

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Luxury hospitality preps for new wave of revenge travelers

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*Travelers want to travel and spend more, and expect new services from hospitality properties. Image credit: Simon-Kucher and Partners*

By NORA HOWE

After COVID-related lockdowns and safety restrictions halted travel plans around the world, consumers are yearning to splurge on travel.

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According to **Simon-Kucher & Partners**, with more savings and collected travel miles, 45 percent of consumers are looking to travel more than they had pre-pandemic, implying a new era of "revenge traveling." During a webinar hosted by the International Luxury Hotel Association, leaders in the hospitality sector discussed how properties are preparing for an energized generation of vacationers.

"Alongside that frequency and spend, there have been some changes to traveler needs and behaviors," said Rosalind Hunter, partner at Simon-Kucher & Partners and member of the leisure, travel and transportation practice, London.

"People are looking for more private transportation, private spacious accommodation and mostly looking to travel domestically as there is still uncertainty regarding border regulations," she said. "Many are also not looking to just travel for vacations as the global increase in hybrid working practices means that workcations' are rising.

"Forty-three percent of consumers have shown an interest in staying an extra week after their vacation to work from that location."

Return to travel

Across the board, guests are looking for evidence of safety protocols, and want to be sure staff members are taking the necessary health precautions.

"Everyone, at least from a leisure standpoint, is looking for a sense of normalcy," said Matt Barba, vice president of operations at **Charlestowne Hotels**. "As much as they want to know that hotels and resorts are following the proper protocols and that staff members are actively cleaning high touch point areas, they just want to feel normal."

To reassure guests of these measures, some hotels have shifted cleaning schedules from night to day as to provide visual evidence.



*The Four Seasons app lets guests check in digitally. Image credit: Four Seasons*

"We have become more obvious in our cleaning practices," said John Speers, vice president of operations at [Salamander Hotels and Resorts](#). "Some things that might have previously been done overnight, we're now doing during the day to instill that sense of comfort and awareness.

"Ultimately, our customers are coming back because they are looking for that human engagement they have been missing," he said. "Some are looking for a very private experience, while others are looking to get out and resume life like it was pre-pandemic."

When it comes to digitizing the hospitality experience, Mr. Speers has found that guests are not fully embracing new technological operations.

"When COVID-19 first started, we went full force on digital, thinking everyone was going to embrace it," Mr. Speers said. "What we have found is that, despite having the technology, few things have been truly embraced, with the exception of in-room ordering, the ability to do mobile orders on the beach and communicating via text messaging."

Some properties have utilized new digital capabilities to better empower their guest-engaging staff.

"We've embraced the fully digital check-in experience," said Daniel Tennant, partner and general manager at [Aries Living Hospitality](#). "Our staff should learn, own and understand the full capabilities of the technology to be the most efficient with guests."

The pandemic has also forced the hospitality industry to be more responsive to employee needs, and automated technology has become an important tool in allowing employees to focus on customer experience rather than menial tasks.



*A UV robot used at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills. Image credit: BHCVB*

"Technology can be key in unburdening staff so they do not have to worry about miscellaneous things," said Michael Heflin, chief revenue officer at [StayNTouch](#), a hotel property management software solution.

"In this new environment, where guest's needs are more hypersensitive, the hotel staff needs to be able to deliver exactly what the guest wants," he said. "At the end of the day, whether that guest comes back has nothing to do with how good your management tasks are.

"It has to do with how well you provide hospitality, and that's what we need to be focused on enabling."

## Adopting new technology

While some hospitality groups argue that digitization removes the high-touch aspect of the industry, many have been adopting and experimenting with mobile technology to better serve guests.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts further invested in its mobile application and chat that allow guests to control how they engage with others, limiting face-to-face interaction while maintaining personal service.

The app features booking and managing reservations capabilities, luggage pickup requests, airport transfers, room service and restaurant and spa reservations ([see story](#)).

Even prior to the pandemic, Marriott International harnessed voice technology to provide a more interactive guest experience at properties including St. Regis Hotels.

Guests at select properties in Marriott Hotels, Westin Hotels & Resorts, St. Regis Hotels & Resorts, Aloft Hotels and Autograph Collection Hotels are able to use Alexa's voice technology to access services and amenities ([see story](#)).

"For anyone who is exploring new ways of operating, just keep an open mind," Aries Living Hospitality's Mr. Tennant said. "The better the staff are trained on new technology, the more empowered they are to service the guests."

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