

Impact of Current Trends in 5-star Business Hotels in Maharashtra with Respect to In-Room Facilities

Jagtap Yash Anil

Researcher, B.Sc HS Department

Bunts Sangha's Ramanath Payyade College of Hospitality Management Studies, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Abstract: *There has been tremendous growth in the number of hotels in India every year which includes all categories of hotels from three star to five star hotels. The major part of the hotel's margin of profit comes from the room sales. The hotel facilities and services are considered as important determinants for the customer satisfaction and earning good revenue for the hotel. In order to take advantage and stand out in the competition, it is important to stay updated with the latest trends in the hotel industry. With the tremendous changes in the taste and expectations of guests all hotels are actively looking into the new techniques to offer the optimal guest experience.*

Keywords: Amenities, Facilities, Business hotels, Current trends

I. INTRODUCTION

The new trends have completely reshaped the way hotels are serving their guests these days. Today, in this world of technology, guests are getting used to the advanced facilities and expect the same with the hotel industry. With the expectations of guests, all hotels are actively looking into the new techniques to offer the optimal guest experience. The trends in the hospitality industry help to improve customer loyalty and communicate better with the guests than ever before. Some of the current trends related to rooms are mobile app for easy access, self-check-in to minimize guests' waiting time, voice-activated virtual assistants, digitalized guest experiences, sustainability aspect and customization. People are becoming increasingly sensitive to environmental and social issues. Standardization can no longer be the norm, if you want to attract customers in the hotels.

The in-room facilities under study include emphasis and enhancement of the sleep experience of the guest, improved air quality, bathrooms as new rejuvenating spaces and special facilities for the Single Lady Traveler (SLT).

Emphasis on the sleep experience of the guest:

Hotel chains are spending millions of dollars and countless hours of market research to enhance the "sleep experience" of customers. After a long day or night of traveling, the hotel bed is the most welcome sight to any guest. In fact, hotels pride themselves and some even advertise about the comfort and quality of the beds within each hotel room. The value of the hotel is perceived higher when the beds enhance the sleep experience of guest, therefore hotels all over the world are refurbishing their beds. The beds in the hotel are custom designed, from expert suppliers. The mattresses have coils from about 900 to 3,000 in numbers, individually pocketed to coil-less ones, non-flip, made of latex or polyurethane, 12.5- 13.5 inch-thick. To make the rooms sound proof and dark, the designers use black curtains, door drop seals, master switches to put off all lights at one time. The bed sheets are a mix of cotton and polyester, with a thread count of 230-330. The best ones are made from American organic yarns or the Egyptian cotton. A hotel has a pillow menu and the guest can choose from the different types of pillows like non-allergic, cotton, soft polyfill etc.

Indoor Air quality:

The quality of the air is one of the most important factors to be considered while maintaining quality guest rooms. Hotel air quality is a prevailing consumer concern: four in ten consumers list indoor air quality as a highly important factor in their selection criteria. Hotels that promote higher indoor air quality earn higher favourability ratings among almost

two-thirds of consumers surveyed. Globally, people are spending an increasing amount of time indoors. There they are exposed to pollutants generated outdoors that penetrate to the indoor environment and also to pollutants produced indoors. The room ozonisers can be used to disinfect and deodorize air-conditioned rooms, thus improving the indoor air quality in the guest rooms. Room ozonisers effectively remove the smell of smoke and other foul odours that have built up in course of everyday use.

Bathrooms as new rejuvenating spaces:

Modern bathrooms are technologically designed as art pieces and are extensions of guestroom for an unforgettable experience. Once a room for cleansing and grooming, the bathroom is now a place where the guest spends quality time indulging in himself. The modern bathrooms takes up anywhere between 30-40 per cent of the overall room space. The right sized bathroom helps in proper division of dry, semidry and wet areas for the guest convenience. Given this expectation prior to arriving at a luxury hotel, the customer might be dissatisfied if the shower and bath were combined (disconfirmed expectations), satisfied to a moderate degree if the bath and tub were separate (confirmed expectations), or satisfied to a higher degree if the separate shower and bath were significantly larger than expected (affirmed expectations) (John Timmerman, 2013).

Special facilities for the Single Lady Traveler (SLT):

Every hotel knows that investing in making their hotel more women-friendly is worth the effort, even though pleasing them is not an easy task. The female customers are slowly replacing the valued male guest and this can be seen in the hotels globally.

The other attributes of a hotel bathroom includes the following-

Sanitary ware and faucets - Designing a bathroom is completely dependent on the hotel classification by star rating and brand preference of the company. Most of the top brand Five star deluxe hotels have quite a lot of automation, finger touch sanitary ware, sensor taps and fixtures. The faucets are slicker, appealing, have better functionality and made of stainless steel, nickel, brass or chrome coating. The touch panel switches add hi-tech ambience to the area

Range and quality of toiletries and linen-More and more hotels are opting for toiletry ranges evolved after research and experimentation on the potent healing, curative properties of essential oils and based on natural sources. The bath linen is expected to be spotless, fluffy and of high quality terry towels.

Space for vanity counter and accessories -A good size washbasin counter to keep a range of toiletries is a basic need for the guest. A double vanity counter or a wider one can accommodate more than one person in the rush hour.

Jetted bathtubs and soaking bath tubs-The luxury brand of hotel bath features good sized jetted soaking bathtub, with a big shower stall with adjustable shower temperature faucets, a hand held shower and a good rain shower. Tub for two is also highly popular among elite guests. A freestanding bathtub in the center of the rooms brings focus to the ritual of bathing and is seen in many guestrooms. The soaking bath tubs have more height and do not have the facility to take bath in the tub like the regular bathtubs, but are meant only for soaking. A movable caddy attached to the tub allows the toiletries being handy during the bath for the guest.

Shower cubicle with rain showers and jets, one touch control - A separate shower cubicle with full water hitting showering experience from rain showers and body jets from multiple angles has become a desired feature for the guest. The maximum space is allotted to the shower area in the designing of bathrooms. The shower system can be customized to everyone's different tastes and preferences. The system offers many other features including one-touch control, touch screen controller for shower panel with integrated, multi-sensory experience that wraps four elements-water, sound, light and steam together in a plug-n-play system which gives hi-tech luxurious feeling and comfort to the guest.

Intelligent Water Closet or Washlets- Intelligent Water Closet or Washlets with convenient activation panel, hygienic self-cleaning dual action spray help saving water, time and is high in demand for bathrooms. A spacious bathroom with separate water closet and bidet enclosure or cubicle is a part of a luxury hotel bathroom. The new Washlets feature technology in which after use, the toilet bowl is sprayed with electrolyzed water, which has a cleansing and antibacterial effect.

Glass as walls between room and bathroom-It came to India much later than the trend overseas. Initially there was much reservation for fear of guest being old fashioned and conscious. The trend of making bathroom and room as one with open doors and washbasin in the room are limited to the luxury brand hotels. Large glass panels between bedroom and bathroom gives an extension to the room. The orientation is such that the guest is able to look out through a glass wall or window to enjoy the view, sometimes right across the bedroom. A barn door stays outside the bathroom and slides in front of the room opening and allows for a wider opening into the bathroom, adding to the illusion of more space.

Pump Dispensers installed in the bath rooms instead of small toiletry packs or refill bottles-To appeal to the environmentally aware guests, the hotels are providing soap, shampoo and other toiletries via pump dispensers. But most of the guest still prefer to have small bottles for toiletries There is a fear among the guest that the soaps in the dispensers may not be hygienic or tampered, even though the dispensers have a locking facility.

Removal of bath tubs as ecological measure -One of the trends seen in today's bathrooms, especially in the business hotels, is a room without the bathtub. The business traveler is more likely to take shower than use the bath tub. It not only saves water but also cuts minutes off a housekeeper's routine with only a shower to clean. Many newly built hotels have put showers in 75 percent of the rooms and bathtubs in 25 percent of the rooms. The Marriott Hotel research shows that business travelers prefer showers to baths but families like the flexibility of a bathtub as well as a shower. Bath tubs should be enabled with thermostatic controlled water fixtures with water temperature set at 38°C.

Lighting in bathrooms- Lights play an important role to create a sense of space and a mood of relaxation in the bath. Soothing LED(light emitting diodes) lights are an emerging change for mood lighting in bathrooms. Natural lighting for the bathrooms and in-room spas gives complete relaxation and a natural feel.

Mirror Television - One more product which adds to the luxury of the bathroom is a mirror television which redefines the wall mounted bathroom mirror for complete entertainment while the guest refreshes and soaks himself in the bathtub. It offers a complete solution for bathroom mirror with a fully integrated television and a speaker.

The study of the above factors will help the hoteliers to understand the needs and the preferences of their customers leading to customer satisfaction and repeat customers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been carried out over the years to understand the needs of the business traveler. The hotel guest room attributes change over a period of five to ten years. Different brands provide the facilities for the business traveler under different heads. For example Marriott hotels provide the business facilities as the "Room That Works" whereas the Hilton has "The Smart Desk". The Starwood Property, Westin has the "Guest Office" and "Room 2000" for the business traveler, whereas Hyatt has "The Business Plan". Technologically advanced facilities are the most important for a business guest in the hotel. Multiple studies from the literature review have suggested that business travelers do need internet access while they travel. All luxury hotels provide free internet services whereas few of the budget hotels provide such free services.

A thesis by Clare Jay (2011) tries to seek the reasons for hotel's choice of amenities and to what extent a hotel's amenity selection provides the hotel with a competitive advantage. This research also seeks to understand the effects that provision of guest amenities and facilities have on hotel front office and housekeeping staff.

A study by Fazuin Mohd. Yusoff (2011) identified hotel selection attributes for Middle East Customers as location, services, cleanliness and facilities. The guest staying at the three star hotels expected basic facilities like the television and a good toilet, whereas the ones in five star expected larger size rooms, pleasant atmosphere, more comfort in general and internet facility.

The trends in the hotel industry keep on changing rapidly. There is a lot of emphasis given on the personalization of services, the hotel uses experience driven strategies, there is an increasing awareness of the need to use eco-friendly housekeeping amenities, products and processes, different facilities are provided to enhance the sleep experience of the guests, the expectations related to the bathroom facilities are totally different from what was provided by the old hotel guest rooms, all facilities provided are customer centric. The literature review was carried out for the current trends like theme rooms in boutique hotels, enhancing the sleep experience by providing heavenly beds, bathrooms as wellness zones and other new trends in the hotel guest room facilities.

Even in a cosmopolitan setting like Mumbai and Pune a stay in a strangely themed art hotel room can be an incredibly unique experience for a business guest. More and more hotels are trying to stand out from the crowd by bringing in local or international artists to create themed and custom rooms that provide one-of-a-kind aesthetic experiences for their customers. Every hotel has some unique selling points to survive in the competitive market. As far as the facilities in the guest room are concerned, it includes the appeal of soundproofed guest rooms, premium quality bedding and linen, hotel frequent-stay points, suggesting that they no longer provide the degree of service or product differentiation and are expected by the guests. (Peter Yesawich, 2012). The author also says that the customer is much more informed and engaged in selection of accommodation than they were previously. The heightened involvement is due their demand for higher value wherever they are staying. In a study by Morten Heidi (2009) distinctiveness of the hotel was rated as important variable to create an exceptional hotel atmosphere. Attaining a distinctive atmosphere has become a pivotal concern for hospitality managers, since atmosphere is perceived an essential factor to attract and satisfy guests. The study identified four stable and robust factors of atmosphere, namely, distinctiveness, hospitability, relaxation, and refinement. Distinctiveness was found to be the main factor in atmosphere; consequently, it is reasonable to assume that a certain degree of distinctiveness is a prerequisite for creating atmosphere.

Through the literature it is being observed that among the new trends the size of bathroom, updated faucets and facilities in the bathroom are important factors for the satisfaction of the customer. A comparative study was undertaken to analyze the factors influencing accommodation selection. It was discovered that business guests rated “bathroom and shower quality” highly (Tim Lockyer,2002). As per a case study done in Thailand related to the customer satisfaction with hotel guest rooms, satisfaction was affected by the overall cleanliness of the guestroom, the cleanliness of linen sheets, pillow covers and blankets, the quality of equipment in the bathroom and bathroom amenities offered.

A study (Express Hospitality Magazine,2013) suggests that many hotels in India and abroad take conscious decisions about choosing the correct bed and bedding for the hotels, mostly during the time of renovations. Along with the interior of the room, the main focus is on the bed and bedding and its comfort to the guest. Each and every bed is designed keeping in mind the comfort of the guest. The bed and bedding contributes on a higher scale to the comfort of the guest compared to the interior or other facilities of the room. There is further evidence of the use of amenities to help define a brand as seen in the ‘Westin Heavenly Bed’, a global initiative of Starwood Hotels. Another study by Brendan Coffey (2013) suggest that sleep adds value experience for the guest and helps in repeat business. The study focuses on the various reasons for not getting a sound sleep in the hotels. It suggests that for a sound sleep in the new place you should request the accommodations department in the hotel the things that suit you to get good sleep, feel rested and at your best the next morning.

The hotels nowadays try to grab business by not only providing the additional services but providing the facilities for which the guest is willing to pay extra to the hotel. The guest is willing to pay extra for the comfort and amenities. The preferences from the guests during the reservation help them to fulfil their needs and wants during the stay. The maximum preferences received during reservations are for comfortable beds in the guest rooms.

A study by Steve Timmerman, (2012) suggest that there is a 20% rise seen in the business of the hotels which are giving top priorities to the bed, its comfort and other room amenities. The study by Shalini Seth, (2012) emphasizes that various hotels have different strategies to enhance the sleep experience of the guests. The bed is always among the top scorer in the guest satisfaction surveys in the hotels. A lot of attention is given on the pillow menu, mattress, thread count, the quality of yarn, the finish and the colour of the sheets to give a unique experience to the guests. In the “Amenity War”, hotels are constantly trying to be one up on each other about their amenities and chief amongst them is their bedding. For many consumers, hotel bedding is seen as luxury, comfort and style, Sonal Kashyap (2010).

Hotels are emphasizing on the bed and bedding and it has become their unique selling point. The guests perceive the overall quality of the room to be higher with a more luxurious bed. The research suggests that superior beds are enough to keep the guests loyal towards a hotel, Andrea Bennett (2005). These initiatives along with other in-room developments such as luxurious toweling and high thread-count sheeting help to create a ‘wow’ factor.

Today’s customers want to stay in the hotels that acknowledge their preferences and desires, engage customers through immersive brand and product stories that create excitement and create the WOW factor (Robert Rauch,2015).

Personalization of services is the most growing trend in the hotel industry. The guests prefer those hotels who handle their issues on the priority basis and also their preferences are taken care in all the visits (Steve Timmermand,2012).

The single lady traveler or customer is a major market segment for the hoteliers and hence their needs should be taken care of. The single lady traveler is a fast growing, niche market and has tremendous potential in India. The female customers are slowly replacing the valued male guest and this can be seen in the hotels globally. Indian Tobacco Company (ITC Hotels) has 10 percent of their clientele as domestic or foreign women travelers.

The success of hotels largely depends on how much more they can offer to their guests. The rising number of women travelers over the world has made the Luxury Hotels create the special services for them. The Women Friendly Frills have become an international trend and since the last decade the hotels in India are also gearing up to tap this clientele. Some hotels have full- fledged floors, whereas others have single lady rooms. The ITC hotels were the pioneers in the services for the single lady traveler and have the special floor for the women.

An interesting study by Judi Brownell, 2011 suggests that managers should focus on the combinations of services, amenities, and facilities to contribute to the desired experience by women traveler rather than focusing on individual aspect. A convenience survey of hotel managers' perceptions of women's preferences shows that women are developing a clear and consistent message about the need to feel safe, comfortable, empowered, and pampered. Guided by these themes, hotel managers are expected to go beyond a focus on individual attributes and amenities to provide an experience that exceeds the expectations of the dynamic and growing market segment of the single lady traveler.

In the study carried out by Ekaterina Berezina,2010 it was found that the male customers consider high speed internet access, easily accessible electrical outlets and express check in and check-out as important, whereas the females considered high speed internet, accessible electrical outlets and guest control panel, while selecting a hotel.

Wouter Geerts (2014) has argued that the business travelers are not willing to put in extra effort in to carrying out environment related practices while staying in hotels. Business travelers are often sent to unfamiliar locations, and are expected to take on a high workload when at the destination. By comparing the uptake of environment related practices at home and when away, it is argued that the strain of travelling negatively impacts the uptake of these practices.

The results of a survey carried out by Anuraag Jhavar, (2012) illustrate the lack of consumer knowledge regarding eco-certification programs for the hotels, especially in terms of what they are and how they function. Although the consumer awareness is low, the interest in eco-certification in the hotel Industry is growing and most of the hotels are taking green certification seriously.

The research by Millar, (2008) says that one of the most influential factors for choosing hotel for the guest is its green hotel certification. There was a slight difference between the choice of facilities for the business and leisure travelers on points like the preference for green hotel and some ecofriendly amenities.

Technology can be the totality of the means and knowledge used to provide objects necessary for human sustenance and comfort. Generation Y customers will expect free Wi-Fi access, hotel rooms that can hook up to and be controlled by their mobile devices, areas within the hotel to socialize in, personalized experiences that give them choices over every possible option the hotel can offer, and the newest technology available for them to use (Kelley, 2012).

Another paper by Too Chee Wah (2010) refers to the various types of technology and devices adopted by hotels for their guestrooms to meet the ever increasing demand and expectations from the guests leading to increased occupancies in the hotel. In addition to the other hotel factors as one of the general amenities, technology amenities are now integral to a hotel stay.

Many studies have compared the hotel attributes preferred by the male and the female business customers. The article by Alanna Peet, 2006 states that Women travelers have specific amenities in their minds when they are travelling and the hotels are changing and updating in order to attract more women travelers. The study indicates that women business travelers' value security and luxury above all the other factors while selecting the hotel, even though they appreciate all the feminine services offered to them in the hotels.

The study by Evita Yung, (2002) is related to the customer satisfaction and hotel services and other factors. It states that the Business center encounters had the greatest effect on customer satisfaction, whereas rooms have the least one. The findings suggest that hotels should pay more attention towards peripheral services, to give the customer overall satisfaction and repeat business. Fu and Parks (2001) findings were that friendly service and individual attention were more important factors than tangible aspects of service in influencing elderly customers' behavioral intentions.

As far as the facilities in the guest room are concerned, it includes the appeal of soundproofed guest rooms, premium quality bedding and linen, hotel frequent-stay points, suggesting that they no longer provide the degree of service or product differentiation and are expected by the guests. (Peter Yesawich, 2012). The author also says that the customer is much more informed and engaged in selection of accommodation than they were previously. The heightened involvement is due their demand for higher value wherever they are staying. In a study by Morten Heidi (2009) distinctiveness of the hotel was rated as important variable to create an exceptional hotel atmosphere. Attaining a distinctive atmosphere has become a pivotal concern for hospitality managers, since atmosphere is perceived an essential factor to attract and satisfy guests. The study identified four stable and robust factors of atmosphere, namely, distinctiveness, hospitability, relaxation, and refinement. Distinctiveness was found to be the main factor in atmosphere; consequently, it is reasonable to assume that a certain degree of distinctiveness is a prerequisite for creating atmosphere.

In a study by Skogland (2004) the chief factors that engaged guest's loyalty were hotel design and amenities. Moreover the factor that caused guests to be most involved in the purchase decision was its employees. Bendall-Lyon and Powers (2002) found that the satisfaction of female customers declined faster than male customers. The Multipurpose television, guest restricted access, weather cards, good night quotes, chocolates, bed analysis, use of glass walls for bathrooms, guest redirected to guest information system, ecofriendly products and services, light weight and multiuse furniture, removal of bath tubs were rated much lesser compared to the first five important trends.

III. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that if the expectations of the customers are met they would be satisfied by the facilities related to current trends and would return back adding to the revenue of the hotel and survival in the competitive global market. Hoteliers should formulate their business strategies using the current trends to attract the Customers.

After conducting this research and getting insight from the relevant research, the researcher would like to recommend the following-

Added research on the same concept can be carried out on other type of hotels than just Business hotels. It may yield interesting insights related to the role that Facilities and Services play in getting a repeat customer.

Customization of current trends related to in-room facilities in the hotel needs to be further investigated as it is the key strategy to improve hotel guest experience.

The researcher recommends that in future similar research can be carried out on current trends and innovations in the various departments of the hotel, which are relevant to that particular period, as every five years new trends emerge and the concept of customer experience gets evolved.

The research could be broadened to include factors other than in -room facilities and housekeeping services which are responsible for customer satisfaction in the hotel.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ahmed Fawzy,(2010),Business Travelers' Accommodation Selection: A Comparative Study of Two International Hotels in Cairo, International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 11:138–156, ISSN: 1525-6480
- [2]. AnuraagJhavar, GuneetKohli, Jie Li, NeilufarModiri, Veronica Mota, Ryan Nagy, Heiley Poon and Clifford Shum,(2012),Eco-Certification Programs for Hotels in California: Determining Consumer Preferences for Green Hotels, Environmental Science Senior Practicum, Spring 2012.
- [3]. Bendall-Lyon, D. & Powers, T. L. (2002), The impact of gender differences on change in satisfaction over time, The Journal of Consumer Marketing, 19 (1), 12-23.
- [4]. Clare Jay,FazuinMohd. Yusoff, (2011),The Role of Guest Amenities in Wellington Hotels, Lincoln University.
- [5]. Evita Yung, (2002).Business Traveller Satisfaction with Hotel Service Encounters, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, Volume 11, Issue 4.

- [6]. FazuinMohd. Yusoff, Flora Shumin Chang Abdullah,(2010).What really matters when choosing a hotel? The case of Middle East tourists in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (Volume 2, No. 3, 2010, Pages 53 to 62.
- [7]. Fu and Parks, (2001),The Relationship between Restaurant Service Quality and Consumer Loyalty among the Elderly, Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research vol. 25 no. 3320-326.
- [8]. JammareeChoosrichom, (2011), Factors affecting selection of hotels/Resorts in LantaYai Island, Krabi Thailand by international travellers, Silpakorn University.
- [9]. Kelley, Brian, (2012). American Generation Y and The Hotel of 2030, UNLV, Paper 1470. Too Chee Wah, (2010).Technology Enhancement in Hotel Guestroom, Graduate College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
- [10]. WouterGeerts, (2014). Business travel, hotels, and environmental sustainability, an exploration of business travelers 'environment-related practices at the travel destination, University of London.