



Reaching OUT *to business travelers*



Hotels are offering businesspeople a remarkable array of amenities that not only helps them work efficiently in their hotel rooms, but also makes it possible for them to relax and renew at the property after a stressful day.

[ELEANOR M. WILSON]

Pricewaterhouse Coopers analyst Bjorn Hanson reports that hotels spent more than \$4.8 billion last year on capital improvements, and the trend continues. Better beds, high-speed wireless Internet, flat-screen TVs, 24-hour business centers, and free breakfast buffets are just some of the perks dangled in front of ‘road warriors’ to make sure they have the best in technology, sleep, fitness, and service.

What do business travelers look for in a hotel?

Brad Wilson, COO for The James Hotels, says quick and easy access to the Internet, fast and efficient service, a smooth operation with no challenges, quick breakfast opportunities...and any other perks that keep them on schedule.

Tom Santora, senior vice president sales and marketing for the Kor Hotel Group, sees many similarities in service for business and leisure travelers.

“Today’s working guests are looking for technology and services that enhance the way they do business. They count on flawless service: from having a fax or package delivered, to a reliable wake-up call. They’re also looking to indulge at destination restaurants and spas. They want to relax poolside but have wireless access to their laptops if necessary.

The consensus among top hoteliers: business guests want these components as part of the package ‘...without being nickel-and-dimed to death for each service.’



THE JAMES CHICAGO

Location, Location, Location

"Business travelers want to stay where they entertain," Santora continued. "Time on the road is intense. Our hotels are uniquely positioned in destinations where guests can work and play: South Beach, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica. We think this mix contributes to our occupancy growth, with no weekend flat periods."

Among Kor Hotel Group's 11 hotels, eight are urban and three are resorts. Collectively, Kor has experienced double-digit growth in occupancy since 2004.

Brad Wilson finds guests combining business and leisure more today than ever before. His company focuses on urban hotels, having recently opened The James Chicago which immediately made *Travel & Leisure's* new "It" list as 'coolest new hotel of 2006.'

"We design and build from a guest point of view, realizing that urban locations typically attract more business than

leisure travel. The James Chicago embodies many characteristics we hope to achieve for future properties," Wilson stated. "We'll open in New York and Los Angeles within the next year to 18 months, providing stylish alternatives to the 5-star traveler." Locations focus on major cities, central to restaurants, shopping, nightlife, and transportation. Museum and cultural attractions also play a role in determining the site, as more and more business trips begin or end with added leisure days for spouses or families.

Marquis Reforma in Mexico City also discovered more business travelers bringing families along to spend extra days exploring this fascinating city. As a result of guest feedback, the hotel debuted its Mexico City Sampler package, featuring family accommodations in a corporate suite and a choice of one sightseeing excursion daily. The package is priced per day so it can be bought as an add-on,

if the family is not staying as long as the business executive.

Tech Talk

Technology heads the list of upgrades. Being connected seems to be everyone's priority, whether traveling for business or pleasure, locally or internationally. Most hotels and even small inns offer wireless Internet in their lobbies and around the pool. And now that whole cities are going wireless...from Philadelphia and Liverpool to Rio Rancho, New Mexico...it's apparent that any hotel wanting to remain competitive must offer complimentary high-speed Internet in guestrooms, and be wireless in public areas at the very least.

The James Chicago moves that discovery a few steps further by adding complimentary video conference calls, a video call home to the children, and wireless guestrooms. The Business Center is open 24 hours with 100 percent free use of all

electronic equipment.

Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong takes a space-saving approach. Guestroom desk/tables have a 'work kit' in the drawer (paper clips, post-its, etc.) and a dataport in the telephone, but to compile that report or presentation, just call for the Biz Hub. It's wheeled into the room, containing all the gadgets needed to do the task at hand or to keep in touch with headquarters and customers. When work is complete, the Biz Hub is wheeled out again, and the guest pays just for the time used.

By Design

Part of this renaissance to attract the business traveler has brought innovations in both design and décor, as well as amenities.

Recently, Hilton introduced 'Relaxation Rooms' in the new Hilton Arc de Triomphe in Paris and Millennium Hilton Bangkok, after extensive research and testing at Hilton Munich Park.

Three zones help travelers differentiate between work and downtime. The Work Zone provides a large wrap-around desk, ergonomic chair, adjustable lamps and ambient lighting, desk telephone, fax/copier machine, a data connection and 24-hour high-speed Internet access. The Bathroom Zone features a Hydro-spa bath, scented massage oils, aromatherapy products, and a second TV for viewing via the remote while soaking in scents. In the main Relaxation Zone, guests can forget those meeting worries by curling up in a large lounge chair, listening to a CD, watching TV, or their own choice of DVD movies.

Executives responsible for closely monitoring guest trends at Royal Sonesta noticed that more guests were working in their rooms, rather than eating there. So when 200 rooms at the 400-room Royal Sonesta Hotel Boston were renovated with the business client in mind, dining tables were removed. In their place are multi-purpose desks with two Aeron chairs and six desk-height outlets. The rooms offer free wireless and high-speed Internet access, plus dual-line dataport phones with voicemail and ISDN capability.

Mexico City's brand new Crown Plaza Hotel de Mexico had the advantage of outfitting its 310 rooms specifically for today's business guest. Each room has an in-room business center equipped with a computer, free Internet access, work desk, and task lighting. The entire property is wireless.

Berlin's latest Park Plaza Wallstrasse took a tip from its name and went right to the corporate bottom line—money. Guestroom carpeting resembles a bonanza of U.S. dollars, wall murals are adopted from financial headlines, and safes are large enough for laptops. Among other niceties is a complimentary daily newspaper, which it's safe to assume is *The Wall Street Journal*.

Business lofts are another step up in hotel plans. Earlier this year, Houston's Hotel Derek introduced six Business Lofts designed to resemble home offices rather than hotel suites. Adjoining the living area is a work alcove with a Texas-sized desk to spread those inevitable papers, a Dell computer with 19-inch monitor, a laser printer and a business toolbox containing scissors, calculator, stapler, and other office necessities. To get those creative juices flowing, the lofts also contain brain-teasing toys such as cards, Etch-a-Sketch, and a putting machine.

The new James Chicago also incorporated media rooms into its 26 Loft Suites.

Work It Out

Hotels are keenly aware of the business travelers' dedication to exercise and proper diet, and they're getting serious about availability.

Workout Guestrooms in the Westin New York at Times Square feature all the necessities to keep up with fitness routines. After a round of heavy meetings, guests can work out their stress on a Reebok Tomahawk XL Indoor Cycle, or a Life Fitness Treadmill. A custom-designed shelf holds Pilates/Yoga and Spinning DVDs, dumbbells, resistance tubing, a stability ball, yoga mat, and more Reebok workout equipment. A laminated pocket-size running map details three- and five-mile jogging loops near the hotel.

Ideas That Work

- » On checkout, Ritz-Carlton guests can buy "Flight Bites," prepared meals in insulated bags.
- » Kor Hotel Group calls it First Class to Go—gourmet food for that flight home.
- » Late arrivals at Hilton Arc de Triomphe find a light minibar, healthy snack pack, and light menu options.
- » Since women represent almost 40 percent of all business travelers, this Paris hotel treats women to full-length mirrors, extra skirt hangers, a powerful hair dryer, leading hair care products, in-room manicure. Men receive relevant male perks.
- » Langham Hotel Hong Kong's package 'Tailor Made by Langham' contains the ultimate male perk, three custom-made shirts.
- » Hyatt's Fast Board kiosks in lobbies print boarding passes, change seats, request upgrades.
- » Hyatt loyalty program guests have free membership in Clear, the private registered-traveler program.
- » Sheraton is preparing its lobbies with YahooLink@Sheraton, featuring computers and flat-screen TVs surrounded by ample seating.
- » W Hotels plans a text messaging service for remote guest/staff communication.
- » Marquis Reforma's VIP Executive Stay package adds 15-minute neck and shoulder massages to other perks.
- » Bangkok's Marriott and The Conrad supply a Skytrain pass with route map as a minibar option.
- » Hilton installed upscale MP3-ready clock radios in all rooms. Coming soon, officials assured, is 'the most important business traveler amenity of all—Sony Play Stations!'

At Westin Chicago River North, the No Excuse Workout rents t-shirts, shorts, socks, and gym shoes, giving guests no excuse to slough off from daily routines. The hotel's Workout Fitness Center boasts a licensed trainer who provides health assessments, individualized programs, and fitness regimens for guests to continue at home.

Marriott and Hilton went complimentary with workout kits, mats, hand weights, tension bands, yoga balls, and an instructional video. "This is a huge success in California," said Laurie Goldstein, spokesperson for Marriott, "but it hasn't caught on as well elsewhere."

Of course, a visit to the spa is a known remedy for relieving stress. Westin New York converted the entire 23rd floor into a spa and fitness center with 13 spa-inspired guestrooms. While enjoying aromatherapy candles and healthy alternatives from the mini bar, the tired guest relaxes in an electronic Shiatsu massage chair. Incidentally, latest figures from the International Spa Association disclose that more men than women now use spas.

To Sleep, Perchance to Dream

If Hamlet had a room at today's hotels, he'd have no problem conjuring up pleasant dreams as a result of the infamous 'bed wars' among major chains. Guests are offered everything from a Heavenly Bed (plus many other names) to an elaborate pillow menu.

Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts goes beyond the bed with its "Sleep Advantage" program. This includes guaranteed wake-up calls, drape clips, quiet-zone floors Sunday through Thursday nights, and other sleep-inducing amenities.

Many hotels now provide sleep kits that contain everything from lavender mist to dispel jet lag, and CDs with sea sounds, to the more conventional ear plugs and masks. But in response to a guest survey, the architectural design team at Rome Cavalieri Hilton, where 56 percent of guests are business people, has really solved the jet lag problem and that need for a daytime nap.



As tired travelers enter executive floor guestrooms, they swing out an enormous floor-to-ceiling mirror hinged to the foyer wall. This soundproofs the bedroom section from any hall noises. One push of a button on the control panel activates a metal security grate on the window, blocking daylight completely. In no time, weary guests are in the arms of Morpheus.

Bottom Line

What conclusions can be reached after absorbing all of these successful innovations? And more importantly, how do you know what will work for you? One positive way to find out is to listen to your guests.

Lana Dubovik, corporate director of market strategy for Kor Hotels, comments that, as an important alternative to traditional Frequent Guest programs, all Kor Hotels rely on customer preference software to tell Kor managers what their guests want.

"We recently introduced online guest comment cards, which have become overwhelmingly popular as many more guests participate via their preferred communication method. Our hotel managers use these 'virtual cards' as a tool for customer service interactions, and also as a timely indicator of any new business travel trends. How important is the ergonomic chair? How often are in-room fax machines used? We learned, for instance, that high-speed Internet and well-lit, adequately sized desks are much more in demand than acquiring a few frequent guest points. So that is where we focus."

As for the bottom line in all this resurgence, PWC's Bjorn Hanson makes a very astute observation. "Beds and other amenities are only half the formula. Any program or package must be backed up with reliable service. You can't raise expectations with amenities, then not meet them with service." ■

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