

# HOLIDAY (AND MARKETING) HAVEN

Kimberly Davis of Sarsaparilla Marketing jetted off to Sicily. In addition to recharging her batteries she returned with useful tips

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**N**ow, it’s not often that a hotel impresses me, but there’s a darn good reason why the Hotel Imperiale in Taormina, Sicily has been growing 30% each year, despite the recession.

It’s not just the infinity pool, stunning views, helpful staff, and delicious food. There are three things make Hotel Imperiale special and successful:

**Identity** – It’s a five-star luxury hotel that offers a five-star service, at a five-star price. While all its competitors have reduced prices, Hotel Imperiale’s have gone up. The team knows who they are, who their customers are, and are happy to focus on being the best in that niche.

**Doing thankless things** – Successful businesses go that extra mile to do things that most people never even notice. But these things are what make a good experience great.

For example, when I first walked in, the staff knew who I was and welcomed me by name (and it wasn’t from *The Apprentice*, they did their homework). I was welcomed by name wherever I went, which made me feel cherished as a customer.

**Strong USP and brand** – Hotel Imperiale is the “first and only” hotel to incorporate local materials, symbols, and colours throughout the property. They use volcanic rock from nearby Mount Etna in all the flooring, baths and walls, have tiling with Sicilian patterns in the bathroom and rooms are stunning green and orange. It gives the hotel charm and character you don’t get elsewhere.

When I booked this trip, all I wanted was a clear blue sea and lovely food. That’s it. Instead, I had one of the most amazing trips of my life. ▶

Before leaving, I contacted the Italian Tourist Board for brochures. But I received nothing that gave me any idea of what it could offer me. Even at the hotel, all I was given was a leaflet with two-sentence blurbs about excursions.

I booked the Aeolian Islands and the sunset trip to Etna, with low expectations. Next thing I knew, I was 12,000 metres up on top of an active volcano, walking along craters, watching steam pour out behind me while the sun set below me. I walked on black sand beaches, and so much more.

Needless to say, the tourism board could really use a serious marketing overhaul. (I'll be sending them a copy of this article!)

As entrepreneurs, we are often unable to switch off, but it's vital that we do. You have to get out of your normal environment and completely detach.

I didn't think I could ignore my phone and emails, but I did. At first it was scary, but by the end, I felt liberated. Everything will be okay when you return. In fact, it will be better, as you'll be full of life and focused.

So, when you take that break, may I recommend the Hotel Imperiale? Be sure to tell them I sent you and send me your photos and thoughts. Ciao! ■



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