



The trendy Townhouse Galleria Hotel in Milan Italy

Citizen of the World

By Inna DeSilva



Thorsten Buehrmann presenting the Seven Star and Stripes Award to Hotel Forte in Sardinia, Italy

Being a fussy traveler, I love reading up on the latest luxury destinations. When I was younger and more adventuresome, I would go with a *Frommer's* or a *Fodor's* guide and pick a three star hotel. Now that we are all accustomed to certain creature comforts, like a good thread count, CD Players and 24 hour room service, how do we pick the next level of luxury when traveling abroad?

Meet “Seven Stars and Seven Stripes”: the new rating system – from five to seven stars – for hotels, restaurants and all things connected to travel. I first heard of it from a knowledgeable European friend. Reading its ravishing reviews made me want to hop on a plane and go somewhere, anywhere where people can pamper me and soothe my tired New York soul.

How about a sand dune safari? Snorkeling in Africa with 45 foot long exotic sea creatures? The best hotel to stay in while in Warsaw? And most important, would you like a Bentley or a Rolls Royce to pick you up from the airport?

Now meet Thorsten Buehrmann, the thirty-four year old wunderkind behind the idea of finally having a global system for measuring excellence in travel. He is based out of Northern Germany and pops in and out of the Hamptons periodically. I emailed him several times and finally got a

chance to speak to him on the phone very early one morning.

Although he grew up in Germany and served several years as an officer in the German Navy, he considers himself a world traveler and a citizen of the world. Now that I know that he was a navy officer, the name “Seven Stars and Seven Stripes” makes complete sense. For ten minutes I tried to get the man to tell me one bad travel story; being a gentleman, he refused to divulge. The only thing he shared with me excitedly was that Europe finally has a seven star hotel, the Town House Galleria hotel smack in the middle of Milan. Fashionistas take note!!

He loves his job; well, who wouldn't love traveling to the best hotels in the world? He sees his work more as a mission. He and a team do extensive reviewing in-house and then meet with directors of each property to tell them their thoughts and experiences. This helps the hotels to go even further in service and pursuit of excellence.

Thorsten seems to feel personally attached to every property he has reviewed. He tells me that many staff members still write to him, and some of the managers have become great friends with him.

Whenever he flies in to present an award to a property, it becomes a local celebration. In Andalucia, the local Prime Minister showed up bringing half of the local press corps. Watching the photos of different award presentations, the one thing that strikes me is how proud everyone seems to be! Apparently an award from “Seven Stars and Seven Stripes” is better than a visit to a spa. It's the ultimate boost for people who are dedicated to making sure that we sleep well at night while under their roof. As I bid Thorsten good night, he manages breathlessly to invite me to Budapest where he will be presenting another coveted award on June 14. Sounds like a party we all would like to attend.