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Hotel Trends 2019: What You Need to Know

by [Cheryl Rosen](#) (/tmrsearchresults?st=1&sr=CherylRosen) / September 24, 2018



Expect to see technology and immersive experience as big hotel trends next year. Photo: Shutterstock

As 2018 enters its last quarter, Travel Market Report sat down with hospitality consultant and Adjunct Professor at the NYU Jonathan M. Tisch Center for Hospitality Bjorn Hanson, to talk about hotel trends for 2019. And while we were at it, we asked some other hoteliers for their thoughts, as well.

Here's what Hanson says we'll be seeing in 2019:

1. Urban hotels charging resort fees

Last year was "a test year" for resort fees, Hanson said — and travelers (and the travel agents who book them) apparently failed the test. So, expect to see more hotels in cities, as well as resort destinations, tacking fees onto the final bill

2. More enforcement of cancellation fees

The big year for cancellation fees was 2016, when most hotels went to two days out, but many still leave enforcement up to the individual property. "I think enforcement will slowly increase, though there are few more offensive acts to a guest than saying, 'Sorry, we don't care about your personal life or your work schedule.'"

3. Lower guest acquisition costs through direct booking

After years of losing bookings to online travel agencies (OTAs), in 2017 hotels finally took back a couple of points. Expect to see more direct

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marketing, bonuses and member rates for travelers who book through hotel websites. "It's about cost and about who owns the guest." Travel agents, too, will see initiatives designed to encourage direct booking.

4. Longer booking windows

Soaring occupancy rates through 2019 will make it necessary to book early and be flexible. While in some cities rate increases have not gotten good traction, others, notably New York, have seen steady rate growth as "availability has been a challenge and will become even more of an issue."

5. Interesting local food and beverage

Celebrity chefs are out as hotels stop competing with fine dining restaurants and turn instead to good, relatively simple, wholesome and local food service. Upscale and upper upscale hotels are asking what interesting things they can do "with this space in this neighborhood, and we are seeing lots of clever things," Hanson said — not the same menu in 500 hotels, but genuine, interesting, local and tasty offerings.

6. Better technology

There will be more and faster internet access, used in new ways. "Guests' appetite for high-speed internet is very hard to satisfy," and very costly for hotels, Hanson said. Still, "hotels have realized it is such a dissatisfier, that they are upgrading"— but they are trying to add some value to their expenditure by letting guests easily connect their personal devices to TV screens and hotel services.

7. Promoting social media and Instagram

There's nothing like a high rating on online sites and lots of Instagram postings for effective (and free) advertising. Hotels are creating little Instagrammable scenes around the property to encourage photos.

8. Simple, inclusive, local and special decoration

"There must be a secret meeting room where hotel designers go to agree on new hotel designs. I'd say more than 75 percent of hotels where I am involved have the same discussion," Hanson said. No longer are all rooms the same; whether it's art or furniture or even the configuration, the trend is for guests to feel they are staying in a customized room. Simple used to mean homey, but now it's very comfortable, in shades of gray and black and tan, so the person stands out. The room should play a supporting role.

Feedback from other experts

Travel Market Report also has seen a trend toward more all-inclusive properties; Hyatt's foray into the all-inclusive market was followed this month by Hilton, and Hard Rock Hotels of Mexico and the Dominican Republic have "ditched resort credit to bring guests a vacation experience that is truly all-inclusive," including deeply discounted experiences like golf, spa treatments, tours and excursions, effective Jan. 6, 2019.

At Solmar Hotels & Resorts, VP of Operations Ricardo Orozco suggested that, in 2019, "luxury travelers will rely more on travel agents; this is a trend that we're already experiencing."

Mario Cruz, concept manager for Original Group, said: "Just as 2018 was the year of multigenerational travel, 2019 will be about couples and adults. More hotels are catering to adults in kid-free environments, either by opening adults-only properties or adults-only sections within one property."

Travel professional Heather Howard DiPietro at TravelSalesGroup LLC agreed that guests are looking for "Insta-worthy experiences" and hotels are delivering. In Antigua, for example, properties are "now including extras like Galley Bay, where you can take a hobie out to explore a shipwreck; or Blue Waters, where they offer a free trip out to the reef for snorkeling; or Curtain Bluff, where they include waterskiing and motorized water sports."

Chris Hornick, Dream Vacations Franchise owner and vacation specialist in Pleasant Hill, Pennsylvania, agreed that the trend is toward the unique. "Something I am seeing across the board, including domestic hotel stays, is that clients and travelers want that local culturally immersive experience nowadays. Everyone has 'been there, done that' with the major attractions

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and sightseeing destinations; people want that true 'what the locals do and go' experience. Smaller boutique hotels and even bed-and-breakfasts have become more popular for clients who want that small town, local charm and experience," he said.

And Dawn Gillis, World Travel Holdings product manager, land & car, reports: "There's a big focus on dining options/restaurant variety, food quality and diversity, cooking classes and demonstrations, foodie events and fresh organic produce from on-site gardens and greenhouses. Karisma Resorts, for example, are known as the gourmet all-inclusive, and they really cater to foodies. In Mexico, guests of their resort the El Dorado Royale can join the audience at the Fuentes Culinary Theatre, a Food Network-style demonstration kitchen. Karisma Resorts also has partnerships with Jackson Family Wines and Canadian Beef, and hosts weekly events featuring their products. Excellence Resorts also has a focus on diverse dining, with multiple Caribbean and Mexico locations that offer 10 international restaurants and up to 16 bars."

The Hotel El Ganzo in Los Cabos, meanwhile, is offering "tours that take guests to authentic and not commercial spots, where they can interact with the grower or the local fisherman who has lived in Los Cabos all his life. Experiences that are off-the-beaten-path, so that discovery becomes the whole point of the excursion, the discovery of yourself and the real Baja," said General Manager Ella Messerli.

The Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe now offers in-room massage treatments, in-room caviar and cocktail receptions, and en suite pasta-making classes with the resort's executive chef.

And at Rome Cavalieri, A Waldorf Astoria Resort, the "Made in Italy by You Experience" takes guests into the heart of Rome for a sandal-making workshop. The owners of Le Mastro offer up tips on shoemaking and design, and then the guests create their own pair of Italian leather sandals.

Meetings, too, are looking for the unique and unusual. Beatriz G. De Smith, sales director of the Hilton Puerto Vallarta, said: "Groups are stepping out from traditional setups and layouts to introduce new space distributions and designs. For example, instead of having a U shape or a classroom set-up, clients are looking for a mix of furniture to create different spaces within the same room, and also looking to incorporate healthy choices in coffee breaks."

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