

BUSINESS AS USUAL?

An evolution is underway as the UAE's hospitality industry vies for the loyalty of a new breed of business traveller



A major shift has taken place within business tourism – one that's transforming the overarching industry. Outdated notions of the typical corporate guest and how to cater to them are long gone, replaced by a new model very much defined by millennial attitudes.

According to a recent PwC report, millennials will comprise 50 percent of the global workforce by 2020. The generation, loosely defined as those born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, is also soon to account for half of all spend in the business travel segment. This new breed of traveller is strongly motivated by value and eager to voice complaints, holding businesses to account online. Booking trips on the web is a given for them and reviews are an essential part of planning travel, while social media is used to take the concept of bleisure to

a new level as guests seek out experiences that are quirky and unique. Appealing to millennials is key and the region's hotels have responded with a robust set of solutions to lure the new business travel spend.

RAVE REVIEWS

Having changed the face of the industry in recent years, the review culture has very much been championed by millennials who turn to message boards and social media platforms when planning and evaluating trips. For hotels, this can often mean they're a few bad reviews away from a crisis and makes continuous engagement with customers online a priority.

"Social media and online reviews have no doubt changed the rules of engagement," says Chris Newman, Chief Operating Officer, Emaar Hospitality Group. "They place the guest

experience ahead of everything else to secure great ratings, thereby positively influencing new guests on where they choose to stay."

While some find the prospect of online judgement intimidating, Newman insists that the digital collective opinion model is a plus for the industry.

He adds: "Review sites have made every employee very conscious of the guests' needs, which is a very good thing."

TIME Hotels CEO Mohamed Awadalla agrees that a company's online reputation is crucial to its success or failure – which is why he has charged a team with regularly checking channels such as TripAdvisor and Facebook.

"We are very active. Someone from within the company will answer every single comment posted online, be it a compliment or a complaint," he says.

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At Minor Hotels, monitoring and engaging goes a step further, as guests are prompted for an automated review on check-out.

David Garner, Vice President of Sales & Marketing – Middle East, Sri Lanka & Seychelles, says: “Online reviews are a very powerful tool and our company monitors every review of our services.

“We also provide automated reviews which guests can complete after check-out. It’s a great way to see where we’re positioned in the market and how we can improve.”

ROOM SERVICE

Hotels also now recognise that they must be well technologically equipped as a standard if they wish to be taken seriously by millennial business travellers.

“We have seen that the needs of business travellers have changed, with connectivity and high-speed internet access a must-have in hotels,” says Emaar’s Newman.

“Connectivity to social networks is a basic need for millennial guests, just like a good night’s sleep and a power shower, while easy access to business nerve-centres is another key driver in the way business travellers choose their hotels.”

One of Emaar’s latest openings in Dubai, Rove Healthcare City has been designed specifically with modern business travellers in mind. The property is strategically located next to Dubai Healthcare City, is 10 minutes away from Dubai International Airport, Dubai World Trade Centre, Downtown Dubai and DIFC.

For Garner, connectivity and location are key drivers for modern business travellers, and are crucial to a property’s success.

“It’s also very important to streamline routine processes such as booking rooms and checking in or out.

“Minor Hotels has been testing personalised apps at selected properties in Dubai for the past year, with features such as restaurant booking and promotional offers.

“The flexibility of mobile platforms is essential to today’s savvy business traveller. They want to have access in the palm of their hand and they want it now.”



01 Chris Newman
02 & 03 Rove Healthcare City

TAILOR MADE TRAVEL

Driving the experiential travel trend forward, millennials look to delve into a destination’s culture during a trip, looking to unearth unique experiences. This extends to business travellers, who increasingly allow time for leisure and exploration during work trips. Capitalising on this, leading hospitality brands have increasingly started to incorporate a range of leisure activities into packages for business guests.

For Minor Hotels’ Garner, this also translates into helping valued guests to create unforgettable stories during a stay.



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He says: “Minor Hotels consistently excels in providing unique experiences to people visiting its properties.

“We’re very much about travellers collecting stories with offerings such as private 10-kilometre dune drives through the Empty Quarter to reach Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara, or exploring the Arabian Wildlife Park on Anantara Sir Bani Yas Island Resorts.

“This is all about our guests having stories they take with them. Hopefully they then go and spread those stories, which helps build our brand.”

LASTING LOYALTY

Set against a backdrop of global market instability, and shrinking budgets for incentives and business travel, hotels now also have to remain extremely competitive in order to lure business guests. Loyalty schemes have undergone something of a resurgence in recent years as a result, allowing hoteliers to both entice new guests and reward their continued allegiance.

The U By Emaar programme rewards business travellers with discounts on restaurants and spa treatments, plus benefits such as complimentary transport to the airport, while Minor Hotels is part of the Global Hotel Alliance loyalty programme, offering returning guests a host of special benefits.

Meanwhile, TIME Hotels launched a new loyalty product last year. Awadalla says: “Loyalty is very important and TIME Hotels partnered with Voila Hotel Rewards to offer guests a multitude of benefits. These range from complimentary room nights to airline miles and charity donations.”

Although, for Awadalla, the formula for meeting the complex needs of today’s business traveller is relatively simple.

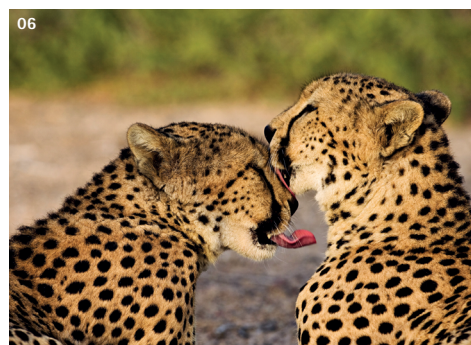
He says: “We want to focus on customer service. Our slogan is ‘You Really Matter’ and I believe that nurturing this spirit within the company is key to future growth.”



04 Mohamed Awadalla
05 & 06 Arabian Wildlife Park
07 Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara



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