

# LUXURY HOTELIERS

3rd Quarter  
2015

## SPOTLIGHT ON

**Salim Bitar,**  
**CEO Aujan Group Holding -**  
**Hospitality & Real Estate**

*Data-Driven Loyalty Programs*  
**Reward Yourself**  
*& your guest*

**Master Tea**  
*Blenders share  
their secrets*

*Signature Scents to inspire  
emotional connection*



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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Luxury Hoteliers, It's been an exciting first half of the year. I have had the opportunity to meet many of you when I presented at HITEC in Austin and IHMRS in New York. As we head into the 2nd half of 2015 I would like to share my excitement with all of you about the upcoming ILHA Fast Forward Luxury Hotel Conference & Hospitality Wellness Expo in Orlando, Sept 27 – 29.

This year we will host the 2015 Luxury Hotel Guest Experience Awards. They are brought to you by The International Luxury Hotel Association and TrustYou, the global leader in hotel reputation feedback.

Today's travelers rely more and more on a hotel's online reputation to make their booking decisions. In fact, a recent Tish/NYU study shows that 95% of travelers rely on reviews when deciding where to book.

The 2015 North America Guest Experience Awards are the first to rank hotels by TrustYou's Meta-Reviews™ which aggregate verified guest feedback across hundreds of review sites and booking engines worldwide. There are no fees to participate, no "expert" opinions, just great feedback from hotel guests that will decide the winners. Visit [www.luxuryhotelassociation.org/](http://www.luxuryhotelassociation.org/) awards to view the finalists.

The conference is also a great opportunity for independent hoteliers to connect with executives from the bigger groups to share insights. We have speakers from both small luxury independents to the largest of the brands.

We have co-located our event at the Orlando Convention Center with the Medical Tourism Association to host the largest hospitality wellness expo in the US. We expect over 2000 attendees to visit the stands that will focus on the trillion dollar wellness travel industry. HR professionals can also benefit from the integrated corporate wellness pavilion.

A ticket to the ILHA Fast Forward conference gets you into the expo too.

Don't miss out, the conference is almost sold out. Visit [www.luxuryhotelconference.com](http://www.luxuryhotelconference.com) for info and to register.

Best Regards



**Barak Hirschowitz,**  
*President, International Luxury Hotel Association*



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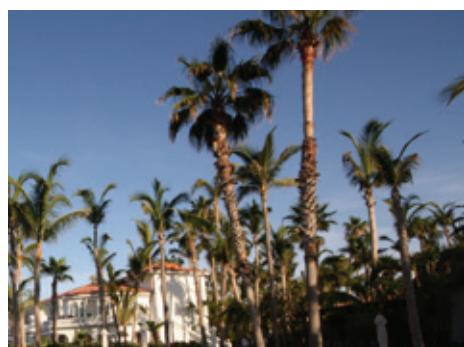
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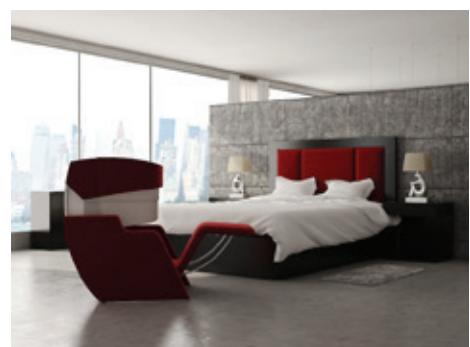
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## WRITE FOR US

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# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Salim Bitar

*CEO of Hospitality and Real Estate, Aujan Group Holding*

By Natasha D'Souza

From forging new roads for Motorola in Asia during the telecom boom of the 1990s, championing strategic investments and critical projects for one of the Middle East's largest sovereign-owned holding companies, and elevating the luxury hospitality arena in Africa, **SALIM BITAR** has fashioned an impressive, intrepid and versatile career path that makes for fascinating conversation.

"I'm always seeking out new experiences that have an element of challenge and discovery," shares Salim Bitar with a warm smile, as we sit down for our tête-à-tête in the sleekly-appointed lobby of The Oberoi hotel in Dubai. "My time at Motorola, experiencing so many different countries and cultures, enhanced my appreciation for good food and luxury hospitality. Plus, I'm a techie at heart. So I get to indulge all these interests in my current role," he quips, again smiling as he acknowledges various hotel employees who greet him from a distance.



*Torres Rani-Rendering*

As the CEO of Hospitality and Real Estate at Aujan Group Holding--one of the Gulf region's oldest family-owned conglomerates--Bitar, 53, leverages his global management acumen, commercial savvy and substantial multi-sector experiences to strengthen and advance

a portfolio of six luxury properties across Africa and the Middle East. With assets valued at over US\$500 million, Aujan's hospitality arm includes resorts on the idyllic, pristine islands of Medjumbe and Bazaruto off the Mozambique coast; the Stanley and Livingstone Private

Game Reserve by Victoria Falls; and The Oberoi Hotel which overlooks the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where Bitar is based.

How did a Middle-East based holding company venture into luxury hospitality in Africa? "Our Chairman, Sheikh Adel Aujan, is passionate about Africa and recognized the untapped tourism potential in some of its unique and unspoiled island, beach and wilderness locations," explains Bitar. "Over the past two decades, with much dedication and determination, he saw to it that these destinations would not only attract discerning travelers but also promote socio-economic development in these communities." Indeed, it appears Aujan Group Holding, guided by its scion's vision, has developed some of Africa's most iconic luxury hotels, safari destinations and island resorts that continue to garner critical acclaim and commendation, such as the Anantara Medjumbe Island Resort & Spa voted Africa's Leading Private Island Resort for the last three years in a row.

### Gearing up for Growth

Since coming on board in 2011, Bitar's role, while heavily focused on luxury

hospitality, appears to be a departure from the traditional "hotelier" position. He clarifies: "I oversee Aujan Group Holding's hospitality and real estate division, ensuring and maximizing its profitability while positioning the portfolio and the overall Group for future opportunities in these sectors."

Given Bitar's rich cosmopolitan experience in various developing countries and growth economies-- including negotiating one of the first technology joint ventures on behalf of Motorola with the Chinese government--and his penchant for restructuring and repositioning businesses for growth and profitability, his tenure at Aujan has yielded various notable achievements, particularly their two joint ventures in August and December of 2013 with Thailand's Minor Hotel Group, which operates the Anantara and Avani hotel brands, among others.

What was the impetus for that partnership? Bitar responds: "We acted as developer, owner and operator of our properties in Africa for over a decade. During that time, it was evident that there were several critical areas where we needed to punch harder. Our decentralized marketing function

meant that there was no overall brand architecture and strategy guiding our market positioning, consequently limiting our exposure to South and East Africa. We are in one of the fastest evolving markets in the world and we wanted to position our portfolio to capitalize on this growth and to deliver superior operating results and return on capital."

Following discussions with various prospective partners, Aujan elected to enter into a strategic alliance with Minor to operate its properties in Mozambique, given the latter's "formidable reputation for managing luxury island resorts and running successful hotels." Says Bitar: "Anantara delivers a memorable brand experience that intrinsically connects guests with the culture, history and surrounding environment. Our alliance with Minor will open the doors for loyal Anantara and Avani customers to discover the breathtaking beauty of Mozambique and elevate it to the world's stage."

### Africa Rising

Over the past decade, economic analysts and captains of industry have lauded Africa's impressive and consistent economic growth, with its



Anantara Bazaruto

average growth rate post-financial crisis emerging over 2 percentage points higher than the global average. According to the 2014 Knight Frank's Wealth Report, five of the top ten countries with the highest projected growth rates for luxury brands are in Africa. The continent, home to some of the world's fastest growing economies, seems poised to emerge as the next frontier in high-end hospitality, buoyed by rapid urbanization, a growing upper-middle class, and swelling leisure and business tourism.

In tune with industry pundits, Bitar too is bullish about Mozambique's prospects. "We see Mozambique abundant with economic potential and natural beauty, both of which can be astutely capitalized upon for the benefit of enterprises, leisure and business travellers, and the nation as a whole. With GDP growing at an average of 7.5 percent per year and over 2,300 kilometers of spectacular coastline, rich flora and fauna...it truly is a hidden jewel of a country that the world needs to learn more about."

Later this year, Bitar expects to establish the country's most distinguished real estate address: Torres Rani. Situated in Maputo--the capital of Mozambique--this landmark mixed-use project, which already boasts the city's first internationally branded hotel – the

Radisson Blu, includes an office tower, serviced residences operated by the Radisson Blu and retail thoroughfare set in an innovative design that Bitar vouches "will boldly change the landscape of Maputo and serve as a prestigious address for any leading organization that seeks to launch itself in Mozambique." He adds: "Torres Rani reflects our unwavering commitment to the development of Mozambique into a major economic and tourism player in Africa. The project is attracting tremendous interest and commitment from several multinational companies, embassies, financial institutions, and retailers who are looking for a world-class business location that is unparalleled in Mozambique."

### Raising the Bar for Environmental Responsibility

Transforming the award-winning Anantara Medjumbe island resort into Africa's first fully solar-powered luxury resort will soon be another feather in Bitar's cap. While Aujan's hospitality developments already encompass distinctive luxury infused with an ethos of environmental responsibility, Bitar maintains that there is a strong business case for moving Medjumbe towards solar power. "When you operate in emerging markets, access to reliable power proves a major challenge. The island is

completely dependent on diesel-run generators, which impacts the bottom line and also our ability to operate this picturesque destination with minimal disruptions."

After extensive deliberations about cost and carbon footprint impacts, Bitar found excellent alignment with a small solar power company based out of Silicon Valley in California. He cites the shared commitment of both companies to achieve this significant milestone in Africa as key to ensuring the resulting investment's financials do not present a stumbling block. "For me, sustainability must also make sense financially," notes Bitar, "Moreover, luxury hospitality travelers are growing more environmentally conscious. They seek self-indulgence but also value the assurance that their stay is not negatively impacting the environment. In a few months, our guests at Anantara Medjumbe Island Resort & Spa can be assured that the only footprint they leave will be on the sandy shores of its beautiful beach."

### Time for a Tech Revolution

A confessed technology enthusiast, Bitar, whose gadget-du-jour is a space-black Apple watch, is excited about the impact of technology within hospitality. "Technology is catalyzing innovation in a host of industries and



Junior Suite Radisson Maputo



*Stanley and Livingstone Zimbabwe*



*Stanley and Livingstone Zimbabwe*

I'm delighted to see a rapprochement between hospitality and technology on a global level," he muses. "What really captivates me is truly transforming hospitality time is truly transforming hospitality through the intuitive, seamless use of technology that allows one to fully capture, understand and address guests' needs, desires and expectations, such that from the moment they commence their experience, it is truly bespoke and perceptive. From the smart control of lighting and temperature, to providing seamless in-room entertainment and concierge services, that 30 to 40 square meter room space should essentially be transformed into an elevated extension of one's comfort zone.

Conversely, Bitar believes the luxury hospitality sector in the Middle East and Africa has yet to fully capitalize on the opportunity to lead the way in

technology adoption and innovation. "Dubai, driven by the Smart City Initiative, has a tremendous potential to showcase avant garde technology within hospitality, given the immense competition in the luxury hospitality space and the prevalence of incredibly luxury-oriented and tech-savvy customers in this part of the world." "On the other hand, Bitar considers the African hospitality sector as saddled with rudimentary issues--such as establishing uninterrupted power and internet access--which also prove challenging within their own properties, he admits."

According to Bitar, the astute use of technology can dramatically reduce a hotel's operating cost, while simultaneously providing the kind of enhanced experience sought by discerning travelers. He commended innovative efforts such as Starwood Hotel's Concept Lab, which is working on a host of technological enhancements for guests including the industry's first truly mobile keyless check-in system. "For a hospitality brand, embracing technology unlocks an array of opportunities to design and deliver bespoke services and experiences that will naturally elevate brand affinity and drive business results," opines Bitar."

## The Inimitable Leader

With over 1,000 employees under his purview, what's Bitar's management style? "I'm passionate about my work and about connecting with people. So while I'm exceedingly results-oriented and have high expectations about achieving our strategic vision and targets, I'm equally in tune with the people around me, be they colleagues or partners," he reveals. Known for his open-door policy and hands-on approach ("I love getting together with the hotel teams and discussing new designs, fleshing out F&B concepts or even fine-tuning marketing collaterals."), Bitar believes in being accessible to employees regardless of seniority and regularly brainstorms with his team to foster a culture of creativity. He emphasizes: "I believe in having an open mind and welcoming ideas that can enhance the business. And an idea could come from anywhere and anyone. Your bellboy might suggest adding Wi-Fi to hotel cars but before he'll share his idea with you, he needs to know that his input is valued, that he is valued as an employee. My days span an eclectic and fast-paced mix of strategic, financial, operational and partnership issues; Sharing a personal moment and building a connection with my team members makes all my efforts worthwhile."



### About the author

NATASHA D'SOUZA is an independent business journalist, communications strategist and presenter based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Passionate about innovation and leadership in emerging markets, she is drawn to compelling stories about disruptive ideas and game-changers in growth economies and their potential impact in the global marketplace. D'Souza's versatile experience includes stints in Dubai, London and Washington D.C. across diverse sectors including start-ups, business intelligence, media, international development and healthcare. Follow her on Twitter @ imnatashadsouza or start a conversation: hello@iamnatashadsouza.com



# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Parris Jordan

*Managing Director of HVS Consulting & Valuation - Bahamas*

**PARRIS E. JORDAN** is the Managing Director of HVS Consulting & Valuation – Bahamas. HVS is well known in the hospitality industry as one of the leading consulting firms in the world. Parris joined HVS in 2004 as an analyst of the Consulting & Valuation office in New York and became a Managing Director of the Bahamas office in 2009. Parris has conducted and overseen hundreds of consulting and valuation assignments for hotels and portfolios across the U.S., the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico. His creative, innovative, and problem-solving nature discovered a niche in an emerging region, which led him to open the HVS Consulting & Valuation office in the Bahamas. He knows firsthand how hotels and resorts can provide jobs, income, and a recurrent economic impact that improves the lives of residents, youth, governments, and businesses in emerging markets. Parris established HVS HEAT, a hospitality education and training program, which provides the means for developing tourism markets to capture a greater share of global tourism revenue by delivering excellent guest services.

**It seems as if you have been involved with tourism or hospitality for much of your life. Did you become interested in the industry at a young age?**

My parents always entertained a lot while I was growing up, and I was attracted to the hospitality industry at a very early age. Although I enjoyed the service aspect of hospitality, I was intrigued by the real estate side of hospitality and tourism; with a knack for numbers, I naturally gravitated to hospitality real estate and finance consulting.

**What was your first job in the hotel industry?**

My first job after completing high school was working at the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Training Institute where I was responsible for supporting the various hospitality and tourism instructors. I then worked at the Hilton Hotel in Trinidad before migrating to the United States to pursue my degrees.

**What attracted you to join HVS and to go into the consulting side of hospitality?**

During one of my college classes, Steve Rushmore, founder of HVS, came in as a guest speaker. I had the opportunity to listen to him and speak with him about the market studies that his firm was world renowned for conducting. I was extremely impressed by his knowledge and expertise. I did further research on Rushmore and the firm, and I spoke to past employees about the great learning opportunities that HVS provided. I wanted to learn from and work with a company that I considered to be the best in hospitality consulting. The opportunity to work with and learn from Rushmore directly was definitely an added bonus that I would never trade.

**You have more than 20 years of hospitality experience in operations, food & beverage, tourism planning, and more recently, consulting. What continues to fascinate you about the industry?**

A fairly recent trend that fascinates me about our industry is the increasing importance of travel and tourism, more specifically, the recognition of political leaders on how travel and tourism are key drivers of economic growth. Domestically, the travel and tourism industry had an economic impact of \$2 trillion in 2014; internationally, many other countries have realized the importance of travel and tourism to their respective economies and are providing support to capitalize on this trend.

**Can you think of a time when you've done something that has made the impossible become possible?**

We created a hospitality-focused training program in 2011 to assist the residents of Haiti with the basic skills necessary to enable them to work in hotels throughout the country. We were retained by a charity and created a school from scratch that graduated 120 students after six months. Three weeks prior to the completion of the program it became clearly evident that the group that hired HVS to create the program would not meet their financial

obligations pertaining to the program. In the end, the students graduated and the program was a success; many great people contributed time and resources to ensure that the program was completed and that the students benefitted.

**You have been part of hundreds of hospitality projects since you joined HVS in 2004. What have been the most challenging trends for investors in recent years?**

While I work in many different markets around the world, the most challenging trend over the past few years has been the lack of financing for hotel investors seeking development opportunities in the Caribbean and Central America. Despite very strong market-wide hotel operating performances throughout that region, securing financing for acquisitions (and more so for ground-up construction) continues to be the major issue for investors.

**How have those challenges shifted both investors' and lenders' expectations?**

The challenges pertaining to financing has significantly increased the importance of a developer/sponsor's business plan. As a result of the economic downturn in 2008, many hospitality projects became distressed and stalled, and many of the lenders were negatively affected. As such, they are paying greater attention to the sponsor's track record and ability to execute and bring the project to the finish line, including significant equity in the projects.

**Do you have any advice for investors wanting to invest in the luxury segment of the hotel industry?**

The luxury end of the market by its nature tends to present strong barriers to entry for luxury hotel development, which for the most part bodes well for the investor. However, it is very important that the developers perform detailed due diligence on the opportunity to fully understand the project. Understanding the market and, in many instances, the submarket, is of vital importance. One of the first steps

is to engage a professional company to perform a market and feasibility study on the project. To explain this differently, if you are going to invest \$50,000,000 to build a hotel, shouldn't you invest \$20,000 to make sure it's feasible?

### **What advice would you offer to those who would like to develop in emerging markets?**

With strong competition inherent within established markets, investing and developing in emerging markets can present alternative investment opportunities for hotel developers. It is important to note that the due-diligence process is even more critical to developers that are planning projects in emerging markets. It is important to understand market and product selection, lender requirements, operating costs, airlift, and the nuances of conducting business in the specific market.

### **Some markets have gone from European plans to All-Inclusive plans. Do you see revenue advantages when comparing one plan versus the other?**

The all-inclusive model continues to increase in popularity among hotel visitors and also hotel investors. From the developer and investor perspective, this model has been very successful in the Caribbean, dominated primarily by large Spanish hotel companies and

small Caribbean-owned hotel chains. There has been increasing interest from the investor community, including private equity and U.S. hotel companies, to invest in this segment. From the visitor perspective, the experience continues to improve, and operators are offering luxury all-inclusive hotels with significant options and a fixed price that attracts customers.

### **What are the key markets you are paying attention to in 2015/16, particularly in terms of foreign investment?**

Gateway cities in the U.S. continue to draw very strong interest, especially from international investors that see the U.S. as a safe haven for real estate investments, particularly luxury hotels in gateway cities. Internationally, Colombia is gathering interest, and when Cuba is opened up to U.S. travelers, we expect significant foreign capital investment.

### **What markets do you consider primed for development? And what markets do you believe are over supplied?**

For many years, Panama has experienced an influx of new hotels, which has improved the overall hotel stock and the quality of the products within the market. At the same time, it has resulted in a notable amount of new supply. I consider Cuba to be primed for investment. With the expected influx of U.S. visitors to that country, there are



currently key opportunities to develop new hotels in Cuba, as the majority of existing hotels are older properties.

### **You have innovated and branched out into programs like HEAT and events like CHICOS. What motivated you to go in that direction?**

Pertaining to the Caribbean Hotel Investment Conference and Operations Summit (CHICOS), it was really a combination of having the entrepreneurial desire and the support from HVS to build on our experience and expertise of creating and running hotel investment conferences around the world. It gave us the opportunity to provide our clients who are considering investing in the Caribbean and Central America markets with a forum to network, while educating themselves on market trends and other pertinent information. As it relates to Hospitality Education and Training (HEAT), I fell in love with teaching again while lecturing part time at New York University, and I wanted the ability to provide hospitality education and skills to less fortunate and less exposed individuals from developing countries, having myself grown up in a developing country.

### **You have been involved with hundreds of projects globally. Is there any new destination or market that piques your interest investment-wise?**

We were involved in the \$3.5-billion Baha Mar project in the Bahamas, which is the largest hospitality project in the Western Hemisphere. Although the development has encountered some issues with the scheduled date of opening, upon completion, the Baha Mar development will consist of five hotels, including two luxury hotels with all facilities opening in a single phase sometime within the near future. It will be interesting to see how this overall destination and the assets are absorbed by the market. The development is important for a number of reasons, and with the large investment from China into the Americas for such a major hospitality project, the success of this project hinges on other types of similar large-scale funding opportunities from China.



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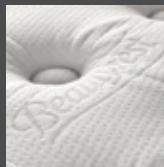
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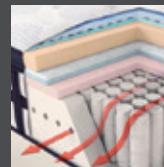
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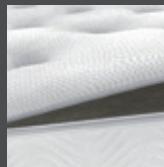
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# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Gary Henden

*General Manager Six Senses Samui, Thailand*

*By Sharon Hirschowitz*

Gary Henden joined Six Senses Hotels Resorts and Spas in 2005 as Executive Chef, and quickly climbed through the ranks of operation and executive management throughout their Asian properties where his passion for permaculture,

sustainability and innovative property design and development has grown. He talks to us about Six Senses' new Wellness and Yogic Programs, farm-to-table trends and how striving for excellence can become an obsession.

## **Will we be seeing any new and exciting developments with your brand in the near future?**

Six Senses is constantly evolving with a strong focus on wellness and sustainability, to which we've recently launched yogic programs, Arial yoga and have many more exciting initiatives to come... In addition the company continues to expand around the globe, seeing three properties opening just next year in Portugal, China and the Seychelles...

## **What key trends are you paying attention to during 2015?**

Wellness, nutrition and farm to the table foods (tracing origin and focusing on quality organic/local foods)...

## **How do you motivate your team?**

Sharing key information and encouraging empowerment at all levels, all of which creates a sense of ownership and involvement that co-drives their career...

## **Guest service has evolved the last few years. What has been your biggest challenge keeping up with guest expectations?**

Guests expectations are ever

increasing and changing, which is partly down to the huge amount of competition and choice that's on offer. Our main focus is to continually improve and redefine our product and services, whilst keeping true to our brand standards and core values.

## **How important a role does technology play in improving the quality of guest service?**

Technology is playing an ever increasing role in hospitality, both in improving operational systems and services within the guest rooms. High speed internet and connectivity are a given, guests now expect convenience apps/software to control the likes of ambiance, temperature and entertainment channels from their own devices.

## **Has the interest in experience-based travel had an impact on your hotel brand?**

Creating innovative and fun experiences is something we strive to achieve, setting us apart from the more conservative luxury operators.

## **What new skills or personality traits are you looking for when**

## **recruiting a new team member?**

We rate personality and attitude over experience in most cases, as skill sets can be taught.

## **How has social media influenced the way you interact with customers?**

Social media has increased our guest interactions on many new fronts, enabling more transparency and information to base decisions upon.

## **What are your goals for the next year?**

We have many goals for next year based around product and service improvements, which include several exciting projects to upgrade and rejuvenate our guest rooms and common areas.

## **Do you have any advice for someone wanting to make the shift into the luxury hotel industry?**

Be prepared for a change in life style evolved around pleasing your guests, where passion for excellence can often turn into obsession.





**Why did you call your company “Rainmaker” and what do you do?**

Before Rainmaker had a single customer – or even a proper business plan – my partner, Bruce Barfield, and I shared a common goal: to create a company that made good things happen. We wanted to “make it rain” for our clients, and the business name was born from that sense of purpose.

At its core, Rainmaker is a software solution that helps hotels optimize profits. We’re a team of engineers and mathematicians that understand the nuances of the luxury sector. Our products and services factor in market data and all of the assets that drive dollars to a hotel’s bottom line. “Cutting-edge” is an over-used term, but our technology truly pushes the envelope. We give hotel executives reliable forecasts and actionable insight to optimize their pricing and win group business at maximum profit.

Almost twenty years since Rainmaker’s inception, good things are definitely happening for our customers.

**Rainmaker is one of the fastest growing companies in Atlanta. What's been the key to your success?**

Only 10 percent of hotels worldwide capitalize on profit optimization

software, which is a boggling statistic. Hotels leave money on the table, year over year, because of uninformed or ill-informed pricing decisions.

I think our quick growth reflects the “aha” moment that is finally taking hold in the hotel business – and especially in the luxury sector. Hoteliers are wising up to the ROI of revenue management solutions, and seeing the untapped potential that Rainmaker offers their bottom line.

Rainmaker’s flagship solution, GuestREV, for example, is built on proven forecasting and optimization algorithms. It gives a hotel accurate forecasts for different types of demand, as well as optimal pricing – all while factoring in uncertainties and base costs. That leads to both top- and bottom-line growth.

It’s complemented by our Revcaster solution, which is an integrated price comparison tool that looks at market-specific pricing trends to help hoteliers monitor parity, maximize ADR and drive higher profits.

And GroupREV has become the “secret sauce” for group sales managers. We help hotels improve group room revenue by more than 8 percent on average.

### **What's the biggest pricing pitfall you see made by luxury hoteliers?**

Most hotels have multiple profit centers. But many hoteliers fall into a simple rate trap, and undervalue potential revenue from amenities like F&B and spa. Rainmaker is the first solution to factor “Total Guest Value” into the optimization

process. We take the total profitability of each guest segment into account, and rate accordingly. It's a more informed, dynamic approach to rate setting that can make a huge impact.

### **Thoughtful, personalized service is a cornerstone of the hotel business. With that in mind, can technology and the luxury hospitality industry really coexist?**

Absolutely. The luxury sector is grasping the ways technology can improve customer interaction, rather than replace it. For example, the traditional front-desk check-in is being transformed thanks to smart devices, minimizing the need for a sterile counter experience. Staff can now welcome guests as if they were inviting them into their home, and personally escort them to their room while handling check-in on the move.

Rainmaker’s GuestREV Mobile app is a great example of how tech can improve response times, too, meeting the instant gratification demands of today’s travelers. The tool gives an executive instant access to pricing functions and reports in real-time via their smartphone or tablet. GroupREV empowers hotel sales teams to negotiate with real-time information in hand so they can confidently land business. The proof is in the pudding: our clients see an 11 percent boost in deal conversions on average.

### **Tells us about the corporate culture at Rainmaker?**

“Delivering Happiness” is our cultural touchstone. It’s the mantra

that guides every member of the Rainmaker team, and each year, we publish a book that captures the ways our customers and associates do exactly that.

Customers are a true extension of the Rainmaker family. We host an annual user conference at a luxury retreat, so we can make sure they get many “value adds” from their association with us. The conferences include panels, educational talks, and breakout sessions, and have become a great place to share best practices.

We are committed to delivering happiness beyond the walls of our offices, too, which is why we donate time and resources to great organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Make-a-Wish Foundation.

### **Data security is a hot topic at the moment. What should hoteliers be thinking about now to save them headaches down the road?**

Data breaches have become a matter of “when,” not “if.” It’s a new reality that every industry is working to navigate, including hospitality. And because technology is in constant evolution, it’s close to impossible to promise a perfect safeguard against present, let alone future, threats. When every protection has been employed, customers return to the companies that demonstrate sincerity and transparency in times of crisis. In these situations, planning for the worst and having a solid communications protocol in place trump “high-tech” every time.

# SPOTLIGHT ON



## **Antonio Cuellar** Award Winning Hotel and Resort Photographer

*By Sharon Hirschowitz*

**ANTONIO CUELLAR** is a highly sought-after hotel and resort photographer, most recently honored by the American Society of Media Photographers “ASMP” as best of 2013. He has offices in New York and Miami and travels worldwide for clients, with recent assignments taking him to Mexico, Paris, China, Dubai and London. Antonio shares some of the behind-the-scenes efforts that go into taking that winning picture, and his passion for his art.

**You have won numerous awards, including being honored by the American Society of Media Photographers “ASMP” as the best of 2013. Can you tell us a little more about this?**

ASMP gives out this award yearly and it is based not only on image

quality but on technical and logistical challenges photographers need to overcome to accomplish their project.

I had the pleasure of visiting Cartagena back in 2008 for my friend’s wedding. I had not visited Cartagena in a long time and I soon realized the city had changed drastically since I last visited. Tourism was booming and there was a surge in the hospitality industry like no other city in South America. All of a sudden luxury boutique hotels were being built where there once were 15th century homes and they spared no expense! Because of the nature of what I do, I knew I had to come back and capture its beauty. Soon, what was supposed to be a single trip turned into a 16 visit project that extended over two years, in which

I photographed 18 boutique hotels, 16 restaurants, and 12 museums and point of interests.

I was determined to capture 200 images of the old city and its surrounding fortifications. This determination was tested many times due to challenging logistics, bureaucracy and high production costs. As we progressed, city officials became increasingly interested in my work, ultimately assigning a government official to help scout locations and coordinate logistics and provided security when needed.

**When did you first know that you wanted to specialize in photographing luxury hotels?**

Most of the photographers in my field are hired to capture an architectural record of the space or

structure. I didn't want to stop there and started focusing on lighting mood as well. I wanted my images to create a place people fantasize about visiting and soon realized that lighting mood was a very important aspect in recreating this feeling. The style that I started developing became very appealing to luxury and upscale hotels. It was a style that took full advantage of digital technologies but yet felt classic in many ways.

I became obsessed with improving my lighting techniques in order to create my vision of the perfect image. One that not only captures the best angle, but also showcased the mood by focusing on light. So I began putting a lot of work into my productions until I was satisfied with the results. It turns out, recreating cozy and romantic environments required a lot of work on location and in post-production.

It seemed to me that luxury hotels were the only ones willing to go to the extent of this production in order to increase sales. Thanks to the amount of travel that I do, I have made a big effort in becoming more practical so I have been making changes to simplify production. My image production and post-production has become more effective in recent years and I am able to produce better quality images in less time and with less gear.

**Why do you think it is important for a hotel to use a professional photographer? What is the difference between a reasonably priced photographer and one who charges a higher rate? What questions should an hotelier ask when looking for a good photographer?**

Historically hotels have heavily relied on name recognition for healthy

bookings. Even though this still is an important factor, travelers are expecting top quality images to match established luxury brands when doing online research. High quality photography is a primary factor unestablished brands need to consider when attempting to break into the market and compete with established brands.

The difference in price from a budget photographer to an established photographer with a lot of experience in Hospitality is a question that comes up frequently. The reality is that, unless you are dealing with someone such as an AD agency who is familiar with the extensive work that goes into the production of a great image, selling photography services is not an easy task. What is frustrating is that this will always become clear to the hotelier after the fact. I have never performed a job in which a client concluded that I have an easy job, or that my work is not worth the investment. It is not just about expensive equipment, I have a 3 step production process in which I approach all my jobs and they all involve extensive work.

It is a common mistake of hoteliers to expect a commercial photographer to deliver 100 images in order for them to have options to pick. This is what we call the "wedding photography approach", as the production value of wedding images shot in a journalist style are absolutely minimal. In reality this would be a very expensive session. Commercial photography productions take a lot of prep time and it is not cost effective to have this approach. Therefore I would always question the quality of the work of a photographer who suggests this approach or agrees to it. If the hotel wants to have the approach in which they have options to choose from, my advice is to ask the photographer to perform a scouting day prior to the actual shoot, in which he/she will deliver a large volume of images showcasing different angles for each area with little production value. The most common practice is for the hotelier to be an active participant during the photo session.

There are several steps an hotelier can take to ensure they are hiring the right hospitality photographer. Without a doubt, the most



important step would be to ask for their online portfolio in order to see if their style is a good fit for their brand. Ask the photographer about their experience in hospitality and maybe some recommendations. Chances are during the interview most questions should be coming from the photographer. Most experienced photographers will try to collect extensive information in order to determine what can be accomplished in the facility and what your expectations are in order to deliver an accurate quote. Finally ask them about their work process. If a photographer is only going to show the day of the job and take 30 images by himself, much like in the scouting process, I would definitely question the quality of their work.

**Can you explain the production process? What percentage of your work is done on the computer and how much is done on site?**

As I mentioned earlier I have a 3 step approach to most of my jobs. The pre-production stage involves meeting with the clients in order to coordinate logistics and discuss ideas. It also involves a very extensive location scouting in order to determine the best angles and what the best time of day is to photograph them. And finally meeting with the stylist to determine what props are needed or allowed by the brand guidelines in order to help accentuate the existing decor.

If the first stage is done properly this would mean



we would have a detailed shooting schedule during production and no time would be wasted in scouting for angles. The stylist would also be more prepared to deal with her job and all the props for that particular day would be readily available. The focus during production should be lighting, propping and coordination with talent should models be involved.

Because of my unique approach to photography and my commitment to high quality of work, most of the time I am in charge of post-production. My style involves several techniques such as light painting, where multiple images are blended together in post-production. So, to answer your question, my work is heavily dependent of post-production. However all steps in the process are equally important.

#### **How can a hotel prepare for a shoot to ensure they get the most out of the pictures?**

This is a very good question and I believe partially answered in the previous question while discussing pre-production. My preference is for the hotel to be involved in the production and pre-production process. Discussing ideas and logistics is crucial to achieve better results and exceed client's expectations. I might determine that the best time to photograph an area of the hotel, such as a lounge, could be dusk, but this could be the worst time due to the popularity of that area at that time. Collaboration and planning are key in a successful production. Being present as a semi-active participant during the production process is also key.

#### **What is a favorite recent image you have shot recently? Can you describe the creative process behind it?**

A lot of photographers fall in the trap of becoming attached to images that present the biggest technical challenge, or ones that required the most work. If this was the case photographing the San Felipe Castle in Cartagena would be without a doubt one of them. This image took 8 hours to photograph and involved, the closing of a busy streets, 2 power generators, 6 assistants and even

armed security. The results were spectacular and the image won awards.

The reality is that I feel I have matured my skills to the point where the lighting and technical aspect has become second nature and I am more focused on capturing beautiful spaces and telling a story while doing so. Nothing excites me more than a positive reaction from an hotelier when I deliver an image that can help boost sales.





## *The Evolution of Luxury:*

# DESIGN LEADS THE WAY

*By Barbara Best-Santos*

There was a time when checking into a luxury hotel meant checking into a world of extravagance and opulence. Perception dictated that the more gilded the interior and the more that was offered, the more luxurious the experience. The luxury hotel experience after all has always been aspirational, designed to provide the guest with an experience they could not get anywhere else. Though that environment can and does still exists today, the luxury market has evolved and peeled back layers of lavish extravagance to create a new, modern definition of luxury that is keenly influenced by consumer trends, economic factors, technology, cultural influences and wellness.

Looking back, the summer of 2009 marked an era of change for the luxury market. Hotel occupancy rates nationwide hovered at 60 percent and revenue dropped by nearly 20 percent that same season.\* In response, luxury markets in general seemed to adopt a more discreet and humble sensibility. There is now a more restrained attitude. These economic shifts have given birth to the lifestyle hotel movement that has seen a massive diversification of choices flooding the market with new independent hotels and boutique mini-brands authenticity, personalization and unique experiences reflected through design.

**The evolving definition of “Luxury”**

The luxury market aspires to offer spaces that no one else can replicate. As brands approach design projects, they need to tap into the heartbeat of what makes a guest feel extraordinarily special and deliver on that message. More specifically, brands need to ask: What do today’s guests aspire to experience? What can they NOT get in their everyday life, nor from other hotels? What would they pay a bit more for? For many today, a luxurious moment would be defined by the time one can spend away from the frenzy of everyday life and the ability to seek out quiet places to recharge and strip away distractions. Infuse those capabilities into the right setting, with impeccable service, and you have the recipe for a

perfectly luxurious escape.

### The Technology Conundrum

Today, technology is intrinsic to every aspect of our lives – It's almost akin to an addiction, the more we use it the more we need it and it's really hard to let it go. And the speed with which advances are brought to market often brings challenges as well. Hotels have traditionally had a hard time providing the basics to meet ever growing guest expectations and not overinvesting in soon-to-be-obsolete tech. With a luxury property, the bar is set even higher and the guest will expect everything that they have at home or work, and more.

How can design help meet this challenge? Luxury should mean having the best in available technology, make it completely accessible and easy to use and then make it all disappear when you need a time out...leaving a beautiful sanctuary in which to recharge personally rather than electronically. A tall order for sure. The trick is to design both options in one environment without falling victim to the age-old trap of failing to deliver because you're trying to be everything for everyone.

### Cultural Influences and Heritage

The story often goes that a guest wakes up in a hotel and the only thing that tells them where they are is the local context of the room art. Those days are gone for most high end hotels, but today's savvy traveler is pressing for deeper and more meaningful connections during their stay. Though there has been a long tradition in the luxury segment of having grand hotels arise from some historic era or location with a strong tie to the property's history, it is certainly more of a challenge with newer properties and those with less inspiring settings. There is an opportunity to dive into the story behind each project and understand the origins, location and personality so as to imbue every aspect of the property with elements that are consistent with, and referential to, a unique story. The opportunity to connect with the guest goes beyond the visual aspects of the



built environment continuing through food and beverage offerings, educational experiences and staff engagement. In the successful luxury environment, the guest is truly transported through a one-of-a-kind journey that stays with them long after they leave, and ideally brings guests back.

### Health, Wellness and Sustainability

Another major aspect of today's lifestyle that is impacting hotels at all levels is the movement toward healthier living. With people focusing not just on exercise and nutrition, but on holistic wellbeing, it serves as a challenge to the luxury sector to up the ante. The baseline expectations of fitness and spa offerings are not enough and there have been tremendous advancements in the areas of healthier building and finish materials, an emphasis on indoor and outdoor connections, fitness opportunities outside of the traditional box, biophilia, spa-like guestrooms and of course food and beverage offerings. With everyone on the bandwagon, how does the luxury market offer even more?

It once again comes back to experiences that eclipse what we can get elsewhere. Creating a sanctuary of health that is seamlessly embedded in every aspect of the property. We are already seeing the idea of personalized health profiles that are used to curate a guest's stay and beyond. There is an uptick in medical and wellness focused travel in the luxury sector. This holistic approach with the extension of services

beyond check-in and check-out will be expanded. Understanding how this guest relationship communicates with the built environment is very important, especially for continuity in messaging and service delivery.

As they say, the only thing certain is change. Designing for the luxury market is both challenging and rewarding, as the bar is set precariously high in terms of delivering exceptional experiences, maintaining brand identity and meeting evolving guests' needs. Having a keen understanding of all of these elements is essential to designing aspirational spaces that are positioned to provide sustained success for both branded and independent luxury properties.

Resource. Hugo Martin, LA Times.  
<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/03/business/fi-hotels3>



#### About the author

Barbara Best-Santos is the San Francisco-based Hospitality Director for the Northwest region of Gensler, the global architecture and design firm. Joining Gensler in 2008 after having co-directed her own firm, Best Santos Studio, Barbara has achieved a distinguished career in interior design. Barbara specializes in boutique hotels, spas, and restaurants, as well as large-scale hotels and resorts. She has experience working on projects both in the U.S. and abroad, in locations such as China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Guam. [www.gensler.com](http://www.gensler.com).



When I got to my ocean view suite at the One and Only Palmilla Resort in May there was a sample of fruit in a square, creamy coloured ceramic bowl; a green apple, some red grapes, a perfect yellow grapefruit. None of them struck my fancy so I left them there.

The next day I came back to my

room mid-day and the maid had placed a banana next to the other fruit. Now we're talking, I thought. There's my first morning bite to go along with my much-needed shot from the in-room espresso machine.

I had my coffee and my banana the next morning while I fiddled with my laptop, then went for a full

breakfast. That afternoon, I came back to find a fresh banana again nestled in with the other fruit. I also found a scattering of fresh flowers on the bed and a small, ceramic cactus with a card explaining the features of a plant known as *Opuntia robusta*, also known as the prickly pear.



# SAN JOSE DEL CABO, MEXICO

*It was just a banana. But it spoke volumes*

*By Jim Byers*

The next day, I once again had a fresh banana in my fruit bowl.

There are a lot of big reasons to visit a place like One and Only Palmilla; a large, beautiful beach, a wide variety of truly luscious restaurants, a wavy, colourful day bed on your patio stacked with brilliant blue, green and orange cushions, and a 95-foot

yacht you can charter as you sail the Sea of Cortez, sipping on Veuve Clicquot and splashing at regular intervals in the deep-blue waters.

There also are a million small details that separate a place like this from the competition; things like a golf cart to take you to the beach, an in-room jar of special-made tequila

you can dip into anytime you like, lovely blue agave bath products, a bar of dark chocolate studded with pumpkin seeds, walnuts and dried apricots on your table when you arrive late at night after a cocktail at the fire pit overlooking the ocean. Not to mention bananas.

The property, for those unaware, was

badly damaged by Hurricane Odile in September of last year. Working with top designers, the folks at The One and Only resort team managed to get things back in about a half-a-year; remarkable given the challenges and the “horrible” shape the property was in.

A first-time visitor arrived in May to see a resort that looked both new and established at the same time, with a variety of white-washed units with red-tile roofs spilling down gentle hills towards the blue sea. The landscaping is as good as any resort I’ve visited, with almond trees and mangoes and palms and riotous bougainvillea.

The food here is utterly top-notch. At SEARED, which is overseen by celebrity chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, I try to sneak the citrus-topped burrata under my shirt to take home to

my room overlooking the ocean but am caught red, or in this case, white handed. I don’t much like polenta, but the dish they served at SEARED had a lovely, crispy coating. The jalapeno fritter was spicy and tender and light, and the lamb filet was almost like a dessert; sweet and tender with caramelized onions.

At breakfast I sat at a table overlooking the Sea of Cortez and dined on Sonoran shredded beef with scrambled eggs, onions and red and yellow peppers, along with tiny potatoes, cherry tomatoes sliced just so and creamy, fresh avocado. They had San Francisco-quality sourdough toast, served with smoky pineapple jam in a tiny, adorable jar.

There appeared to be staff everywhere but the service never felt stuffy. I was later told they have 900-plus employees for 173 rooms.

They have the workers, but they also have the right attitude.

Managing Director Peter Dowling says the motto here is “what you want, when you want it.”

“Some hotels might say ‘Oh, it’s 11 a.m., we don’t serve ice cream yet.’ That won’t happen here. If you wake up late and want your bacon and eggs at 2 p.m., you can have it.”

My room was a suite with a dark wood headboard featuring intricate carvings on each side. The room featured an arching ceiling, a huge, round mirror and leather straps on the bar and dresser versus simple wood; another bespoke touch I appreciated. There was an enormous sofa big enough for the starting lineup of the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team to share, plus a gorgeous rain fall shower and a bathroom decorated in Mexican mosaics of light green and muted



*Sunrise at One and Only Palmilla*



*An oceanfront suite at One and Only Palmilla*

yellow. My large verandah/porch had a day bed that I slept on one night, listening to the sound of the waves crash on the beach below.

The spa was wonderful. But I was mostly taken by the chance at my first-ever barber straight razor shave. The fellow poked and prodded and steamed my face and got every stray bit of graying hair he could find in an hour-long session that had me drifting off to sleep. I woke up just in time for an offer of a glass of fine Scotch or tequila. Thanks, I said but not at 10a.m.

The beach on the south end of the property goes on for miles, while there's a smaller, protected stretch of sand along with beautiful coves on the eastern edge. Pelicans could be spotted soaring and swooping in the air and perched on the jagged black rocks as they eyeballed a midday snack.

The restaurant coffee could use a bit of an upgrade, and the beaches were a bit stormy when I was there; making it tough to swim. But the pools were magnificent; free form beauties lined with pink, blue and green tiles that shimmered in the sun as you swam underwater; pulling you along in a series of sparkles like nothing I've ever seen in a resort pool.

On the way to the airport after a three-day visit that was far too short, one of the women I was travelling with asked if I'd noticed the sewing kits. I hadn't.

"Oh, it was amazing," she said. "There was a kit in my room when I got there. But the next day I noticed they had taken stock of the clothes and colours I had in the closet and brought back a new kit with thread that matched my wardrobe. They even had pre-threaded some of the

needles with the right colours."

**FACT BOX** One and Only Palmilla has a variety of programs, including a kids club. You also can learn to surf or play tennis or golf. I loved the cooking and margarita-tasting session at a wonderful nearby restaurant and farm, Los Tamarindos. Website: [www.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://www.oneandonlyresorts.com)

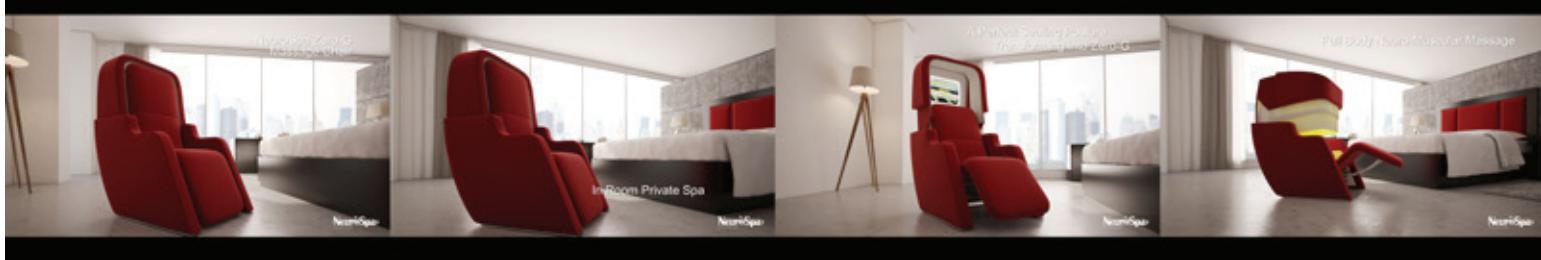


#### **About the author**

Jim Byers is a freelance travel writer based in Toronto. He served five years as Travel Editor at the Toronto Star, the largest paper in Canada. His work can be found regularly in Canadian newspapers and magazines, including Zoomer magazine, WestJet magazine and others. He also contributes to the Houston Chronicle, Dallas Morning News and The Australian newspaper. Check his blogs at [www.jimbyerstravel.com](http://www.jimbyerstravel.com) and follow him on Twitter @jimbyerstravel.

# LUXURY SUITE IN-ROOM SPA NEUROSPA ZERO-G

*World-wide patented Canadian  
Scientific discovery*



GILBERT BOUCHARD, President and owner of NeuroSpa, talks about the NeuroSpa Zero-G Massage Chair, a "Spa in a room" massage capsule with incredible relaxation and health benefits that hotels can offer to guests as a possible amenity or upgrade. Today's travelers often find it difficult to find the time to go to the spa, so appreciate an in-room sanctuary where they can recharge and heal. The chair has a

dual function, using the same space as a normal recliner chair, and then transforms into the in-room spa when desired. In addition, potential guests can view the Zero-G animation while selecting a room online.

**Mr. Bouchard, how did you and your team develop the NeuroSpa?**

My background is in music acoustics where I studied, learned and discovered

the tactile effects of music and how the sensation of sound, frequencies and vibration effect the human body. This led to a realization that music and its effect on inner body sensations has a very therapeutic effect on the overall well-being of a person. As people were claiming pain reduction, anxiety reduction and improved sleep, we soon realized its tremendous wellness potential and patented the Multi-Frequency- Acoustic-Vibration-

# MASSAGE CHAIR



Transmission Method and System worldwide.

## When was the first NeuroSpa created?

6 years ago we launched the original NeuroSpa bed and it became an immediate success in the most renowned Canadian Spa's like Ovarium, Spa Eastman, Chateau Frontenac etc... They have all been very successful at selling NeuroSpa sessions at the same

price as a human massage without reducing human massage sales: it is a complementary service. What was added to the original experience on the NeuroSpa Energizing Station? We created and added Synchronized Chroma Therapy: Every musical note corresponds to a specific color (more than 1200 different colors are available). Each color is projected onto a canvas in the form of light. The canvas is created using artistic paint and a

special technique that allows the light to react and transform, similar to the way in which nature and the outdoor environment reacts as natural daylight changes. We also added Air Knit suspension to the zero gravity posture creating a sensation of floating in the air.

## After 6 years, who are the NeuroSpa users?

Thousands of professional centers



including Spa's, Medical Clinics, Dental Clinics, Chiropractors, Massage Therapists, Aestheticians, etc... The world renowned Montreal Cardiologists Institute offers NeuroSpa sessions in their preventative care center. Google, Reebok, Ubisoft and many other company's employees are using it every day as well as people who use NeuroSpa at home.

#### What is new on the NeuroSpa Zero-G?

It needs less space; it is the first Zero Gravity Recliner to use the same space as a normal recliner chair. When in use, it actually uses less space than a typical recliner. Instead of just lifting your legs 90 degrees and moving your back 30 degrees, the zero-G Chair uses a sliding mechanism which transforms the chair from a perfect seating posture to the Zero-G horizontal position. We also used the air knit suspension to make you feel like floating in the air.

#### What will be the benefit for Luxury Hotels?

The spectacular, motorized NeuroSpa Zero-G Massage Chair is a highly attractive amenity for any luxury hotel, as NOBODY has it at home presently! As you know, travelers are stressed and tired, especially business travelers, and they don't have much time to go to the spa. Viewing the Zero-G animation while selecting a room will make it very attractive to their clients. It is a great marketing tool as we are able to personalize the 3-D animation for each hotel using their own décor, suites and rooms.

#### What are the benefits for their clients?

Improves sleep, deeply relaxes the body, relieves chronic pain, decreases stress and anxiety. Just a 5 to 15 minutes session before a meeting, dinner or outing increases your energy level and revitalizes your senses. Best of all, the Zero-G recliner is not only an "In-Room-Spa" it can replace one of your standard furniture pieces as it is incredibly comfortable for everyday use including reading, relaxing, watching TV. You can also connect personal devices and the chair will generate a neuro muscular massage and chromatherapy perfectly synchronized with your music.

Hoteliers located anywhere in the world who would like to trial the NeuroSpa-G Massage Chair can ask for more information here [luxuryhotelassociation.org/neurospa](http://luxuryhotelassociation.org/neurospa). The chair is easy to carry, has a unique magnetic assembly in three minutes and state of the art knock down technology, making it easy for one person to demo easily. See the NeuroSpa Zero-G Massage chair here <http://www.neurospa.ca/index.php/en/achat-location/residential>



We create one-of-a-kind signature scents that connect brands with guests, in deeper more memorable ways.

What does your brand smell like?



Air/Aroma

[www.air-aroma.com](http://www.air-aroma.com)

# INSPIRING TEA ARTISTRY

True handcrafted tea has a story, a journey that reflects the local flavors of its homeland, infused with unique experiences and influences gathered along the way, and transformed into the purest, most finely tuned blend of tea. Imagination is where it all begins, say the Master Tea Blenders at Rishi Tea, as they give us a glimpse into their craft, sharing the art of palate memory in creating a flavor profile, how hoteliers can create an impressive tea menu, and just how many cups of tea they drink a day.

## How do you create a tea blend?

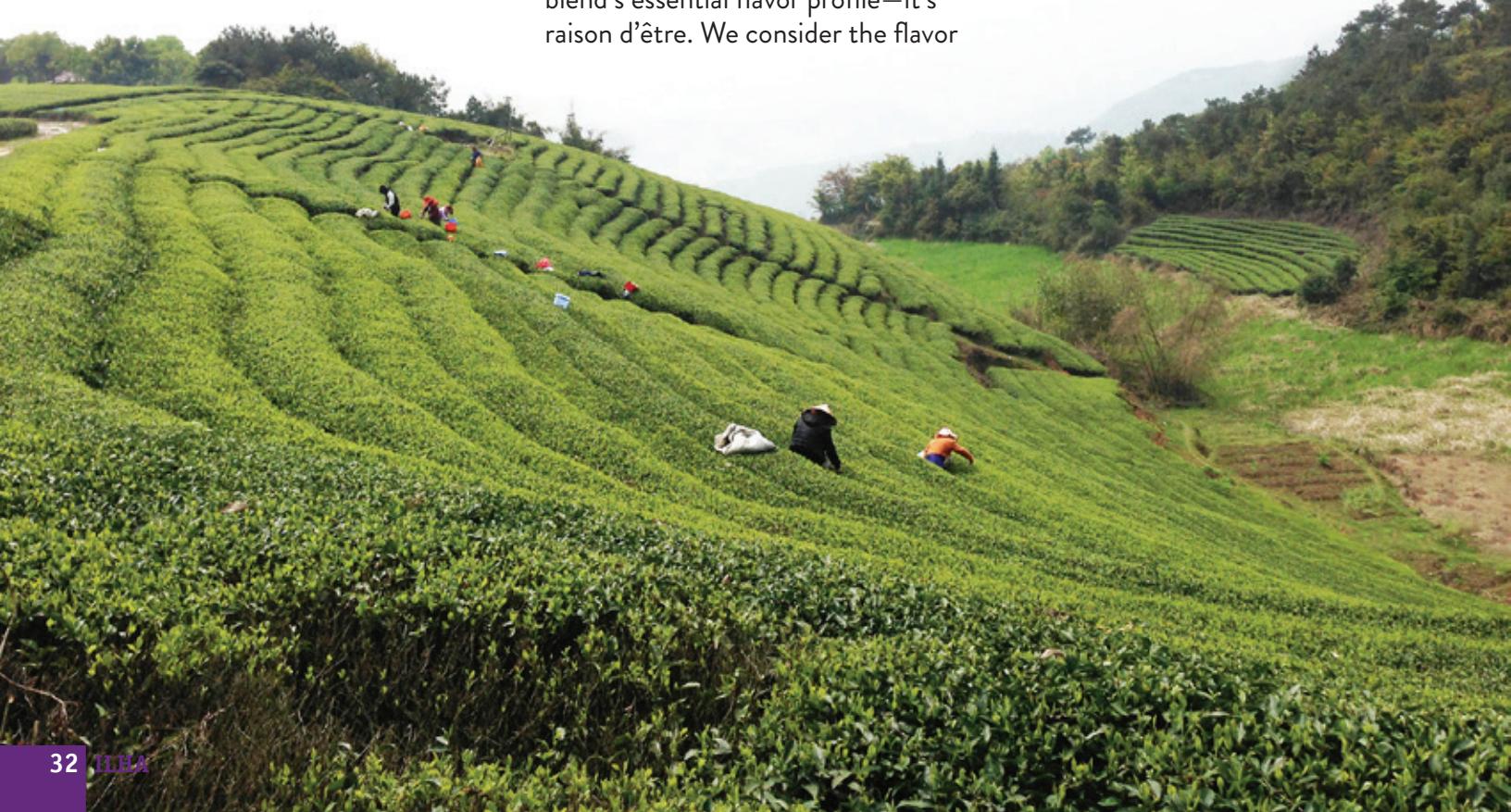
### What is the process? How long does it take to get to the right blend?

The genesis of a new blend always begins in the imagination. Our blenders have an incredibly rich palate memory, developed over the course of years of intensive daily tastings and blending exercises. With hundreds of organic ingredients in our repertoire—most of which we actively source from multiple unique origins—our range of flavor profiles is truly vast. In developing a new blend, we often begin with a collaborative, creative discussion on the potential directions for the blend's essential flavor profile—it's *raison d'être*. We consider the flavor

and energy of the core ingredients, then debate which exotic or curious layers of mid and high aromatic notes to introduce as complements. The whole process can take minutes or days, weeks or months—however long it takes to achieve a perfect balance that satisfies our entire tasting panel. We are proud of our originality and creativity when it comes to creating new blends.

### What does it mean to be “certified organic”?

Rishi has been an organic tea company from our very foundation in the late 1990s, before there





existed a standard for organic certified tea in the U.S. market. We believe that organic agriculture is so important for humanity to rediscover in order to protect the long-term health of farmers and consumers, and to help restore ecological balance. For us, being certified organic means that a tea, a farm, or a partner is accredited to the USDA NOP organic standards. Today, over 95% of Rishi's products are certified organic. In essence, organic tea and herb farming means that any use of pesticides, fungicides, and chemical fertilizers is prohibited. Farms undergo annual inspection by independent certifying agencies to maintain an active organic certificate. As a direct trade tea company, Rishi complements these independent reports with our own quality control

checks made by our buyers at the tea farms throughout the harvest season. Additionally, Rishi is itself USDA NOP certified organic as an importer and manufacturer. We also undergo annual inspections to ensure that our importation procedures, warehousing, blending, and labeling are all in compliance with regulations. With our firm footing in organics, we are excited and inspired by the rising popularity of organic foods throughout North America.

#### **How would a hotel or hospitality operation approach the crafting of their menu?**

The world of tea is just as broad and diverse as that of fine wine, distinguished by the hundreds of cultivars, growing regions, and artisanal processing methods that

make each single-origin tea unique. Add the hundreds of exotic organic botanicals like ginger, hibiscus, lemongrass, valerian or lavender that are artfully harmonized into delicious, balanced herbal teas, and you have a limitless palette of flavors to discover. So we often say that the more we learn about tea, the more we realize there is yet to learn.

With such a range of profiles to work with, we typically recommend that a hospitality operation consider approaching their tea menu much like a wine or craft beer menu, with a core set of bestsellers including classic black teas, green teas, and caffeine-free herbal teas that remains more or less permanent, complemented by a healthy rotating seasonal set where trending ingredients and flavors can take their turn in the spotlight. With

tea, it is important that the energy of the blend pairs well with the local climate and season. Our staff, thoroughly trained in the arts of tea, are here to help you with that.

In its ancient past, tea was traditionally consumed as food and taken as a medicine before it became the exalted beverage of the East that it is today. Many teas and herbs have an effect on the mind or body energy. For hotels, it is important to consider the various occasions in which their guests will enjoy a pot of tea, and to offer teas that will not only taste delicious but leave the drinker feeling refreshed as well.

#### How do you make the perfect cup of tea? Is there a method, or is it personal preference?

The secret to brewing and serving truly excellent tea involves a combination of several elements. When the stars align, the results can be extraordinary. The range of aromas and flavors that can be expressed from a single botanical, *Camellia sinensis*, is unbelievable broad. With such diversity, there is no perfect, go-to standard for brewing tea well—it is more important to develop a set of senses and skills that will enable you to determine the best method for each type of tea. It begins with selecting the most premium quality organic tea leaves you can find, fresh in season and made with care by artisan farmers. Next, find yourself a source of fresh spring or filtered water. Since a brewed cup of tea is made up mostly of water, the purity of the water itself is crucial to unlock the complex flavors and aromas of your tea. Third, choose a set of quality teaware that complements the style of tea you have chosen to brew. Consider the

### MENU SUGGESTIONS

#### TEA DURING OR AFTER A MEAL:

Ruby Oolong  
Green Tea Mint  
Chocolate Cinnamon

#### MORNING AWAKENING:

English Breakfast  
Earl Grey  
Turmeric Ginger



#### POST-WORKOUT REJUVENATION:

Blueberry Hibiscus  
Tangerine Ginger  
Matcha Super Green

#### SPA & RELAXATION:

Lemon Verbena  
Valerian Dream  
White Tea Rose Mélange

cultural harmony between the origin of your tea and teaware. Finally, and most important, cultivate a positive energy and mindfulness as you begin to prepare the tea. Rinse your teaware with warm water to purify the vessels before you begin brewing the tea. Empathize with the tea leaves to sense the appropriate water temperature and infusion time that will work best to coax out the most complex flavors. The process of brewing tea essentially involves rehydrating tea leaves that were originally dried during their processing at the farm. There is so much freedom in the methods that can be called upon as you brew. This artful, intentional preparation of tea is known as gongfu or “skill” in many tea cultures.

#### How important is your sense of taste?

We use all of our senses in the Rishi Herb Lab where our creative experimentations and product development run nonstop.

Paramount of course are the senses of smell and taste. Both are equally important when it comes to tea. It is now common knowledge that our ability to taste is dependent not just on our taste buds but also our olfactory receptors. We can even detect aroma via olfactory sensors located in the back of our soft palate, and on the roof of the mouth. Ever heard a wine snob or tea geek slurp when they taste? They are ‘aspirating’ the liquid by drawing in oxygen very rapidly, which releases the aromatic molecules in the tea or wine. The aroma is sensed via the olfactory receptors located inside the roof of your mouth. With tea, we often ‘taste’ with our eyes before we take a sip. It begins



with the dry ingredients. They should be wholesome, pure, and richly textured. More important is the infusion color of the brew. Whatever the hue, the liquor should be luminous and attractive. From the golden saffron color of turmeric

tea to the brilliant ruby infusion of hibiscus, the colors of tea are a treasure to behold.

The sense of touch comes into play during the brewing process. The teapots, cups, and vessels used to

brew tea leaves can add a range of natural textures, from clay to celadon to the finest porcelain, that enhance the ritual of tea.

And what about the sense of hearing? Any tea connoisseur will tell you that the sound of a kettle on rolling boil is never far away.

For additional information about the experience of taste, check out the work of Dr. Virginia Utermohlen at [www.tastescience.com](http://www.tastescience.com)

#### **How many cups of tea a day do Rishi tea blenders drink on average?**

We professionally taste (by the spoonful, not the cup) somewhere between 75 -100 teas per day, depending on the season. At the peak time during the spring and summer crops, we may taste well over 100 teas. We are true tea maniacs and cannot help but sip around the clock!

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# SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LUXURY HOTEL INDUSTRY

*By Walter Schaeerer*

As travel bloggers, we depend on invitations from hotels, since the revenue generated by the blog is not enough to cover our travel expense. And if you want to publish a high quality blog, expect the travel costs to mount up... To make sure that the hotels fit our design-and-boutique hotel niche, we do online research before approaching them about a collaboration. We were surprised to find as we did how few of the hotels appreciate the value of a good social network presence. If a hotel is not represented attractively on all channels it

simply will not be found. What follows are a few constructive examples and recommendations on how to get found:

Ever since advertisers discovered that online channels let them measure the effectiveness of advertising campaigns in detail (Google AdWords, Facebook Atlas, etc.), their ad placements in conventional newspapers have continued to drop. As a result, publishers have seen their revenues collapse, and they can no longer afford to pay their writers. The travel industry has also been hit especially hard by this



**Lobby in the Swiss Bernerhof in Gstaad.  
“Wander Hotelier” Thomas Frei organizes  
an annual social media meet-up**

trend. Margins have been shrinking for years due to Internet price transparency and hotel ad budgets have gone down right along with them. It also makes it increasingly difficult for hotels to get the word out to a wide audience with professional photojournalism coverage.

#### In come the travel bloggers.

Travel bloggers are aficionados of travel who like nothing better than sharing experiences with their readership. True, they

typically reach a smaller audience than a newspaper does, but the upside is that their subjectively-colored travel reports can be found on the Internet for years instead of disappearing with the next batch of recycled newspapers. Even better, their write-ups can contain links to the hotel website and they can be shared on social networks, with consequent important effect on search engine optimization (SEO): Search engine algorithms rank links to subject matter-related websites highly and the formula also takes “social signals” from social networks into consideration. The more often a website is linked and talked about (i.e. cited) the more popular it must be, so goes the algorithmic logic, and hence the site will rank that much higher on the search engine hit list (the search engine results page or SERP). This can be expected to lead to more visitors to a hotel’s website and, provided it sports good looks and functionality (e.g., optimized for mobile), presto! more guests are attracted.

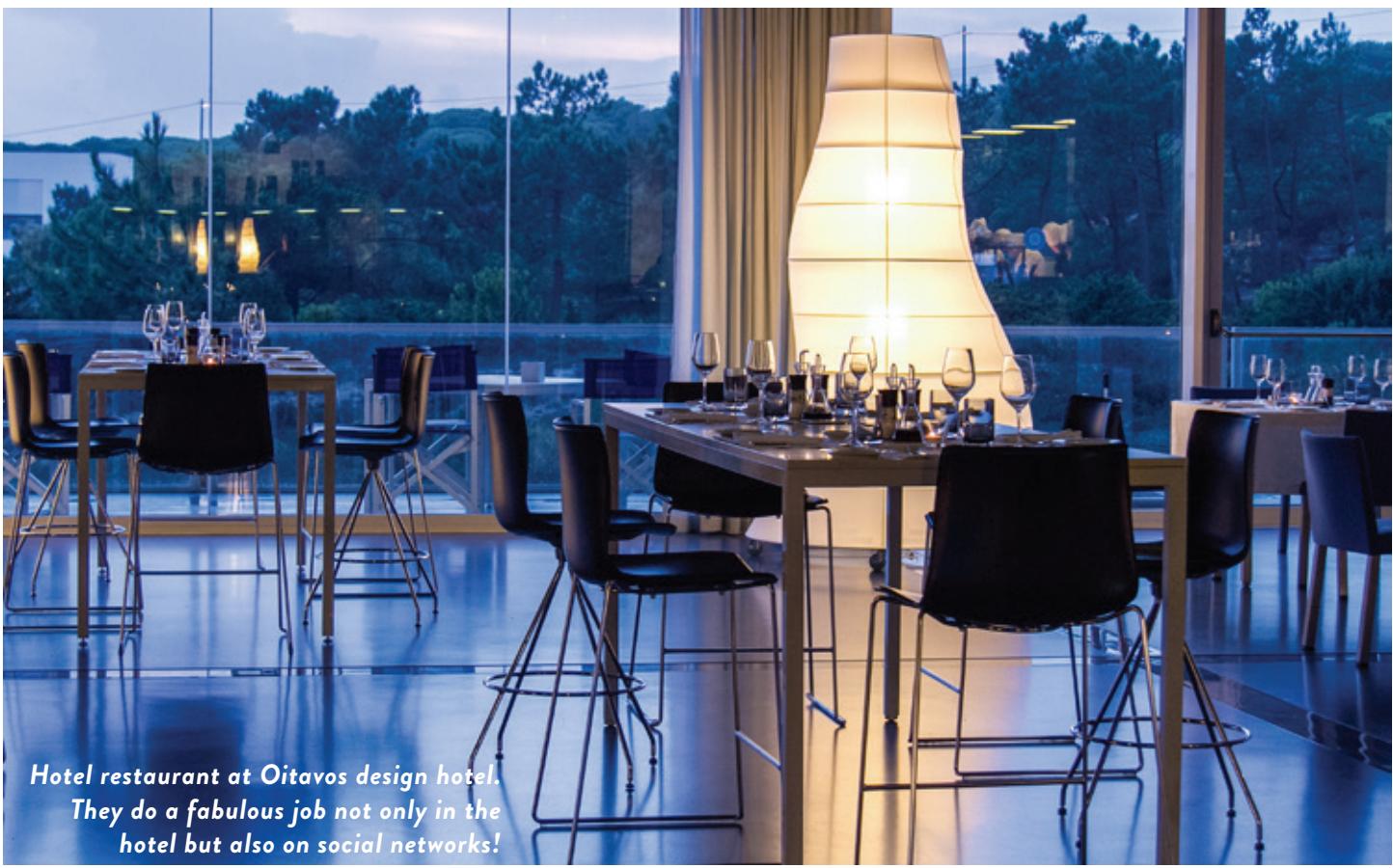
#### Hotels and social networks

By now, most hoteliers have realized that owning a website that is easy to navigate and tells the story with terrific photos is a key advertising asset.

Tip # 1: We usually search for “boutique hotels in XY,” for example. If that is the industry niche you want to occupy, your hotel website should also be findable under these terms. A search for “luxury hotels in XY” is probably too broad for most destinations; the trick is to specify other activities like golf or a spa, for instance, and then put up content relevant to the activity.

As noted already, the most advantageous method of attracting visitors for just about any type of content is search engine optimization. Still, many hotels remarkably continue to underestimate the beneficial effect an active social media presence on Facebook, Google+, Twitter and so on can have. To that end, reviews by bloggers are most effective when their activities on social media are passed along by hotels or service providers. We see this multiplier effect succinctly every time in our own web statistics when hotels share our reviews with their own web visitors: A “like,” “+1,” or “Fav” (respectively, Facebook, Google+, and Twitter) is very easily done; more valuable still, however, for spreading blog reports is sharing their content, preferably accompanied by the hotel’s own commentary. It requires a little extra effort by the hotel, but it pays off by getting the word out more effectively.

The folks at Designhotel Oitavos in Portugal, in my opinion, do an exemplary job in this respect: Not only do their Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest und Google+ presences abound in attractive photos, they also



**Hotel restaurant at Oitavos design hotel.  
They do a fabulous job not only in the  
hotel but also on social networks!**

actively share content from travel blogs, as we can testify.

**Tip # 2:** The Oitavos Hotel would probably get even more hits on Google+ than a “mere” half million (as of June, 2015) if its photos and videos also came with titles, brief captions and a few relevant hashtags. Using such tactics, I can lay claim to having racked up more than 4.5 million hits to date on my personal Google + profile.

In Switzerland, the “wander hotelier” Thomas Frei is a model social media hotelier. He goes so far as to organize a social media meet-up in the Bernese Highland every year, and it gained him a loyal fanbase of social media influencers.

According to fellow travel blogger Keith Jenkins, founder and publisher of Velvet Escape Luxury Travel Blog, among the great hotel chains it is the Four Seasons group that is well on its way with social network and blogger collaborations. He also recommends taking a look at the exemplary offerings by @Grootbos, a South African 5-star luxury private

nature reserve. The entire destination here is really a go-getter and supports blogger trips: In 2013, they launched the much-remarked upon Blogger Outreach Campaign #MeetSouthAfrica.

And in conclusion, permit this bit of wisdom regarding travel bloggers

By now, travel bloggers are a “dime a dozen” as the saying goes: there are attractive publications by passionate travelers for just about any industry niche you can think of. I can’t emphasize the importance of niche enough: the Internet is rife with so much content these days that only those who focus on a specific theme and manage to rank among the best have a hope of standing out in the information flood.

**Tip # 3:** Keep on the lookout for travel blogs that fit your own niche and don’t just report in vivid language, but also offer enticing photos and suitable, well-edited and therefore entertaining videos. Also, get permission to use the photos for your social networks presence or own website. Most bloggers will feel flattered

and will gladly lend a hand – especially if they had been invited beforehand. In our case, after we review a hotel, for example, we make our photos available for use on websites and social networks free of charge. If the photos come across so well that they might even find their way into printed catalogs we license the desired images for a modest fee.



#### About the author

Walter Schaefer is founder and editor-in-chief of travelmemo.com, a luxury destination travel blog. He created the travel magazine back in 2010 as an experiment to help him gain first-hand experience in working with blogs and social media. But, being so interesting, they took on a life of their own, and he has kept them as his online test benches to this day. They let him participate up close and personal in state-of-the-art web developments – and, by the way, travel to an interesting destination now and then.



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# THE SMELL OF LUXURY THE IMPORTANCE OF HOTEL SIGNATURE SCENTS



Langham Sydney



What are the first things guests notice when they enter a hotel? The décor, the staff, and the smell. The first two have long been priorities for hotel brands to get right, but a hotel's scent has only recently become something companies realized they needed to consider.

It is no longer enough to have a beautiful space with great service and luxurious amenities. Today's savvy travelers expect more, and hoteliers are being pushed to create deeper, more emotionally-connected guest experiences to ensure guests become both brand advocates and ensure loyal repeat guests. Creating unique guest experiences is a key trend for luxury, boutique, and lifestyle branded hotels. Guests of these properties are willing to pay more to get the greater experience they desire.



Creation of a unique and exciting hotel lobby where guests can relax and interact while connecting with the brand is a key experience factor, and a reason why guests may choose one property over another. A fantastic way to elevate the experience of your guests is through a unique signature scent in your lobby and other public areas of the hotel. It has long been known that our sense of smell is uniquely tied to memory, and use of a signature scent is a highly effective way to connect with your guests and create long-lasting, positive memories. A loyal guest will tell their friends and connections about their experience, and soon the word is out! Your signature scent can create an authentic and unique experience that is worth sharing with others.

Air Aroma is a global scent-marketing agency that works closely with luxury hospitality brands to further these multi-sensory guest connections by way of custom designed signature scents. These one-of-a-kind fragrances are designed at brand level and create unique, memorable guest experiences that help tell a brand's story. Fragrances are carefully designed to reflect multiple aspects of a brand, such as the overall aesthetic of the hotel, the target guest demographic, and a brand's values, as well as used to create a unique scent logo for the property.

Today's traveler also highly values wellness and sustainability. For hotels where this is an important aspect to the overall guest experience, or for areas within a hotel where this is a

focus (spa/fitness), use of essential oil fragrances ensures the scent aligns with the brand's wellness and sustainability message. Air Aroma also offers 100% essential oil blends for these areas.

Fragrances are delivered into a hotel via cold air diffusion technology that connects to the hotel's HVAC system or stand alone units that can be placed into the space. The result: seamlessly integrated fragrance, offering flat line diffusion that ensures consistent coverage and output in the space. Perfected over 2 decades, Air Aroma's patented cold air diffusion technologies offer optimal fragrance performance and are environmentally friendly. Diffusion levels are can be finely and precisely adjusted for the utmost subtly, for a perfect ambient scent experience.

Hospitality brands that create guest experiences that are all encompassing build brand advocates. SLS Brand Marketing Vice President explains "Smell is the strongest of all senses and we want guests to feel comfortable when they enter the property. Air Aroma helps us to do this on a consistent basis."

Other brands partnering with Air Aroma include Max Mara, Sofitel Hotels and Langham, ensuring the experience with their brand is

one that forms an emotional and memorable connection with guests and clients.

When a person smells something, they trigger their olfactory gland. This gland is directly tied to the part of the brain that controls memory, pleasure, wellbeing, and emotion. Fragrance, therefore, plays a crucial role in how we remember an experience, brand, or space. Everything that guests see, hear, feel, smell, and experience is linked together, and these touch points form a guest's overall perception of a brand or space. If you create a great experience for guests and then add a unique and memorable scent, that scent will have the power to trigger the memory of that positive experience and take guests back to that particular moment in time through scent memory recall. The right fragrance has the power to elevate a hotel from standard to extraordinary.

It's time to ask yourself: are you creating the best emotional connection with your guests?



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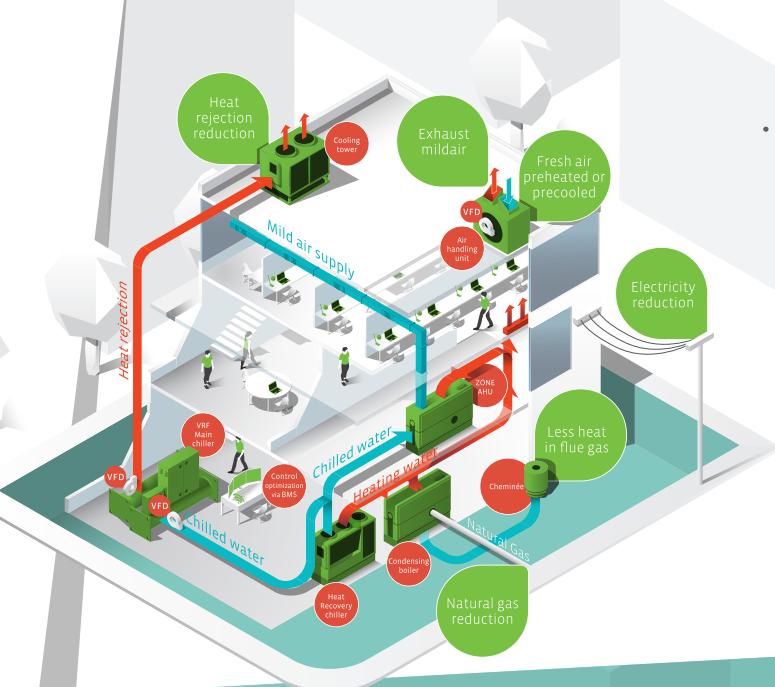
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José Silva, General Director,  
Four Seasons des Berges



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# THE VALUE OF LANDSCAPE FOR LUXURY HOTEL PROPERTIES

*By Kate Douglas Kestyn*

The U.S. luxury hospitality market is the strongest in years and showing room for continued growth. This is evidenced by record-breaking transactions such at New York's Waldorf Astoria and the Montage Laguna Beach - both selling at roughly \$1.4 million per key - and all-time highs for room demand, average daily rate, and RevPAR increases. It is anticipated that demand will continue to outpace new rooms supply. Couple that with historically low interest rates, and the strength of the U.S. economy attracting continued interest from foreign investors (especially China), and it should come as no surprise that investors have been purchasing existing luxury properties at a record pace, especially in the resort-heavy coastal cities. According to Atlas Hospitality, an Irvine hotel industry consulting firm, 399 hotels changed hands in California alone in 2014, almost a threefold increase since 2009 when only 92 hotels were sold totaling \$1.8 billion. This is due to the fact that few hotels have been built because of high financial and regulatory barriers to developers, and the significantly lower cost of purchasing and rebranding an existing property.

## **Outdoor spaces create unique guest experience**

As a result, buyers and sellers are seeing significant value in renovation. This is more obvious on the sale side, where physical updates (and location) directly drive the highest sale price. The Montage Laguna and the Waldorf Astoria are both exceptional examples: beautifully-appointed landmark properties located on signature sites with the highest level of service and indoor and outdoor amenities. Historically, new owners have not hesitated to invest in interior renovations to rebrand the property and make improvements to meet the current demands of travelers. But now the industry is investing at record rates in exterior environments as a way to create unique guest experiences while capturing more revenue and increasing property valuations.

## **Increasing revenues and brand identity**

We have seen this firsthand as owners and developers have invested in improvements to their properties to reinforce their brand identity and increase revenue. Whether it's investing in direct revenue-producing infrastructure – such as pool-side dining, spas, rentable cabanas, or event spaces – or less measurable improvements such as gardens, trails, recreation areas, lighting, signage and wayfinding, and other landscape improvements, they all directly contribute to the guest experience. And as the high-end market becomes increasingly competitive, creating that unique experience, including finding additional ways to offer popular programs (yoga, wine tastings, cooking demonstrations, art classes, etc.), will become more and more important in building loyalty.

## **A new outdoor amenity**

One particular example is the Four Seasons Maui at Wailea. With the growing trend on wellness and a guest population seeking more spa-like experiences, the Four Seasons opted to take a rather unusable hillside site and create a quiet alternative to the main pool area and the resort beach. ValleyCrest Design Group developed a "Serenity Pool" concept, taking advantage of a spectacular ocean view with a sweeping edge infinity pool. One side of the rectangular pool offers water lounging alcoves between lush tropical plantings. The other side of the pool is lined with oversized cabanas with luxuriously detailed teak interiors. The result: a new resort amenity that provides additional revenue through food/beverage, cabana and "casabella" rentals, and spa services, and a guest experience that reinforces the Four Seasons brand expectation.

## **Landscape improvements offer lower cost alternative to interior updates**

As hotels seek to offer a more authentic, local experience, landscape improvements are a much lower cost mechanism than interior retrofits. Take LodgeWorks' latest project – the Archer New York. Taking advantage of their prime Mid-town location – and amazing views of the Empire State Building – they created a roof-top deck and lounge, Spyglass, for both guest use and private party rentals. This investment in otherwise unused space is creating huge value for the property and providing guests with a more personal, exclusive escape from the city. It also supports travelers' desires to be in open, social spaces instead of their rooms or the more traditional hotel bar.

"Hotel development is all about value creation and capitalizing on the assets each site gives us", said Mike Daood, President of LodgeWorks. "External features like views of the Empire State Building are extraordinary site amenities that inspire our architecture and the experiences we design for guests and locals. Those venues not only influence look to book conversion, but if guests feel they are in a special and unique place they will typically stay longer and thus spend more. The PR value is also immeasurable."

## **A sense of place through landscaping**

At the Four Seasons Resort at Hualalai, ValleyCrest Design Group helped them achieve this "sense of place" through tropical garden landscapes, mixing the traditional Hawaiian approach with a Balinese style. In particular, the spa was transformed to include open-air pavilions set against a natural rock waterfall and lushly planted pathways. Additionally, guests are invited to walk through a tranquil sand-bottom stream as part of their pre-treatment experience – all





as a way to create a unique guest experience that emphasizes the special qualities of the Big Island.

### **Smaller landscape projects**

Luxury hotel properties with smaller renovation budgets can find ways to enhance existing or carve out new outdoor spaces that create unique guest experiences. Using plant materials, water features, and other architectural elements, an existing space can be transformed into a stunning area. For example, adding containers, a living wall or overhead arbor to an existing rooftop or terrace. Or create a butterfly garden or recreational areas for yoga, bocce ball, or a chess board, or enhance walkways and paths with new flowers and shrubs. Also consider the views from guest rooms, dining, and other interior spaces. Window views without a natural feature such as a mountain or ocean scene can incorporate water features and plantings to create a stunning view.

### **Grounds maintenance considerations**

An investment in landscaping can

significantly increase property value, but only if it is properly maintained. Proper maintenance ensures your property's grounds continue to enhance the guest experience without taking too much of your budget. The maintenance team should be well trained in safety and proper plant and turf care practices. The team should include irrigation and horticultural experts to ensure plant health and sustainable landscaping practices. Crews should be flexible to prepare for and work around special events, mindful of guest safety, and attentive to the details that a luxury property demands. Whether your grounds maintenance team is in-house or outsourced, a holistic landscape management approach focused on operational efficiency, long-term plant health, and sustainability will reduce overall cost while improving the guest experience.

### **Landscaping differentiates**

As the market continues to adapt to the influence of the growing millennial and baby-boomer traveler populations, we will increasingly

see the hospitality industry invest in "place" to remain competitive. Although the luxury market is somewhat insulated, it too will be looking for new and innovative ways to maintain loyalty. Using and maintaining outdoor landscaped spaces to create that unique guest experience is a fundamental part of the equation.



#### **About the author**

Kate Douglas Kestyn is a Senior Associate of ValleyCrest Design Group, the landscape architecture and planning arm of Brickman/ValleyCrest. Brickman/ValleyCrest's comprehensive services include landscape maintenance, irrigation and water management, tree care, design, construction, and snow and ice services. For years, Brickman/ValleyCrest has been the landscape services provider of choice for many luxury hotel and resort clients, having earned a reputation for embodying the consistent level of care and attention to detail that is required to meet guest expectations. For more on Brickman/ValleyCrest visit [www.brickman.com](http://www.brickman.com) and [www.valleycrest.com](http://www.valleycrest.com).



# Data-Driven LOYALTY PROGRAMS *without the Expensive “Program”*

By Mike Schmitt

You either have too few properties, or not enough geographic diversity to justify a traditional “points” based loyalty system. Or you simply want to drive more guest loyalty to supplement the business you generate from your existing loyalty system. What you really need is a Data-Driven Loyalty model that rewards your past guests when they give you the desired behavior (i.e.

frequent visits and generous spend) without the burden and expense of a traditional loyalty system.

How can a Data-Driven Loyalty model work for you? One example is to exceed a guest’s expectations immediately upon arrival. If you had their complete stay history across all properties in the family you could instantly upgrade the arriving guest even if this is the first

time at your particular property. No need to flash a “gold” card (that guests can forget to use), utilizing a data-driven approach to loyalty you have eliminated the burden (partially placed on the guest!) of managing a points based loyalty system and relegated this task to the perfect person, or should I say computer. One look at your mobile enabled “arrivals report” and you can

make an instant decision that could very easily translate into greater guest satisfaction and greater guest loyalty.

Marketing Automation is a phrase you hear quite often these days, but too often the “Automation” piece is a missing part of your world. A Data-Driven Loyalty model includes marketing automation for repetitive tasks such as delivering marketing communications at periodic intervals, once again relieving you of the burden of a task that is best left to a computer. Pre-arrival communications are a proven method of up-selling rooms, spa treatments, fine dining, golf, and other profitable amenities. A Data-Driven Loyalty model allows for tailoring the pre-arrival message to reflect the past behavior of the guest, and therefore you are offering golf to golfers, spa treatments to spa lovers, and fine dining to foodies. Simple in concept, but difficult to implement without a robust marketing database and a marketing automation system. Thankfully these systems exist and they are much less expensive than a traditional loyalty system that often involves a call center, a monthly statement, a process for “missed” stays, and other infrastructure.

Another problem area in the loyalty arena is the guest survey or feedback system. Guest feedback is critical to your understanding of what a statistically significant number of your guests think about your staff and your property. If your loyalty system and whatever level of marketing automation you have deployed are not integrated with your survey system you have created another expensive and cumbersome

process that could lead to guests who believe “you do not listen to them”. In a Data-Driven loyalty model you can trigger the guest survey email with messaging that reflects a guest’s status. So a first time guest will receive a different message than a repeat guest. This is also an excellent opportunity to convert group or corporate guests to leisure guests, but this critical marketing opportunity will be dealt with in a different article. Most importantly you need to get the guest feedback in your marketing database so you can identify any negative issues that should be dealt with (commensurate with the guests status as defined by their history), and also so you can “thank” a guest for positive feedback-again, so they know you are listening. This is made possible by marketing automation, which is as you now know a critical part of the Data-Driven Loyalty model.

Other marketing triggers that will help drive loyalty include monthly newsletters that include dynamic content. This is simply (at least in concept) targeted marketing with segmentation applied. This is truly a Data-Driven Loyalty model as you are first segmenting your audience so those that are giving you the desired behavior receive relevant offers. You can also use segmentation to send a very rich offer to your traditionally most profitable but now inactive past guests in order to entice them back. Once your audience is segmented you can determine the relevancy of your offers by measuring the “clicks” on the various links in your newsletter, and ultimately their actual spend. This of course allows you to hone in on what appeals to your various audience segments. You will be driving greater

loyalty while increasing revenue, and it goes without saying that the two go hand-in-hand.

A Data-Driven Loyalty model allows you to remove the burden of a points based system from both your valued guests and from your organization. This is even more important for the luxury and resort properties. High end travelers do not always carry a “premium” loyalty card, yet they deserve platinum level treatment based on their spend. Marketing Automation, which certainly includes a robust, yet simple to understand, analytical reporting environment (including web-accessed dashboards) can help you determine your most profitable guests with very little work on your part. Why is that? Because you already have all the data you need to reward your guests commensurate with their stay history, but unfortunately that data is not always accessible and even when it is it may not be in a format that lends itself to a revenue generating marketing program. Fear not, there are hospitality systems out there that will reward both you and your guests for your data-driven approach to building loyalty.



#### About the author

Mike Schmitt has over 14 years of experience in hospitality CRM. As the CEO of Clairvoyix Mike is responsible for the company's strategic direction. Mike is the co-inventor of a US technology patent (# 6,137,967), additionally Mike holds a Bachelor of Science, Computer Science degree from California State University, Long Beach and a Masters of Business Administration from Nova Southeastern University.



*The Nam Hai villa bedroom*

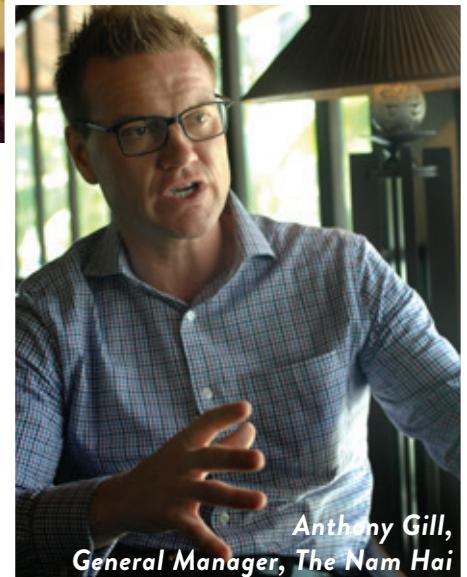
# Natural Hospitality *From The Heart*

By Carol West

“Attention to detail, it’s a sickness,” laughs Anthony Gill as he picks up an errant scrap of paper from the Nam Hai’s immaculate grounds. Englishman Gill, 36, came to Vietnam in 2006 after a stellar career working for some of the industry’s marquee brands including Six Senses’ properties and before moving into the general manager’s role, had worked in F&B for close to 20 years. But then something happened. “I fell in love with Vietnam and its people. Tourism was still so raw, the luxury industry was young and

green compared with Bali and Thailand and I felt I could make a difference. One of the missing links today is natural hospitality, a warmth of heart, a warmth of welcome and the Vietnamese have this in spades, an inner gift of being open and hospitable that’s disappeared from many developed societies,” said Anthony

But even natural hospitality needs to be harnessed and I’m intrigued to know how he schools a staff in excess of 500 to recognize and acknowledge guests



*Anthony Gill,  
General Manager, The Nam Hai*

by name. After all, clients staying at the Nam Hai, the Central Coast’s pre-eminent luxury villa resort, are all discerning, global travelers with high expectations and yet the warmth-without-obsequiousness greetings that we all receive “good morning Miss Carol, good morning Mr Robert, enjoy your breakfast....” are genuinely expressed.

## Talent Spotting

While the property has a million dollar

maintenance budget, Gill sees the Nam Hai's major investment as its people and has introduced intensive staff training sessions to attain high levels of service. "We consider ourselves very lucky that we receive specialized skill training and English language lessons. We take pride in learning guests' names, it's much more friendly than 'sir' or 'ma'am'" said one staffer who originally came to the Nam Hai as a guest and on graduation, applied for an intern position. What a recommendation! When doing a cooking class a couple of days earlier I'd become acquainted with a young man who is now working in the Nam Hai's Asian kitchen. "I like it here, I'm learning a lot" said Hung, just one of the hundreds of staffers recruited from Danang and Hoi An who now have career opportunities in a growth industry.

Anthony Gill acknowledges that the main threads of salary enhancement and service charge, annual bonuses and remuneration improvement schemes have seen investment boosted from just over \$22,000 to almost \$100,000. "Everyone has a personal development plan that's 95% owned by the individual, 5% owned by line leader plus access to knowledge. Using their job descriptions, we work with them to help them achieve that next step up the ladder," said Gill.

Having been in the country for a while

- he had a 2 year stint as GM of Hue's iconic Art Deco hotel La Residence before taking the reins at the Nam Hai - he's also developed a knack for talent spotting. "Half a dozen employees have worked for me for 4 or 5 years and I've been fortunate to encourage some of the stars along the way. Miss Ay was a restaurant supervisor when we first met and now heads up F&B and both the director of engineering and head of HR are locals who've moved up the ranks", said Gill who clearly relishes his mentoring role.

### Future Proofing

Even though the Central Coast has seen fast-paced development from a string of fishing villages a few years ago, the number of hoardings announcing the imminent arrival of new lifestyle resorts indicate that things will be heating up over the next decade. However, unlike the Nam Hai which draws on the region's architectural history, development is not controlled and there's a real danger that properties won't reflect a sense of place.

Switching hats, Anthony Gill has assumed the role of chairman of Central Coast Vietnam, a 25- member committee who pay annual dues to market this pristine stretch of coastline. "We're working hard with our partners in the public sector to create both a blueprint for the region and raise

awareness and even though it's baby steps, we've seen more movement in last 3 years than the previous 25," said Gill noting big changes in joint activities involvement over the past 6 months alone.

"The risk in Vietnam is not just over-development but discouraging a huge swing to where a destination is overwhelmed by certain nationalities. No one likes going somewhere and feeling like an outsider," he said. "Any experienced GM knows you need an even spread of nationalities and we're fortunate that this region attracts an eclectic mix of developed markets such as Europe, Australia, the UK and US, all classic markets that perform well," said Gill. Considering that the number of weekly international flights into the hub city of Danang is now approaching 100 including daily flights from Hong Kong and Singapore, the Central Coast is also set to become a gateway for emerging markets including Japan, Korea, mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

"Having been here 2 ½ years, you can sometimes become inured to the Nam Hai's 'wow' factor, its sensational views and resort design but what keeps me 'wowed' and motivated is how consistently superlative are guests comments about the staff service. Helping to place people, unlocking their natural sense of hospitality, is what I love doing best," he concluded.

### Balancing Act

"Just like life, it's a balance. We want to lead our staff but also teach them to enjoy their work independently," said Le Thi Da Lam, director of business development for Pilgrimage Village Boutique Resort and Spa and Vedana Lagoon Resort and Spa both in Hue. It was her father, Le Van Truong, chairman and CEO of A Dong Corporation, who set out 20 years ago on their tourism adventure. "At that time, there were only three government-run hotels and no tourism development on the horizon. I was working for one of the government-owned properties but saw a small opportunity and opened our first



The Nam Hai pool



*Aqua Bungalow, Vedana Lagoon Resort and Spa*

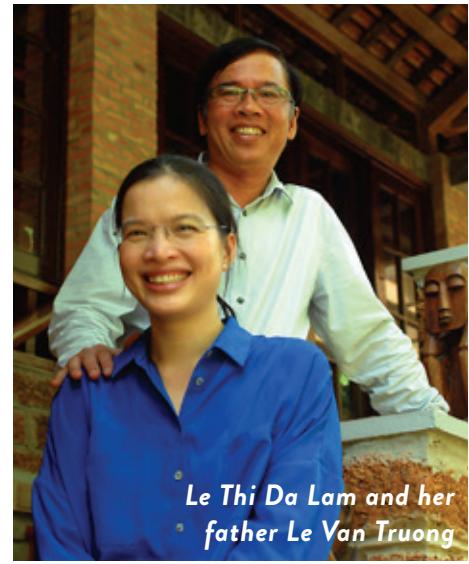
mini-hotel as a private operator,” said Truong. Having run two restaurants and talking directly to visitors, mainly from Europe and America, he understood what guests wanted but in early 2000, there was no individual investment in tourism. “Pilgrimage Village began life as a handicraft village and a restaurant but as he acquired land, rooms were built around a natural jungle village populated by banana and paw-paw trees, typical of those used in ancestral offerings. Visitors loved it but growth was gradual, organic, and eleven years on, we now have 99 rooms,” said Lam picking up on their story.

This local, low-key, private retreat is laden with romantic overtones. The lushly landscaped 50m pool is set in a valley originally dug by villagers as an irrigation channel for their crops. Service is excellent and it’s close to Hue’s cultural attractions. “We began with a staff of 180 ex-pats, experts in F&B, yoga instruction and spa specialists but now employ around 400 locals,” said Lam whose family has lived in Hue for generations. Hong has been with Pilgrimage Village for 9 years and his gentle demeanor belies an alert eye for detail as he leads the breakfast team at Slope restaurant. You know it’s working from the bright-eyed greetings received from laundry ladies to gardening guys. “We mainly employ local young staff and train them from

the ground-up. It’s an ongoing, organic journey for all of us,” smiled Lam

### Sense Of Place

It’s clear that staff feel a real connection not only with the owners’ philosophy and the opportunities being presented to them but also because the architecture provides a familiar sense of place. “Our signature architecture pays homage to Hue’s heritage with hand-carved columns hewn from the center of jackfruit tree trunks and pavilions of open spaces where guests are welcomed. We wanted to create a bare, natural look to enhance both the timbers and their carved traditional designs,” said Lam. We’re sitting in the resort restaurant that took 3 years and a team of 8 craftsmen to build. “As they worked, they ate jackfruit, throwing the seeds on the ground. We’re now surrounded by trees springing from those seeds,” she said. Rather than taking an organic approach, their sister property Vedana Lagoon Resort & Spa came from a master plan designed to enhance the luxury of space. Here nature provides the color palette but nature was also a drawback when it came to finding local staff. “We combed the streets offering free English lessons and the chance to earn a living. At first, the young people preferred swimming in the lagoon and fishing but gradually, attitudes changed as they saw opportunities to



*Le Thi Da Lam and her father Le Van Truong*

improve their lives through work,” said Lam. Having recently stayed there, I can report that the level of service in all respects was first-rate, all the more remarkable given that the property, nestled between the twin world-heritage sites of Hue and Hoi An, has only been operational for 4 years. It’s a youthful team with 90% now recruited from the local area, 10% from Hue. Tha, our buggy driver, proudly tells us that his name means Honesty. His parents are both fisher folk on the lagoon but this resort has given him a chance to work locally and improve his English language skills.

The Vietnamese management style of doing it together and taking the people with them augurs well for the country’s tourism industry while unlocking the warm welcome that comes from natural hospitality is something everyone can aspire to.



#### About the author

Carol West is a Melbourne-based writer who, together with partner and photographer Robert Muir, produces travel and lifestyle features for media throughout Australia, Asia and India. She also writes and edits a free WebZine filled with travel inspirations at [www.2onthewing.com](http://www.2onthewing.com) so why not subscribe, share with friends and colleagues and join her....



*LED Lighting*

# IS YOUR POOL ENOUGH TO ENGAGE YOUR FAMILY GUESTS?

*By Jason Broadhurst*

When we think about luxury hotels, we often think about pools and hot tubs. A hotel's pool can define it. There's something about water that conjures up the feeling of relaxation, and epitomizes what luxury is all about.

And yet pools and hot tubs, no matter how luxuriously designed, can be limiting. They cater to a specific set of clients: those of a certain age, those who feel comfortable in bathing suits, and those who value pool time enough to pack and change into those bathing

suits. Generally, they are not the ideal water environments for families and smaller children.

That's why more and more hotels and resorts are looking to improve their pool areas or create water amenities with attractions that engage and excite guests of all ages and abilities. Resorts like the Galaxy Macau and The Beach in Dubai are doing it by creating specific aquatic play areas away from the pools called Splashpads or enhancing their existing pools with structural play

elements.

Here are some questions to ask about your current water experiences to help determine if it's time for an upgrade or a re-think.

## **Who's using your pool area?**

Is it young families with infants and toddlers? Families with teens? Part of the question actually gets to: how much can your guests actually do in a pool anyway? If you're anything like



**Galaxy Macau Splashpad ®**

me, a few lengths of a pool is as much swimming as I'm capable of – and I'm not likely to do that if other guests get in my way like an obstacle course. And if my young kids are with me? Well, then I'm a full time lifeguard and entertainer to toddlers who want to play in pools catering to older kids and adults.

#### How are they using it and how long are they using it?

If I'm not swimming or not able to swim laps because the pool doesn't have designated lanes, or because of other guests (well within their rights) who serve as obstacles as they hang out in clumps with their drinks by the side, I'm "relaxing" or hanging out myself.

It's great to hang out in water for a while, but there is certainly a limit to pool time and activity – especially with kids, whether toddlers or teenagers (who need something special to keep them off their electronic devices). My family's limit is about an hour, and then we're out and looking for something else.

#### What can you offer infants and toddlers so their parents won't feel they always have to be lifeguards?

Parents need downtime, too. The Beach in Dubai added a zero-depth aquatic play area known as a Splashpad because it is accessible for all. Zero-depth means that there is no standing water, so no drowning risk for the very young and no need to change into bathing suits if you don't want to. That's great for those of us with young children as we don't have to become lifeguards and entertainers. Instead we can become observers or even participants in the fun.

And because of the variety of features on offer, ranging from small frogs and snails with low pressure water effects up to tall buckets dumping water on those below, they are inviting to all ages and abilities. (Older kids love to spray water at each other with cannons).

#### What else can they do at the pool?

The answer usually is – not much. While luxury hotels want to provide access to activities that keep guests engaged,

happy and ordering food and beverages, many families need more than a chaise lounge and pool.

Faced with this conundrum, the Westgate Town Center Resort & Spa in Kissimmee, FL, created an elaborate pirate ship-themed installation that provides multi-level aquatic play bridges that interconnect, slides, and overhead water features to maximize the play experience. These kinds of unexpected play spaces appeal to young children through teens, and their parents, and keep them engaged and happy for hours.

#### If I choose to add a Splashpad, am I limited in what is on offer?

All aquatic play solutions can be themed. Maybe you want a Splashpad to mimic the colors of the local flora, or to complement the surrounding architecture. Or maybe you want to create a forest, an underwater adventure or a pirate ship. It's all possible.

#### How much space do I need to add a

## Splashpad or other water structure?

Splashpads and Poolplay elements can be big or small; scaled to fit any size. They provide an attraction that widens the hotel's appeal to those with young families, and they offer hours of entertainment that keep kids busy, parents relaxed and visitors onsite.

The Galaxy Macau added a lazy river that transformed its outdoor play area into something more interesting by placing features that spray or drop water onto guests floating through. It's easy to spot when guests smile or laugh as they float down the river. It's when they're sprayed or when water is being dumped on them. Lazy rivers don't have to be lazy. They can be fun!

## If I make a change, am I stuck with that change?

Changing Splashpad or Poolplay configurations can be expensive and complicated. But features can be switched out, or extra features added, so you can keep the attraction fresh year after year, and keep guests returning to see what's new. Splashpads can also be illuminated to increase operating hours, or to turn them into architectural features during the



**The Beach Dubai**

evening hours.

Choosing aquatic amenities that engage guests leads to a rapid return on investment through an exciting and memorable guest experience that keeps guests on site, and encourages return visits.

If you're looking to widen your appeal to include a wider and younger demographic, consider your water amenities as a place to start.



### About the author

Jason Broadhurst is the Director of Marketing at Vortex Aquatics Structures International ([www.vortex-intl.com](http://www.vortex-intl.com)), a leader in developing aquatic play solutions with over 6,000 installations in 35 countries. Jason uses his 18 years of marketing and communications experience to drive Vortex marketing efforts around the world. He is based in Montreal, and holds a Master of Science in Innovation Studies from the University of Huddersfield in the UK.

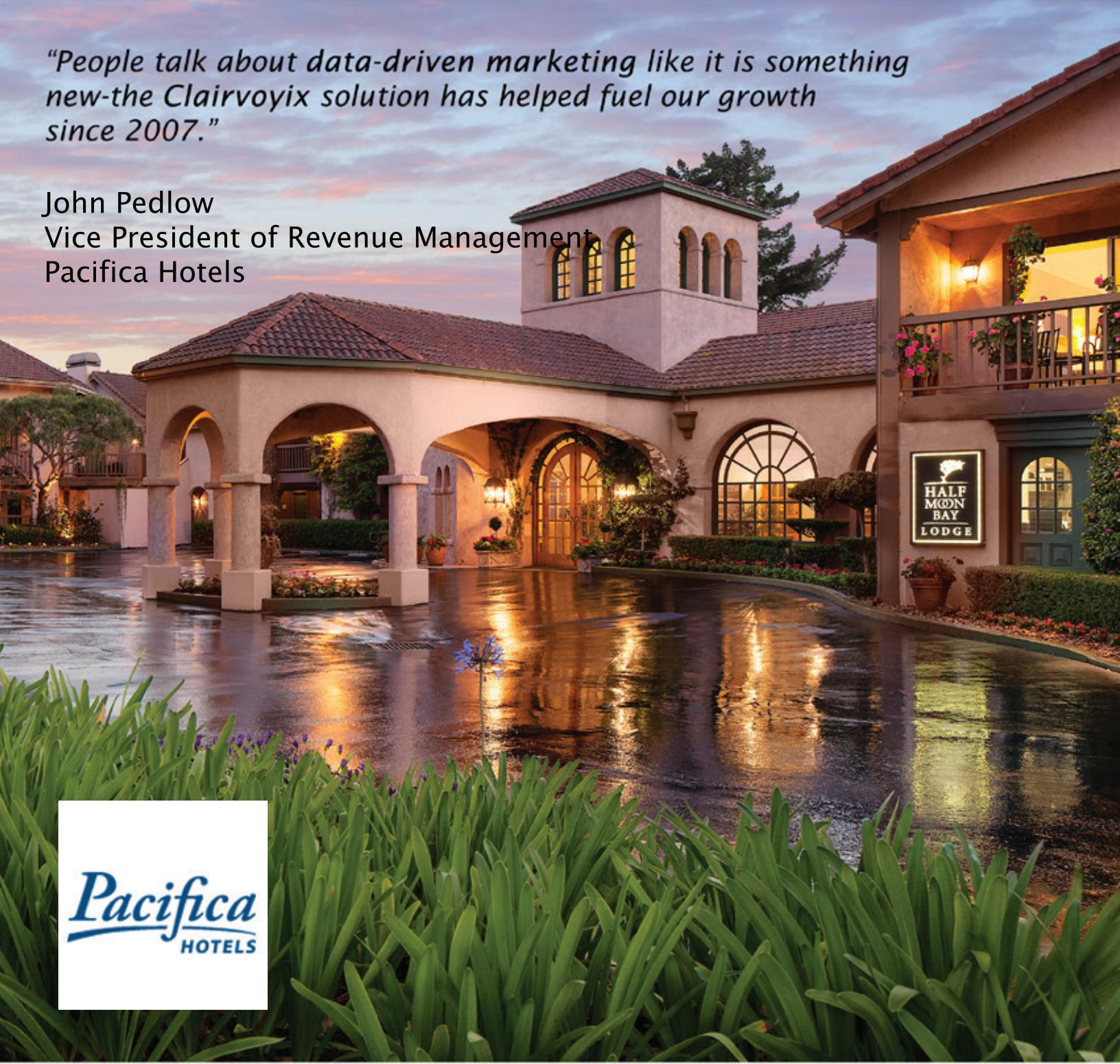


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# Wearable Technology THE NEXT FRONTIER FOR HOTELS

*By Abi Mandelbaum*

Finding new ways to stand out in a competitive marketplace is difficult. Many hotels have differentiated themselves by offering tech-related amenities to guests. With the advent of the Apple Watch, Microsoft's Hololens, and other gadgets worn on the body, hotels should consider that wearables might be the next wave of must-have technology products that will entice and engage guests. In fact, some hotels already have.

Here are three hospitality groups that are already using wearable technology.

## A MARKETING DREAM COME TRUE

Recently, Disney introduced MagicBands to its guests, a wristband

that operates off of Disney's proprietary MyMagic+ system. Through MyMagic+, guests can plan almost every detail of their trip. Some things the platform consolidates include booking transportation to a hotel from the airport and choosing where to eat. The MagicBand also serves as a room key and ticket for attractions, replacing the need to carry around bulky key cards and folded papers, both of which are lost frequently.

Duncan Dickson, a professor of theme-park management at the University of Central Florida, called the use of this kind of technology "a marketing dream." He was quoted as saying "[Disney will have] some very robust data to use in understanding guest behavior and

desires."

To take advantage of Disney's program, guests must book directly through the company. This enables the company to get more of its products and services in front of future guests, who may not have been aware of them if the guest had booked through a third-party website.

## SMART VIBs

While Disney's MagicBands might be one of the most robust wearables, they are not the only bracelets the hospitality industry is using. Two hotels on the island of Ibiza—Ushuaïa Ibiza Beach Hotel and the Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza—have given guests the ability to purchase \$40 Smart VIBs, also known as Very Important Bracelets. These bracelets replace credit

cards and room keys, allowing guests to pay for services and bypass lengthy checking-in and checking-out processes.

The bracelets are coded to match a guest's preferences, which might include room admissions and access to the users Facebook and Twitter profiles for picture and content sharing.

### SMART WATCHES

Another type of wearable technology recently popularized by the announcement of the Apple Watch is smartwatches, which are similar, but more robust, than VIBs. A smartwatch, as the name suggests, is a watch with a touchscreen that interfaces with a user's smartphone. Its benefit is that it saves users from having to constantly dig their smartphones from their pockets to check their messages and apps.

One of the best-known examples of a hotel using smartwatch technology is Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

Earlier this year, Starwood Preferred Guests announced the release of its Apple Watch app, which, among other things, lets guests forgo room keys. The hotel group's Apple Watch app will be similar to its iPhone app, but not a direct port.

Of course, there are other ways hotels can utilize smartwatches. Hotels around the world are already making devices like iPads available to their guests during their stay. Take for example again Starwood Hotels & Resorts. Over the next two years the company has stated that they will invest \$100 million to upgrade its amenities, including making iPad room-service menus available to its guests. Hotels could just as easily invest in making devices like the Apple Watch a part of their technology experience upgrades.

Imagine that each room in your hotel came equipped with the use of at least one Apple Watch. Suddenly hotels would

have access to the most direct way to interact with their customers on their property, no matter where the customer was on the property.

Catering to today's increasingly tech-savvy consumers should be an important part of any hotel brand's marketing efforts. Making wearable devices a part of your offered amenities in some way should be a goal for 2015.



#### About the author

Abi Mandelbaum is co-founder and chief executive officer of YouVisit, a technology company that develops virtual tours and virtual reality experiences for a variety of industries, including education, hospitality, real estate, travel and leisure, and many others.

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# HOTELS GO MOBILE TO ENRICH THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

**Mobile & Text Guest Engagement Helps Hoteliers Build Strong Bonds with Mobile-Social Guests**

By Andrea Baptiste

What do Millennials and Gen Xers want from luxury hoteliers? And how will hoteliers deliver it? A closer look at new mobile & text guest engagement technologies and trends reveals new ways to increase guest satisfaction, improve guest recovery, drive better TripAdvisor reviews and capture market share among these prized demographics.

## NEW ENGAGEMENT TRENDS DRIVE THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

### Engage a New Generation of Core Guests

As their earnings, spending and travel inclinations grow, Millennials and Gen Xers are emerging as the new core hotel guests. This age bracket is impatient, unpredictable, emotional and driven by technology and automation. Their behaviour offers a glimpse into a new

culture of connectedness, brand co-ownership and immediacy. Mobile-social Millennial and Gen X guests feel strong bonds with their preferred brands. In exchange for their loyalty, they want a say in how these brands operate. They want the ability to voice their concerns digitally and have these concerns addressed on the spot. Hoteliers need to be devising ways to capture the hearts and minds of these highly valued consumers.

### Engage in the Digital Domain

Technology is evolving the guest experience and transforming the way guests connect and communicate with their preferred hoteliers. This transformation is changing the way guests think about loyalty, advocacy and bookings. Social-mobile guests expect hotels to treat their loyalty with respect. They expect hotels to pay attention to their needs, acknowledge





their concerns and resolve their issues. Perhaps most importantly, they expect to engage in real time, whether they are on or off hotel property.

### **Engage Front-line Staff**

The guest experience is the execution of a hotel's brand promise. For hotels, the front line is the bottom line. Informed and engaged employees play a key role in following through on the brand promise. The value placed on quality of experience is defined entirely by the guest, but the delivery of this experience is driven by committed and passionate employees. Front-line staff need knowledge and skills to interact and connect with guests on a personal level. They also need tools that can alert them about issues and enable them to act in real-time to ensure operational excellence.

### **Engage on Social Media**

Social networking has changed the way guests select hotels. Social media platforms provide a global forum where guests can share experiences, make recommendations and express likes and dislikes. Hotels willing to embrace this shift and actively influence social insights will be better able to increase their bookings, preempt negative reviews, resolve issues more effectively and prevent future problems.

### **Engage in Real Time**

Forward-thinking hoteliers are looking for new ways to increase guest satisfaction and address service issues proactively, before guests check out. Traditional post-visit surveys are an important source of satisfaction data, but they have limitations. For example, they aren't operations oriented or designed for real-time, on-property communications.

### **Current Solutions Limit Engagement Opportunities**

One key limitation of post-visit surveys is that guests provide their input after they've left the hotel. Insights from survey data come too late to enhance the guest experience or address operational issues on the spot. Hotels can try to apply these post-stay insights, but they'll always be reacting based on aggregated data. Aggregated data won't help hotels connect with guests on a personal level, engage them in meaningful conversations, recover them when they are dissatisfied or turn them into loyal customers.

Face-to-face interaction in the hotel offers employees a means to improve the guest experience in real time. But most guests don't provide feedback – good or bad – directly to hotel staff. This makes it difficult for hotels to take action to address their concerns or respond to their individual requests. This is consistent with recent industry research, which shows that over 90% of guests will not approach an employee face to face, either to express concern or to offer positive comments.

The result is that staff are often unaware of guests' most important issues. Worse, a significant number of these issues go unresolved. Why is this important? Current research indicates that 95% of guests will revisit a hotel, remain loyal and refrain from

posting negative online reviews if their problems are resolved while they're still on the property.

## Mobile & Text Guest Engagement Brings New Benefits

Mobile & text guest engagement solutions help hotels break down the connection barrier by offering a new communications channel that hoteliers can use to connect and communicate with guests during their stay and throughout their journey. Mobile & text guest engagement helps hotel staff and guests engage with one another in a personal dialog using their channel of choice – text, native app, web app, email, website and kiosk. Guests can use their smartphones to easily make requests, share compliments and raise issues for properties to immediately act upon, allowing hotels to resolve issues before a guest may publish negative remarks on social media or leaving the property dissatisfied. These hosted solutions integrate with the top CRM, PMS, POS and CRS vendors helping hoteliers get more value with their current investments and in their guest interactions. Mobile guest engagement solutions help hoteliers achieve five key outcomes:

**Connect with more guests** — Mobile & text guest engagement allows hotels to communicate with guests during their stay. The ubiquity and ease of use of mobile-based engagement generates high response rates (15% to 34%) compared to post-visit surveys (<1%).

**Improve operational excellence** — The real-time operational capabilities of mobile & text guest engagement solutions make it easy for guests to make requests, share concerns and offer valuable insights on any aspect of their stay. Real-time analytics and natural language processing engine allows hoteliers to better track guest dialog, data and insights by location, date and time, and compare and benchmark weekly, daily and shift data related to hotel operations and guest satisfaction. Hotels can use guest insights and dialog to motivate staff and improve

operations before a guest provides final feedback on a post-visit survey, and before the next guest walks into the hotel.

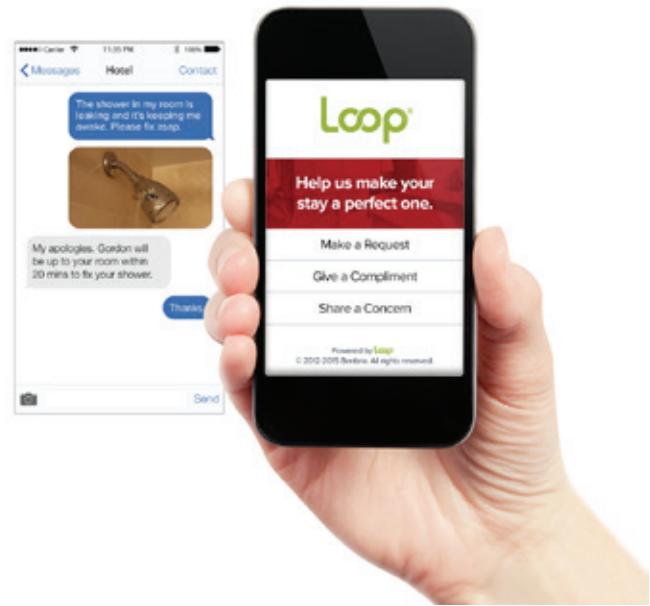
### Create a private, guest-led dialogue

— Mobile & text guest engagement solutions foster two-way dialogue between the guest and the hotel. The guest gains a chance to be heard. The hotel gains an opportunity to respond in real time to satisfy the guest, resolve an operational issue and build a long-lasting guest relationship.

### Drive real-time action and resolution

— Mobile & text guest engagement empowers hotel staff to take responsibility for the guest experience. Staff members are notified when a guest asks for help and armed with tools and insights that can help solve the problem in real time, before the guest checks out.

**Pre-empt negative reviews** — Mobile & text guest engagement allow hotels to connect with guests and privately resolve issues before they reach social media. Real-time staff action help hotels overcome negative experiences, draw out positive reviews and inspire new levels of brand evangelism. When a guest's needs have been satisfied, Mobile & text guest engagement solutions allow staff to digitally prompt the guest via their mobile device to post a review on TripAdvisor. With these tools and processes in place, each problem solved through mobile-based engagement improves the guest experience and provides a new opportunity to solicit a TripAdvisor review. As the principle of reciprocity suggests, guests are more likely to respond to your request to post a positive review on TripAdvisor at a time when they are delighted by an



exceptional experience at your hotel.

Mobile-social technology is a central part of the guest experience for Millennials and Gen Xers. Real-time mobile guest engagement solutions offer hotels the means to connect and bond with these prized demographics. These solutions empower front-line staff to enhance the guest experience, improve guest satisfaction, recover at-risk guests while on property and foster positive online reviews by acting on guest requests on the spot. By adopting mobile & text guest engagement solutions, hotels can increment the value of post-visit surveys and realize a tangible return on investment through increased loyalty, advocacy and bookings.



#### About the author

ANDREA BAPTISTE is President & CEO of Benbria, a leader in the area of Mobile & Text Guest Engagement solutions. Its real-time communications and onsite operational solutions enables luxury hoteliers to increase guest satisfaction, improve guest recovery and foster positive online ratings. For more information: [www.benbria.com](http://www.benbria.com).



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# AUSTIN, TEXAS LUXURY HOTEL BOOM

By Elise Krentzel

With over 2,000 start-ups and tech companies, a thriving live music scene ("the live music capitol of the world"), world class festivals like SXSW, Formula One and ACL, Fortune 500 companies such as Dell and Whole Foods and over 200 new inhabitants per day streaming into this once lazy town; Austin Texas, is undergoing a revolution. There's nary a space where a crane isn't visible downtown reminding one of Berlin after the wall fell.

Tourism is also booming like never before. 520,000 rooms are already booked out to 2020. "Austin's tourism market has grown an average of 5% per year for the last 10 years. In 2013 there were 21.5 million visitors", says Shilpa Bakre, Sr. Communications Manager for Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau. JW Marriott opened in February this year with over 1,000 rooms, making

it the largest luxury convention hotel in Austin and the largest in the JW franchise. Its bar scene has become the top local's "go to" destination, with alcohol sales surpassing those of the W.

According to <http://www.austintexas.org/includes/content/docs/media/ACVB-Austin-Upcoming-Hotel-Projects.pdf> by 2016, 9,100 new rooms will be available downtown with a total of 34,000 city wide. By 2017 11,000 downtown and 36,000 citywide.

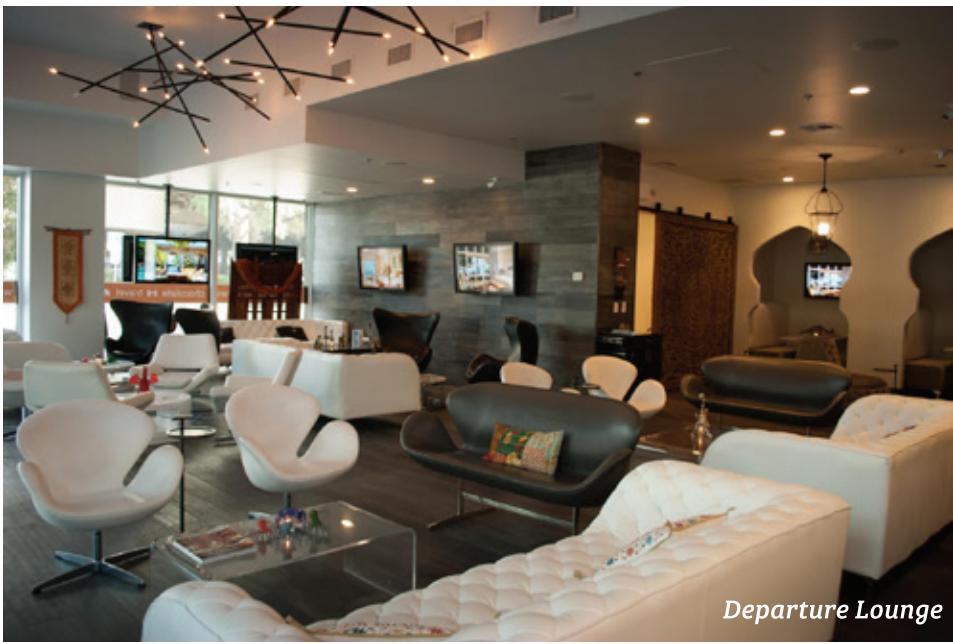
"Austin is becoming sophisticated, evolving into a world class destination", says Keith Waldon owner of Departure Lounge, a luxury travel agency/wine bar and member of Virtuoso. "The calibre of luxury properties

has not kept up with the growth of the city" he says. We have the Four Seasons and the Driskill and a few other 4 star properties who've been around for 20 years. The Four Seasons has gone through a multi-million dollar renovation to keep up with the newcomers. Others are following suite."

The San Jose and San Cecilia luxury



**Keith Waldon**  
**Founder & Director at Departure Lounge**



Departure Lounge

properties have very small capacity, under 50 rooms and are consistently booked out. Hotel Ella near the UT campus and the South Congress Hotel are both owned by the Violet Crown Hospitality Group. Hotel ZaZa (boutique institutions in both Houston and Dallas) has not yet broken ground and is located downtown, nor has Proper Hospitality's Austin hotel & residential downtown tower. Together with a live music venue and restaurant, the Hotel van Zandt will be a funky version of upscale. The Fairmont's huge entry to the market will have an adjacent walkway, with a giant 1,200 rooms (and a residential arm), to the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB) giving the JW a run for their money.

Austin will have 2 huge cornerstones for group and luxury business with JW and Fairmont. Since leisure travel has been steady there wasn't a great option for conferences, points out Waldon, because the hotel infrastructure was lacking. Austin would lose out to cities like Houston, Dallas, Phoenix.

Carolyn McCall-Squires, Assistant Director of Marketing and Membership at the Texas Hotel & Lodging Association has seen

firsthand Austin's burgeoning growth over two decades. THLA is the largest association of its kind in the USA with over 3000 members. <https://texaslodging.com>.

She explained, "Prior to 2013 there were only 732 rooms divided amongst the Four Seasons, Intercontinental and the W. By 2017 there ought to be approximately 3,004 rooms, according to the Smith Travel Research standards of luxury property inventory." THLA works closely with the Austin chapter to provide insight on transportation and infrastructure issues as well as legal advice. As more capacity comes online, the prices will be lowered. "Right now it's crazy high", says Keith Waldon. It's not uncommon for the W to get \$450 - \$550 per night for their entry level room.

Since there's direct access to cities like NY, SF, LA, CHI etc. Austin Bergstrom Airport now boasts 7 weekly flights to London via BA and Air Canada launched direct to Toronto besides 300+ daily flights to over 45 cities, making the city more attractive.

Newcomer Hotel Granduca Austin will be located in the Westlake

district offering a distinct old world Italian ambience and residential feel. Scheduled to open in October of 2015 with 194 rooms, CEO Joseph Violi reports, "Our cultural connection is to Italy. Granduca will be an oasis, like a Tuscan palazzo in the hills of Texas." Expect to see a distinct Northern Italian restaurant in a town that is clamoring for more authentic cuisine.

One can speculate that Austin will become the next LA. According to Forbes March 2015 worst evening commutes Austin clocks in at #8 of 10. While CapMetro has added many new bus lines there are no bus lanes so cars, bikes and motorcycles share bus lanes causing aggravation. There's a bus that goes from the airport to downtown yet no light rail or mass transit. The city is doing more to make the downtown area walkable by adding sidewalks and has installed a beautiful boardwalk along Lady Bird Lake. However parking is a big headache.

Still, with thousands moving in each month and increased construction of hotels and residences, one wonders where will all the bodies go and how will they move about? Waldon adds, "So long as Austin continues to be the hotbed for innovation — take Silver Car, Austin Capitol and cuisine, group business and conferences will want to be a part of the vibe that makes Austin unique."



About the author

Elise Krentzel is a Creative Strategist - a Sales, Marketing and Branding leader moving luxury, travel and hospitality at the cutting edge. A Natural explorer and career globalista, uncovering great ideas and building brilliant teams to execute them. She's lived in 5 countries and traveled to 600+ cities, done business in 7, and brings a wealth of experience, street smarts, and intuition to spot market needs and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Contact Elise on elise@krentzel.com

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# UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL

## OF YOUR BUILDINGS FOR HIGHER REVENUE PER ROOM AND IMPROVED OCCUPANT COMFORT

Since its inception, energy efficiency has been sometimes overlooked, due to unfounded assumptions. When most people think about energy efficiency, occupants' discomfort, high costs, heavy works and long ROI are often what come to mind; whereas there is actually a very effective method to being energy efficient without facing, and even preventing, these risks.

Most people also tend to get confused when it comes to energy efficiency, because the scope of what can be done is so wide: renewables, efficient lighting, insulation, equipment upgrades, controlling set points... If one is not specialized in the energy breakdown of hotels, it is very hard to picture what is happening and what could be done differently at various levels. For example, lightings do represent a consequent part of energy bills, rather easy to tackle, but a lighting project is only an insufficient fragment so that buildings' consumption will not be truly optimized and actually remain much higher than it could be if the whole spectrum of energy consumers were to be treated. HVAC systems for instance (Heating Ventilation Air Conditioning), often oversized, operating in isolation

and fighting each other; are the top contributors to overspending.

### Where does energy efficiency come from?

After a worldwide awareness emergence about global warming and climate change, "green" labelled products and solutions started to flourish in every activity field. Slowly but surely, people started to research more about human impact and to explore possibilities to minimize it. It was realized, among others, that energy was consumed at excessive speed, and that loads of CO<sub>2</sub> were produced even though it is one of the most noxious gases for the atmosphere. Buildings on their own were found to account for 40% of the world's energy consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and on top of being harmful for the planet, they cost a lot of money. The roots of building energy efficiency are therefore as simple as that: save money, save earth.

### Why should it be hotels' concern?

Well it simply makes sense! Besides saving money at no cost and so increasing your net profits, being kind to the environment is an everyday

more appreciated behavior. Most consumers feel more and more sensitive to that kind of initiatives, so that acting responsibly offers a broad set of advantages including impactful promotion tools. As for the savings the calculation is easy: 40% savings on a \$500,000 bill already represent 200K annually that can be invested in more purposeful ways, for instance to increase value offer through infrastructures or available services, which would in turn increase occupancy rates at no extra cost. Another path is to keep it to reduced costs, and so increased average revenue per room. In both ways, it will have a strong impact on profits. Giving the increasing value of green buildings, it is also a long term investment potentially giving the key to a 10 to 20% premium on selling price.

### What does it take to engage?

SMi Enerpro proposes a free diagnosis to put into the limelight the measures that can halve energy bills, and turnkey solutions to avoid clients any upfront investment. Then, works are performed in mechanical rooms and roofs, so that they do not jeopardize occupant comfort neither regular activities; and

# Smart Energy Management

## The case of the Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino

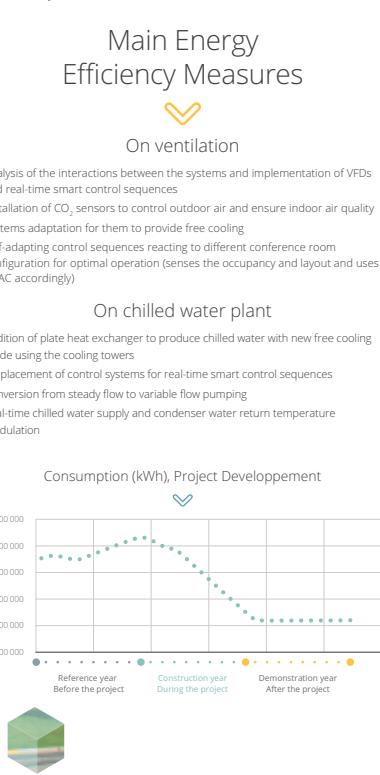


Photo credits: Gabe Lawrence

projects' costs are paid back through shared savings on a total ROI period as short as 4 years (including engineering, construction, financing costs, etc.). Smart energy management is therefore now available to anybody, at no cost and no risk.

### How does it work?

HVAC systems often represent nearly 55% of hotels energy consumption and SMi Enerpro can reduce this consumption by 50 to 60%, which results in hundreds of thousands of dollars saved. It is not necessary to undertake big and costly construction projects; it is mostly about rethinking how all the equipment work together. And actually that is the point: they often do not work together, or at least not as much as they could. That is also why replacing it to more efficient equipment is not what is going to save the more money. What will is the ability to analyze systems and



controls interactions to make sure they perfectly fit each other and work hand in hand. While classic HVAC and control systems are inefficiently ran according to set points for a typical day, smart algorithms permit real-time dynamic modulation which takes into consideration live conditions. Let's take an example: for instance on July 24th, at 3 pm., the data in a classic system would be the monthly region average weather and outside temperature, for

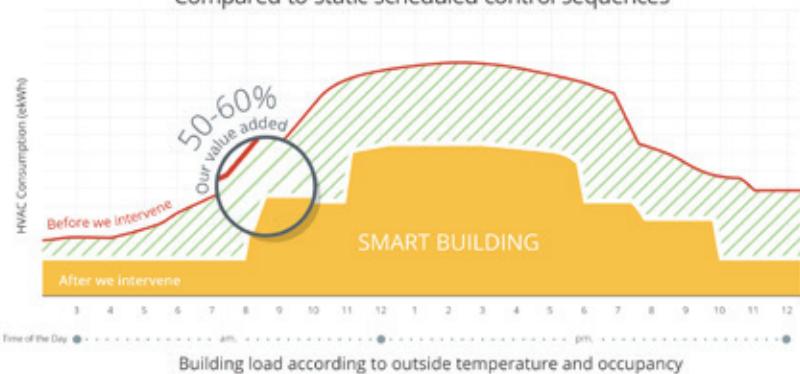
instance clear weather 25 degrees, and no occupancy data would be specified. If on July 24 it is actually 15 degrees, occupants will tend to stay more at the hotel so occupancy could be way more consequent than usual, with some people in common areas and many people in their rooms. In that case these people would not feel comfortable because rooms' temperatures would not be regulated at that time of the day, and in common areas air conditioning would be on and make them feel cold. Similarly, if it were 35 degrees, it would also be too hot because air conditioning would behave as if it were 25. In any case, it leads to systems misconduct, purposeless spending, and occupant discomfort. On the contrary, smart algorithms and HVAC real-time dynamic modulation will allow to just sticking to real-time internal and external environments' conditions (such as weather and occupancy, too often overlooked), thereby ensuring minimized energy expenses and improved occupant comfort.

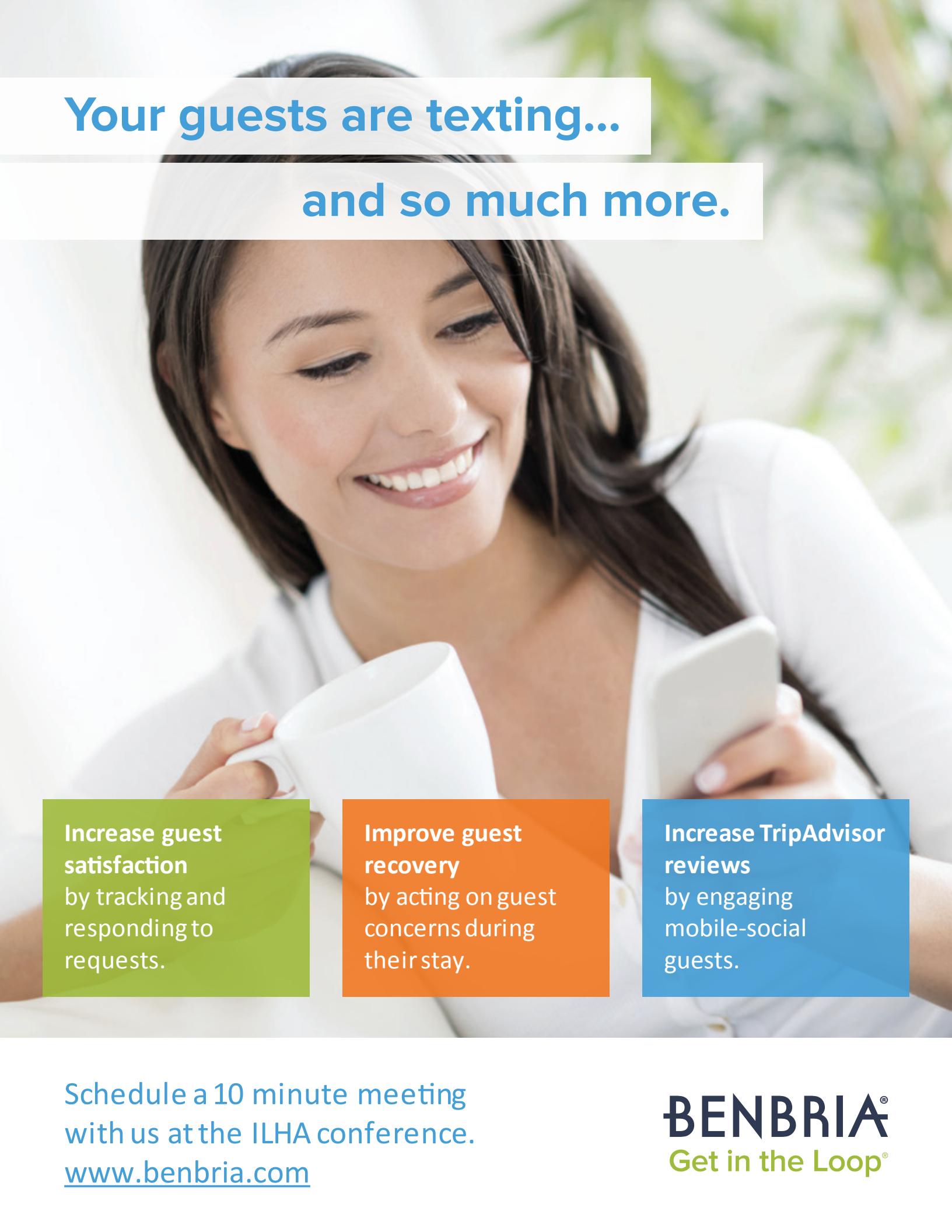
### What to remember?

Energy efficiency, and more particularly smart HVAC real-time dynamic modulation, is at your door. It is affordable, reliable, cost-effective and beneficial for the environment. Doing good for the planet and doing good for your own is now the same thing, and "green" has actually become profitable.

*For more reference information or a free energy efficiency diagnosis contact SMi Enerpro, the ILHA Official Building Energy Efficiency Partner.*

### The Benefits of Real-Time Dynamic Modulation Compared to static scheduled control sequences





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