as my first interview subject for my inaugural article. And what better way to begin discussing the Pursuit of Luxury than to disclose my own pursuit of it this summer.

The reason Firenze Number Nine was so adamant about having my current credit card information before my arrival was because they wanted to ensure I had the easiest possible check-in I have ever encountered in my entire globetrotting life.

I arrived at the hotel after a very brief five-minute taxi ride from the Santa Maria Novella train station and gave my name to the first person I met who, coincidentally, was standing right at the entry door. She immediately walked to a table, picked up a key card and said, right this way, let me walk you to your room.

"But Signora Raji, *per favore*, leave your bags there."

Of course, this was not an unusual request. What was unusual was that I did not see anyone that looked like would attend to my bags. And this also became a charm of Firenze Number Nine things just seemed to magically happen, by perhaps some invisible elves, who just made things happen while insisting you not wonder *how* it happens.

I will not bore you with further stories of my stay except to point out yet another surprise when I arrived in my room: a welcome letter from the hotel manager offering me free rein of the mini bar.

Anything you want is yours, the note promised. Charge only comes if you want us to replace anything you have already consumed. *Prego* indeed.

So here is my conversation with Firenze Number Nine's Ms. Tani:

Tell us a little bit about the history of Firenze Number Nine. What is its origin?

Firenze Number Nine was opened in 2012 inside an antique noble palace of 17th century. Led by an ambitious project, the renovation works transformed the old building in a contemporary "house," maintaining the beautiful decorations of the Renaissance: the frescoes on the first floor, the stairs, and the structure of the antique courtyard inside the restaurant/breakfast room that now has a beautiful skylight.

Number Nine comes from the civic number of the street where the hotel is located and is connected with the symbolic meaning of universal love, harmony, empathy positive concepts that we like to see in our hotel.

Your check-in process was the easiest I've ever encountered, and mind you, hotels are a second home for me. How did you come up with the concept of not having a traditional check-in desk and check-in process?

Firenze Number Nine is different by choice from the other hotels and the check-in process is one of the aspects that make us different.

From the beginning it was designed as a "home."

Our guests find at Number Nine their home away from home. For this reason, we didn't want any kind of obstacles between them and our staff. This is why every guest is welcomed in our hall/library. We invite them to sit down on our comfortable sofas and start the check in process in a very relaxing and friendly way.

And also your mini-bar. I think I've stayed at perhaps only one or two other hotels that gave free rein of the mini bar. Why have you offered this amenity when so many other hotels choose to make this yet another way to make money from guests?

This is another aspect that makes us different.

Since the opening of the hotel the free minibar is a special gift we offer our guests and they appreciate it a lot. We decided to be more flexible and less profit-oriented as the happiness and satisfaction of our guests is the main profit we can strive for. It is a little effort we decide to make, but it rewards us in terms of reputation and reservations.

I also loved how your front desk receptionist didn't try to bombard me with information on Florence as soon as I walked through the door. Such information is helpful, to be sure, but when I arrive at a hotel, it's usually after dealing with airport travel and taxis and a number of other nuisances. Your receptionist instead encouraged me to come

with airport travel and taxis and a number of other nuances. Your receptionist instead encouraged me to come back to her once I was settled in. What prompted you to do away with this hotel ritual?

Laura is our guest relation manager. She takes care of our guests from the time they make the reservation to their departure, personalizing their stay as much as possible.

She is helped by a team of guest-relation assistants whose work is to help and assist the guests in designing their experience in Florence without being too pressing or invasive. The warm and relaxed hospitality make our guests feel at ease from the arrival in hotel.

How do you behave if you have guests at home? It is all about empathy. If the guest is tired we prefer to make a short check-in/presentation and let them be free to come back later, whenever they want.

Tell us a little about the design concept for each room.

The restored 17th century palazzo is adorned with local art and a serene color palette. Our 45 rooms and suites are decorated with delicate nuances, exquisite frescoes and white marble bathrooms.

The hotel's design is modeled on the concept of home, made of warm and comfortable spaces.

Brilliantly spacious for a city hotel, the essential designed guest rooms are enhanced by the light and airy decor that's fresh with a touch of funk.

Number Nine refers to the bedrooms as concept rooms, each one different from the other with different features and services to suit the guests' needs.



Tight squeeze?

Ultimately, how do you want guests to feel when they leave your hotel? Of course, you want them to come back, but what reasons do you want them to have to come back?

We want that they have a special memory of Firenze Number Nine, as it was their home in Florence. Not just a hotel, but a peaceful place made of enthusiastic and friendly people.

For our readers who are looking for a marketing takeaway from this article, what can you tell us about how you attract guests to your hotel?

Simplicity and uniqueness are the key of the success.

People want to experience something unique and special, but feel comfortable at the same time.

Firenze Number Nine is the ideal combination of these two keys as it offers an exclusive wellness experience in Florence in a delicate and relaxing way.

Our focus on wellness is entirely personal. We understand that our guests are away from their routine, and we are on hand to help them feel your best throughout your stay.

While we have a full European-style breakfast, we also provide a wide selection of organic, healthful products, as well as offerings for dietary restrictions such as gluten-free and vegan items.

Exercise routines don't miss a beat.

With a Klab Fitness center on property, our guests can take advantage of dozens of classes throughout the week, from spinning to dance to yoga and pilates. The fitness center is equipped with aerobic and strength-conditioning apparatus.

After a day of explorations, guests can slow down in our intimate spa and steam room. We use all natural products in our therapies, ranging from massages and manicures to facials and personalized treatments at Arya Beauty & Comfort Zone, our new Day SPA.

The wellness experience people can enjoy at Number Nine is what makes us different and attract people.

Please complete this sentence: The pursuit of luxury is

Uniqueness and harmony in everything.



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