

TRAVELAGE WEST



MINDY PODER Executive Editor

The Top Hotel Trends for 2019

Nov 18, 2018



One of the top hotel trends for 2019 has to do with how hotels are improving digital communication with guests *Credit: 2018 Getty Images*

The top hotel trends for 2019 are “more evolutionary than revolutionary,” according to Mike Heflin, senior vice president of the Hotel Division for Travel Leaders Group (TLG).

Although some of the year’s hot trends might not sound brand-new, what is palpable is a stronger focus on precision to deliver hyper-personalized hotel stays. The “T” word — technology — is thrown around less clumsily; there’s better knowledge of how tech can and will be used to better the hotel experience. As a result, there’s also a better understanding of how travel advisors can remain integral to the booking process. Finally, hotel brands are

looking inward and sharpening their brand identities to better align with clients and lure millennials away from Airbnb.

Future Perfect

“Looking forward, the key factor influencing guest satisfaction, brand preference and customer lifetime value will be how successfully hotel management integrates new technologies virtually and in real life to improve the physical product and service delivery that enhances perceived value,” reads Phocuswright’s latest analysis on hotels. (Note: TravelAge West and Phocuswright are both part of Northstar Travel Group.)

Titled *It’s All About the Experience: How Will Technology Improve the Hotel Stay?*, the October 2018 report identifies three technologies that hotels must integrate to provide a seamless guest experience: sensors that signal smart devices to service client needs; artificial intelligence that can streamline booking and help staff anticipate guest needs; and authentication technology that can integrate personally contracted services, such as a traveler’s Netflix or Facebook account, into the hotel experience.

According to the report, “by allowing guests to be instantly onboarded to the hotel’s network and by authorizing seamless access to their digital content, previously unimagined degrees of personalization are possible, with customized experiences tailored to an individual’s true needs, based on their behaviors and fulfilled by the services that support their lives beyond travel.”

The team at Forbes Travel Guide (FTG) is closely watching how hotels maximize technology, too.

“FTG is introducing a digital communications evaluation as part of its hotel inspection process in 2019,” said Amanda Frasier, executive vice president of ratings for FTG. “Alternative communication options versus traditional phone calls have been rapidly on the rise, and we will begin capturing our own data on how hotels use and embrace technology to enhance the guest experience.”

Filling in the Gaps

As properties work toward improving and uniting their back-end technology — which includes strengthening loyalty programs and direct-booking channels — there’s a need for advisors to redouble their efforts and communicate the added value and bonus perks they can bring to the booking process.

“Things such as dietary requirements, customized check-in/check-out times and special in-room requests are becoming more important, especially with frequent travelers who have high expectations,” said Ignacio Maza, executive vice president for Signature Travel Network. “Travel sellers need to build close working relationships with their hotel partners to ensure special requests are addressed and solved before the client arrives on property.”

Brand Magic

To deliver on personalization and to respond to the influx of lifestyle hotels, most brands are inspired to communicate their brand differences more strongly.

“Hotels continue to offer ways to capture the guest’s loyalty to their brand, and we are seeing more mergers, acquisitions and rebranding than ever before,” FTG’s Frasier said.

According to TLG’s Heflin, hotels are more in tune with how to create consistent touchpoints across each of their brands “so they come to actually mean something to consumers and to travel advisors who want to align the right type customer to the right property.”

“Every hotel company has somewhere between 15 to 35 brands, and those brands probably started with a concept in mind on why they had to be different than the other 34 brands that existed,” he said. “But hotel companies are starting to take seriously that a brand is supposed to be a consumer promise, representative of a unique definition.”

For lifestyle companies, opening a hotel can take branding to the next level.

“The hotel really allows us to showcase the brand in a way that we were unable to before,” said Daniel Caudill, creative director of luxury goods brand Shinola, which will open its first hotel in Detroit in December. “The signature Shinola blue will be found throughout the property, as well as many signature Shinola products, including iconic power-supply cords, turntables and Bluetooth speakers. In addition, we are creating exclusive products for the hotel.”

Perhaps in response to the consumer embrace of Airbnb and lifestyle hotels, more properties are layering on opportunities for destination immersion.

“The William Vale hotel in Brooklyn, N.Y., is taking on Airbnb on a holistic level,” said Aytan Litwin, founder and CEO of White Space, a hospitality furniture manufacturer. “It’s as if the place was built to poke a finger in Airbnb’s eye. Instead of featuring just a single space designed to invite locals through the doors and cultivate a sense of hipness, William Vale has several: an insanely popular rooftop club on the main tower, a public park on top of one of the smaller surrounding towers, cool restaurants at every price point and gallery spaces with rotating exhibitions.”

Hotels such as William Vale are catering to millennials, the fastest growing demographic of U.S. travelers.

“This means companies are updating their product with vibrant lobbies, farm-to-table menus, redesigned rooms and public spaces and faster internet, but also creating new brands to target them, such as Hotel Jen by Shangri-La Hotels, Moxy Hotels by Marriott and Jo&Joe by Accor,” Signature’s Maza said.

Millennials are also more prone to extend business trips with leisure time, leading to the trend of lobbies doubling as co-working spaces in places such as the renovated Harbor Court San Francisco and the new Kimpton La Peer Hotel in Los Angeles.

“The trend started with accidental acts of alchemy; brands such as Ace Hotels created open, comfortable and connected lobbies that encouraged socializing and collaboration,” Litwin said. “Now, co-working spaces are cropping up in hotels across the globe, sometimes under the auspices of a cleverly named sub-brand, which broadens the appeal beyond staying guests.”

Link to article: <https://www.travelagewest.com/Industry-Insight/Business-Features/The-Top-Hotel-Trends-for-2019>