

# Being chief of a Club Med village



By Cari Coetzee

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Brendan van Zyl has cultivated his hospitality skills at Club Med resorts across the world and recently became the first South African Chief of Village at a Club Med resort, ever! We asked him to share his journey with us...



Brendan van Zyl

## ***Tell us about your journey with Club Med***

**Brendan van Zyl:** It's been quite a journey (and climb up the ladder) so a list may be best:

- October 2009, started in Club Med Cherating Beach (in Malaysia) as a pool lifeguard.
- October 2010, Club Med Bintan Island (in Indonesia) as golf supervisor
- October 2011, Club Med Phuket (in Thailand) as sport manager
- October 2012, Club Med Cherating Beach as events manager
- April 2013, Club Med Palmiye (in Turkey) as sports and events manager
- October 2013, Club Med Bintan Island as leisure services manager (managing sports, events, childcare, spa and excursion departments)
- August 2014, Club Med Turquoise (in Turks and Caicos - the Caribbean) as leisure services manager
- May 2015, Club Med Kemer (in Turkey) as leisure services managers

- November 2015, Club Med Val Thorens Sensations (ski resort in France) as leisure services manager
- May 2016, Club Med Cancun (in Mexico) as assistant Chef de Village (assistant general manager)
- September 2016, promoted to general manager aka Chef de Village.

## **■ What is a Chief of Village?**

**Van Zyl:** Chief of village (CDV) which in French is *Chef de Village*, is otherwise known as the general manager of a Club Med resort. He or she is the driver of the resort operations in managing both front and back of house. The position is unique and can be compared to no other. The position entails hands-on management with a human touch of client relations. We manage an international team of up to 30 different nationalities and welcome clients from all over the world. We are on the front line day and night to ensure our clients are receiving nothing less than an excellent stay in one of our 68 resorts worldwide.

## **■ And how did you become one?**

**Van Zyl:** We have a stringent development process to become *Chef de Village*. I was identified early in my career as a potential general manager. Thereafter your career is managed from the Paris office. They assign you to villages (which is the Club Med term for "resorts") where you can be challenged and grow as a person and as a manager. We then have yearly assessments in France or Morocco, and once you tick all of the right boxes you will be nominated for the position of CDV. If the votes go your way, you will be promoted and will take a post in a resort after a four-week training period based in Paris at our head office.

## **■ What does it mean to you to be the first South African to become a CDV?**

**Van Zyl:** It is humbling and a great honour for me to be the first South African in Club Meds' 67 year history. Now more

than ever, I am determined to be successful and to provide opportunities for fellow South Africans to take on this adventure.

### ■ ***What does the day-to-day of a Club Med CDV look like?***

**Van Zyl:** I start in the morning at around 8am by welcoming guests to the restaurant for breakfast, and then at around 10am have a brief managers meeting with my team. 10:30am I will do a village walk-around to check all activities and my team, and stop to have a friendly word with the clients. I normally make a quick stop at the office at around 11.30am, and at 12pm I am at the restaurant again welcoming guests for lunch and going table to table to get feedback from the guests.



Brendan at Club Med in Cancun, 2016

The afternoon starts with meetings and office work, followed by another tour of the village to see my team and guests. I try to make time at 5pm for some sports whether it is squash, tennis, swimming or a run. At 6.30pm I am welcoming guests to dinner and at 8.30pm I am on the microphone presenting the evening programme in English and French. I am heavily involved in the evening shows and events (which is “the usual” at all Club Med resorts) - this is something I take great pleasure in. I will then stay at the bar to socialise with the guests until midnight and thereafter I finish the day in the office replying to emails. This happens six times per week.

### ■ ***Where will you be stationed and what do you look forward to the most?***

**Van Zyl:** My first assignment as CDV started in December 2016 on the beautiful island of Ishigaki at Club Med Kabira in Japan. I will be based here for one year, and thereafter I will be assigned to another one of Club Med's resorts worldwide.

It is an exciting time for Club Med, and I am proud to be a part of this new transition. I am excited to play a big part in the new vision and strategies of the brand. I am strongly invested in growing the talent and the future managers and CDV's of Club Med, with a personal goal of seeing more South African managers. I am excited to imprint my mark as a South African and prove my potential both as a manager and a driver of the company's goals. Lastly, I am excited to pass down the passion and love I have for my job to my teams, which I will work with in a hope to motivate them to be better in their career paths.

### ■ ***What advice would you give other South Africans who might want to become CDV?***

**Van Zyl:** Be very open minded and willing to learn. Take on challenges, make the people you work with love you and if you can learn French, do it - it is really important. Most importantly, be adaptive and immerse yourself in different cultures whilst keeping your South African culture at the forefront.

Club Med Southern Africa is actually on the lookout for more South African GOs (Gentils Organisateurs/Gracious Organisers) to join the Club Med team at resorts around the world, so now is the perfect time for anyone who is interested in setting out on a journey on a global playground with the brand. Who knows, you could become the next South African

CDV...

## ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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