

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Conversational service, personalized travel experiences in demand

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Travelers are interested in in-room afternoon tea or happy hour delivered directly to their room. Image credit: InterContinental Hotels Group

By KATIE TAMOLA

As many consumers feel comfortable returning to travel, high-quality service is a must, according to new research.

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A new survey from InterContinental Hotels Group's Voco Hotels finds that nine in 10 respondents rank great service as most important to them when staying at a hotel. Travelers are seeking hotels with staff who make them feel comfortable, can easily communicate in a friendly manner and help them connect with entertaining activities.

"While service is one of the most important elements that makes Voco Hotels so unique, we're also known for doing things a little bit differently," said Will Yell, vice president of luxury and upscale conversion and affiliate brands at **InterContinental Hotels Group**, in a statement.

"So rather than turning down beds, we're turning up our hosted service to enhance our guest's stays and deliver unexpected, localized offerings that meet the needs of today's travelers."

OnePoll surveyed 5,000 respondents from Nov. 11 to Nov. 18, composed of 2,000 respondents from the United Kingdom and 1,000 respondents each from the United States, Australia and the United Arab Emirates.

Good service is everything

After two years of travel restrictions, uncertainty and apprehension regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers are looking for connection and entertainment in their trips.

Six out of ten respondents reported craving connection, interaction and/or conversation during their travels, compared to pre-pandemic.



The Voco Hotel in Dubai. Image credit: InterContinental Hotels Group

This kind of connection could be as simple as interacting with those who work at the front desk of a hotel, with 65 percent of travelers believing hotel staff should act in a friendly manner towards guests, and half saying they want to be able to talk to staff in a friendly, conversational way as opposed to overly formal or personal.

Almost half of travelers, 48 percent, agree that a friendly, approachable and personalized experience is more important than ever following the pandemic.

Travelers are also looking for offerings that go the extra mile, with one in three saying they wished more hotels offered late night comfort food.

Twenty-nine percent of travelers wish for more enhanced bathroom amenities for self-care, and 29 percent noted they would like in-room afternoon tea or happy hour delivered directly to their room.



More hotels have partnered with spirits brands for elevated cocktail experiences. Image credit: Rosewood

Late night comfort food was the number one amenity respondents in the United Arab Emirates were seeking, while travelers in the United States wished they could request their favorite cocktail or hotel in advance.

In response to this kind of demand, Voco Hotels are rolling out "turn up" services which offer out-of-the-box bookable experiences to guest, including things like high tea in Dubai and brunch after dark in the United States.

Not just a stay, but an experience

Several luxury hospitality brands are working diligently to bring travelers memorable, unparalleled experiences. Whether travelers are looking for intimate or over the top, brands are seeking to meet their needs.

Gone are the days of superficial travel dipping in and out of communities, seeing the highlights or sticking close to a familiar travel group. During a session at Cond Nast Traveler's Points of View Summit on Nov. 16, travel leaders discussed ways to find deeper connections with a destination through its people and culture, from taking part in authentic activities and eating and buying local to simply engaging with the residents ([see story](#)).

In August, hospitality group Marriott International helped travelers make up for lost time in the relaunch of its Marriott Bonvoy Moments platform, aiming to offer unforgettable experiences.

Marriott Moments offers something for everyone, including foodies, fashion lovers, the athletically-inclined and more. Marriott Bonvoy, the group's rewards program, emphasizes one-of-a-kind experiences rather than solely focusing on amenities upgrades ([see story](#)).

"Just like travel has changed, consumers expectations have too," Mr. Yell said. "With nearly half of travelers stating they want to be valued as an individual, a one-size-fits-all approach to hotel service no longer resonates with travelers."

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