

5 guest trends dominating travel experiences in 2021

Given the challenges that Covid-19 brought to the hospitality industry, it has had to adapt to ensure its survival. Now with domestic travel slowly returning, the question is: What are the specific challenges that are shaping the 'new normal'?

Shaun Lamont, managing director of First Group Hotels and Resorts, says several business and leisure travel trends are emerging from the pandemic, some of which he believes are here to stay.



Shaun Lamont

“Choosing a resort that follows strict Covid protocols is at the top of every holiday-makers list and we are not alone in the extreme measures that we have implemented to ensure guest safety. Over the past 12 months though, we have also noticed other significant shifts in guest behaviour,” Lamont explains. “From bookings to choice of accommodation to communication, travellers venturing out into the world definitely have new expectations.”

Lamont shares five guest trends that are dominating travel experiences in 2021 and will continue to influence the hospitality sector for the months and years to come:

Digital bookings

Consumers have become more tech-savvy with the trend towards digital and contactless services gaining momentum. These changing attitudes have impacted the hospitality industry too and we have witnessed an increase in the number of online bookings. This works in favour of the guest as we can communicate with them directly, provide reservation confirmation emails, pre-arrival communication and information on all guest safety touchpoints.



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Self-catering

Hotels have historically outperformed self-catering in terms of occupancy rates. Several long-standing factors have attributed to this dominance, particularly business and group travel. But Covid has turned the industry on its head. Worldwide, surveys show that self-catering now boasts almost double hotels' occupancy rates, likely due to its ability to adapt to social distancing measures, the home-like environment and the fact that it offers more remote and private locations. Blending work and play, business travellers are now also opting for self-catering as it provides a space where they can work comfortably while enjoying more privacy.



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Booking ahead of time

There have been significant changes in guest behaviour in terms of reservations. Our guests are booking their well-deserved getaways further in advance and we are finding that this is often because families and blended families are choosing to reconnect with one another by spending time at our resorts. This is a sure indication that following lockdown, people are cherishing the time away from home and choosing to share their holiday experience with the special people in their lives.

Outdoor events

There has also been a significant increase in the number of queries into outdoor events. This popularity can be attributed to people's desire to avoid the three Cs – crowded places, close-contact settings and confined enclosed spaces. Whether it's meeting and event space, outdoor dining or inviting green spaces for socially distant coffee breaks, more and more guests are looking to incorporate the outdoors into their holiday or business experience.



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Virtual events

Virtual meetings have become a norm but the demand for hybrid events is definitely on the rise. This caters for smaller groups of people who get together face-to-face at resorts that are closer to home. They, in turn, meet virtually with other groups to stage a much larger, live conference. Adding value for our guests and taking care of their virtual communication and engagement is, therefore, a key priority.

“Guest behaviour is constantly shifting and new trends are emerging all the time. The hospitality sector is however resilient, and we look to the future with optimism. In the meantime, our mission is to continually update our guest experiences and to understand new trends so that we continue to help our guests make lasting, magical memories,” Lamont concludes.

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