

What the hospitality sector should stay on top of for 2019

 By [Sharmila Ragunanan](#)

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As part of Bizcommunity's BizTrends 2019 series, Sharmila Ragunanan, hospitality expert and group marketing manager for Dream Hotels & Resorts, dishes on hotel trends that will make the traveller experience even more exciting in 2019, and other industry developments that lie ahead.



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Dream Hotels & Resorts (DHR) recently rounded-up its 2018 General Managers' conference. Here, Ragunanan offers some feedback from the event and advises how best to tackle industry changes in the new year.

■ ***The United Nations declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, and since then this has been a significant trend. What is the momentum here going into 2019?***

As we have seen in recent years, sustainability and sustainable travel have become less of a niche trend and more mainstream; it's great that more hoteliers are going more 'green'. However, we still see a degree of 'greenwashing' and the wrongful promotion of false environmental credentials. The hotel sector needs to be careful of this. Green credentials are great for marketing to conscientious consumers, but if you are going public with this message, you have to make sure these operation and systems are valid, and customer-inclusive.

I do feel practices such as grey-water recycling, the use of low-energy light bulbs and enforcing straw bans will become low hanging fruit and industry norms in 2019. If stakeholders want to become leaders in the eco-arena, they need to push well beyond quick buy-ins...

■ ***GlobalData predicts outbound family travel will grow by approximately 4.6% (compound annual growth) from 300-million trips in 2017 to 376-million in 2022. How can industry players tap into this growing family travel market?***

This is an industry trend that often gets overlooked when it comes to the start of a new year. It's one that is a beneficial trend to tap into for 2019, seeing as families often return to the same holiday destination year after year, and even generation after generation. There are always going to be families that travel, and this sector should still carry the same excitement and focus as a new trend at the start of the year. But, to really tap into this, it's important to really get under the skin of the family guest experience, ensuring a sense of security and support, not just during their stay, but before they book and also a follow up after check-in.

GlobalData's consumer survey also states that parents are likely to favour sun and beach (54%) holidays in the coming year, followed by visiting friends or family (34%) and city breaks (28%), which is precisely what many hotels, guest houses, home shares and lodges offer in South Africa.



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At Dream Hotels & Resorts, we have concentrated on value-adds for families by growing a varied portfolio of family-friendly resorts and lodges across the country. We also offer exclusive membership programmes with benefits, along with holiday ownership opportunities.

Added to that, when it comes to pet owners who hate leaving their 'fur babies' behind, we are currently exploring the viability of pet-friendly accommodation at selected resorts. Pet-friendly requests are growing and will be important to monitor over the next year.

■ **Personalisation is another significant trend that we have seen dominate 2018. How will this develop in 2019?**

Our industry is entering a golden age of personalisation. The current economic climate and market woes have made locals more conscious when spending on their holidays. When it comes to personalised add-ons, stakeholders should carefully consider whether guests are willing to spend more. According to research by Statistics South Africa, from 2016 to 2017, travellers travelled more but spent less.

When discussing this particular trend at our General Managers' conference, most of the proposals were to improve our existing strategy. Many of our properties will be undergoing internal training drives to upskill our staff so that we can focus on maintaining a personal touch.



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In the current wave of hospitality technology, we want to bring back a more human element, without too many bells and whistles. There is still a huge demand for personalisation in South Africa, especially as we see more intimate experiences offered by the likes of Airbnb. By treating guests as individuals, customers are far more likely to return to your establishment.

■ **Unsurprisingly, in our stressed world, wellness tourism is one of the fastest growing industries. What's new with this trend?**

The Global Wellness Institute has predicted wellness travel to become a US\$800 billion industry by 2020 which says a lot about how people are choosing to travel, putting their physical and mental wellbeing at the forefront of their holiday choices.

In hospitality, this now extends beyond hotel gyms and spas, with an increase in services such as personal chefs and tailored menus, meditation classes and yoga retreats, but also experiences where guests can fully engage within their surroundings, connect with the people they encounter, and build a greater awareness within themselves.



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At our conference, we loved the 'farm-to-fork' concept of building veggie gardens, not only for sourcing food straight to our kitchens, but for contributing to community upliftment. By employing people from the community to be directly involved in these projects, guests have an opportunity to feel more connected to their surroundings and can gain a greater sense of value from their stay.

■ **Any closing remarks on how to tackle 2019 hospitality trends?**

From pod-style hotels to rooms on glaciers, the hospitality industry is rapidly evolving; but it's important not to get too distracted by every 'trend'. While it's good to keep an eye on year-end trend reports, not every trend concerns every hotel, guest house or lodge.

What we must keep top of mind when starting a new year are global market changes and a possible local economic slowdown, especially with the upcoming elections in 2019, which is set to impact growth in all industries, countrywide.

ABOUT SHARMILA RAGUNANAN

Sharmila Ragunan is a hospitality expert and group marketing executive for Dream Hotels & Resorts.

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