

Secret Shops Help Entertainment Destination

Entertainment and experiential destinations must keep many aspects of "visitor experience" in tip-top shape to remain competitive. The Attractions General Manager for ABC Farms spoke to us about how an Agritourism destination uses mystery shops to train and reward a large staff. The result is excellent visitor experiences and fired-up employees.

Presented by Mystery Shopper Services

ABC Farms is the largest Agritourism destination in America with a half-million visitors annually coming to enjoy dairy, pig, and craft adventures. Created by a veterinarian and dairy farmer in 2002, ABC Farms began as a fun and educational response to misinformation spread by anti-farming groups.

ABC Farms is committed to educating the public about modern farming efforts as well as to protecting the environment, caring for animals, and ensuring the highest quality products possible. The Creator wanted a venue where people could see the truth about farming and experience first-hand the workings of a successful farm.

How does mystery shopping tie into the Fair Oaks Farm business model and training?

Our goal is to find a way into the heart of every visitor. Mystery Shopping is a great bad experience prevention tool. I want to prevent bad experiences for our guests. We have a large staff made up of guides, drivers, receptionists, and more. The training for our employees is extensive. The sharing of shop information and how we incorporate mystery shopping into operations is part of our new hire orientation. It helps them understand our standards and how we evaluate employees. Service is number one for us, which is why we mystery shop our staff. We emphasize 100 percent customer satisfaction. Everything we do is tied to service, from greetings and products to cleanliness and safety.

How do employees perceive mystery shops?

We make the shops a positive thing. It's a chance to get recognized. We build the shops up to shine. If noted for exceptional service in a shop report, employees get a range of accolades from a gold star or "employee of action" form to free ice cream or a day off. It's kind of a fun joke among the team because while it may sound simple, people love to be treated to something extra.

How have you tailored mystery shops to achieve your objectives?

We use about seventy questions and shop each area - attraction, restaurant, coffee shop, ice cream shop, gift shop - once a month. You must teach what you want. It begins with telling, then showing and measuring. I can say over and over to be nice, but until I break it down and show what that means through specifics, it won't stick. Without the mystery shop data, we have no effective way to measure our visitor's experience.

How do you use the online dashboard resource?

The Mystery Shopper Services dashboard enables real-time monitoring for each area we evaluate. It's a powerful tool to measure how we are doing at a glance. I can see averages and set goals. If I notice something that is not going so great, I can call a meeting for that group to have a pep talk and point out improvement areas.