

# THE PERFECT GUEST

BY LYNN FERRARI

**W**hen an invitation to a weekend in the country means a cozy lodge, steaks on the barbecue, and walks in the woods in your most comfortable Bean boots, you can count on a relaxed, intimate few days. You most likely will unpack your own suitcase, make your own bed, and tear up a little lettuce for the salad as you talk with your hosts in the kitchen.

When that invitation mentions packing your tennis whites and dressing for dinner, however, odds are the kitchen is one room you'll never see. That room belongs to Cook. It is her domain, and a houseguest does not presume to whisk in to fix a cup of tea or forage for a sandwich, unless invited to do so by his host. It is lovely to be cared for by professional household help, and it is lovelier still when guests are comfortable in their understanding of what services will be provided and what form to follow.

Naturally, it is not good form to be haughty or high-handed. The same rules of civility that you practice with acquaintances and business associates apply to someone else's servants. It is equally bad form to be jocular, chatty or personal, all of which can embarrass a servant whose job it is to carry out his responsibilities with efficiency and dignity. Human nature proves that the more courtesy you apply to those whose job it is to see to your comfort, the more comfort you will experience.

If the butler opens the door and your host is not present to receive you, say, "Good afternoon, we're the Covingtons." Don't shake hands or comment on the marble foyer, and don't thrust your hat or coats into his arms until he asks you for them, or tell him your luggage is in the trunk.

Generally, your host or hostess will introduce employees to you, saying, "George, this is Mrs. Truesdale, our housekeeper. Mrs. Truesdale, will you take Mr. Covington's bag to his room, please?" Again, during the introduction, your most appropriate response is a warm smile and a "hello," not a handshake or a chat. Should you later require something of Mrs. Truesdale, or if a maid or a valet has been assigned to assist you, including their name and a please in your request is simply common courtesy.

In a household with a large staff, expect your bags to be unpacked for you. If a maid or valet offers to press a suit or a dress that might have become wrinkled, accept the offer, and later give her or him a gratuity, not at the time of the offer. You are expected to give a gratuity to anyone who has given you a personal service, usually \$2 or \$3 after a one-



night visit, but \$5 or more after a weekend or longer is appropriate. It is not necessary to give a gratuity to the cook, the butler, or the chauffeur, unless they have provided a service especially for you. Opening the door, preparing dinner, refilling your wine glass or driving you and your hosts to the theater are not considered personal services. The host compensates his staff for any extra work after a large house party.

Gratuities are given to the maid or valet when you are getting ready to leave — and they finish packing your bag, if they do so. If you are not there at that time, and do not see them, put the money in an unsealed envelope bearing his or her name and ask your host to deliver it for you. It is good form to include a note expressing thanks.

If a household is not blessed with a large staff, remember that those who are employed already have quite a bit to do. Don't overburden them with extensive personal requests.

**Q.** We're leaving on an extended cruise next month and need to know how to allocate tips to the ship's staff. Can you give us a guideline?

**A.** Certainly. Since you indicate a long trip, plan to tip weekly. Friday evenings are the customary time to extend your thanks and your gratuities. First class travelers generally tip the cabin steward \$2 per day. Should you have both a steward and a stewardess, that amount is divided between them. The dining room steward receives \$10 per week, and the headwaiter \$5, while your waitress receives \$2 per day.

Unlike a private restaurant where you do not tip a busboy, you do include him in your largesse on a ship, usually an amount representing a dollar a day. The wine steward receives approximately 15 percent of the wine bill at the end of the week if you order wine nightly, or at the time he performs his service, if you order only an occasional bottle of wine. Lounge and bar stewards are tipped 15 percent each time you frequent the lounge or bar.

The chief deck steward receives between \$5 and \$10 per week, depending on how often you avail yourself of his services, and his assistant \$2 per week. The "boots" would appreciate \$2 for keeping your shoes shined every day, and cabin boys are tipped at the time they render assistance, anywhere from 50 cents to no more than a dollar, depending on the service.

Plan to allow approximately 15 percent of your fare for tipping. Do check with your travel agent before you sail — some cruise lines include an amount for gratuities in the fare. In this case, you only give an additional tip to someone who has been particularly helpful to you.

Never tip the ship's officers, including the chief steward, the purser, the captain, the cruise director, or any of the recreational staff, such as a craft director, exercise instructor, or lifeguard.

**Q.** My executive director is practically inaccessible and I would like to have a block of uninterrupted time with him to share some new ideas. Is it appropriate for me to invite him to lunch so we can have an uninterrupted discussion?

**A.** Alas, no, nor to breakfast, nor to dinner. Not ever. You can't invite him to a social event, either, unless he has invited you and your husband or wife or companion first. Should he ever invite you to a dinner party, by the way, you are expected to reciprocate, but only on a social basis. It simply is not correct to ever invite a business "superior" to a business lunch.

Your best bet is to draft a succinct memo outlining your concepts with a cover note attached: "Jim," or "Mr. Warrington Smythe," — "I have given a lot of thought to our investment opportunities in China as you discussed them during last week's meeting. Attached are some of the possibilities for our division. I would be happy to fill in the details with you when you have the time."

This gives him the chance to review your concepts at his convenience and arrange an appointment with you, which is more appropriate than your requesting an appointment with him.

*More questions? Please write Etiquette for Excellence, P.O. Box 2903, West Palm Beach, FL 33402. ■*