

The Hotel Yearbook 2023
The Uncertainty New Normal



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5 Ways Consumers Will Shape the Future of Hospitality in 2023

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Synopsis

Choice Hotels EMEA CEO Jonathan Mills lays out how the past three years have changed the way people travel and what they expect from hotel brands. The pandemic has made people value travel more and has changed their expectations. Mills suggests that consumer brand expectations for 2023 will have more longevity than those of the past. He lists 5 consumer brand expectations for 2023, including hotels creating a sense of comfort and familiarity for guests, using more eco-friendly materials for amenities, accommodating up on the trend of bleisure travel, providing an authentic local experience for guests, and increasing focus on health and safety measures.

As we know, travel trends change faster than you can say 'hospitality'. But the past three years have fundamentally changed the way people travel and what they expect from hotel brands.

With the pandemic now thankfully behind us, we have come to realise travel should not be taken for granted.

COVID-19 has changed the way we travel for good, and in ways that we could never have foreseen, with travel now widely viewed as a gift to be treasured. With that, I strongly believe consumers' expectations in 2023 will have more longevity than those of years gone by.

But how exactly are consumers shaping the future of hospitality? Here are the top five consumer brand expectations I believe will come to the fore in 2023...

1. HOTEL MEETS HOME

As consumers scramble to make up for all the leisure and business travel they missed in recent years, many are spending lots of time away from home.

Hospitality brands are now recognising that a sense of comfort and familiarity can go a long way in meeting and exceeding those ever-growing expectations.

With this in mind, I wouldn't be surprised to see more and more hotels giving their reception areas and social areas specifically a facelift this year, with homely décor to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

But an authentic 'home away from home' experience often goes beyond just that and also lies in the details. Atmospheric lighting, comfortable bedding, or even real ceramic milk jugs to replace the plastic single-portion milk capsules we know all too well.

These little touches, and many more, could make all the difference when it comes to providing guests with a sense of homely comfort.

2. TIME TO UPSIZE

With consumers now more environmentally conscious than ever, single-use personal items are quickly becoming an unwelcome presence in hotel rooms.

The days of miniature shampoo bottles and disposable slippers are numbered – so hospitality brands must say goodbye to old habits or risk alienating their valued customers.

Re-designing amenities with more eco-friendly materials is nothing revolutionary. But what hoteliers have often overlooked is that many of these items don't need to be individually packaged for each guest.

Wall-mounted shower gel dispensers, for instance, present a great opportunity for hospitality brands to drastically reduce their use of packaging materials and stay ahead of the game in 2023.

3. THE BLEISURE REVOLUTION

We know bleisure, the idea of blending work and leisure travel, has been around for a while, but trend has evolved rapidly over the last few years.

Once the privilege of freelancers and solo entrepreneurs, bleisure travel is now talk of the town among corporate executives – and virtually anyone who has been freed from the confines of office life and embraced remote or hybrid working.

With travel restrictions now largely gone, I expect 2023 to be the year when consumers' bleisure travel expectations leave a permanent mark on the hospitality sector.

Comfortable workspaces, fast and reliable Wi-Fi, and flexible check-in times will become the norm in hotels worldwide.

Meanwhile, those that fail to seize the opportunities of the 2023 bleisure boom may find themselves losing out on a fast-growing and remarkably diverse segment of travellers.

4. A LOCAL TOUCH

Over the last few years, travellers have been on the lookout for ways to immerse themselves in their destination and its culture. I very much expect this trend to continue in 2023.

Consumers are expecting to engage in authentic experiences that allow them to develop a deeper connection with locals. So, the onus is on hospitality brands to 'bring the outside in' and help their guest discover the real side of the destination.

If anyone can provide a truly welcoming atmosphere to guests, it's those who live and work in the local area. By hiring passionate staff from the local area, alongside offering local touches throughout the hotel, valued guests receive a more authentic experience and obtain an in depth insight into everything the destination has to offer.

They'll be on hand to recommend hidden gems to visit, delicious dishes to indulge in, and much more. Whether it's local specialities on the menu, traditional art in the lobby, or even cooking classes, I'm confident travellers will be eager to make their stay as authentic and memorable as possible.

5. HUMANISING HOSPITALITY

When consumers finally returned to hotels in 2022, they were met with a very different hotel experience. Social distancing, contactless check-in processes, and mobile ordering at the bar have become the new normal. Or have they?

With travellers now longing for more human interaction, my view is that this hands-off approach will soon be out of touch with their needs.

Let's face it: it's the warm welcome at the check-in desk, the friendly conversations with hotel staff, or even chatting with fellow guests at breakfast, that make a hotel stay truly memorable. These are the experiences that make consumers feel valued.

And in 2023, hospitality brands should do all within their power to bring back these simple moments and deliver a high-touch, personalised service to guests across all touchpoints.

I firmly believe that as we enter 2023, these elements will continue to remain at the forefront of travellers' minds.

The consumers of 2023 – no matter their age – are making more responsible choices with their travel and aren't afraid to part with brands that don't embrace, welcome, and cater for their ever-changing needs.



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Jonathan Mills is CEO of Choice Hotels EMEA where he oversees the company's continued investments across the EMEA region for franchisees and guests. Based in Amsterdam, Jonathan leads all business and franchising operations for the region, including development, franchise operations, corporate sales, marketing, franchise relations and finance. Globally, Choice Hotels has nearly 7,500 hotels, representing nearly 630,000 rooms, in 46 countries and territories.

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