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SEARCH



How to design hotels for wellness tourism

April 14 2014

Travelers want healthy options while on the road. Owners would do well to add wellness elements to their hotels.

Highlights

- Today, more and more hotel chains are creating designated brands to appeal to the wellness traveler.
- Wellness tourism is a \$439-billion market worldwide, according to SRI International.
- There are plenty of wellness elements owners can add to an existing hotel.

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The needs of hotel guests are ever evolving, and the hospitality industry continues to adapt to meet their demands. Today's travelers are exceedingly focused on healthy living and expect to maintain their wellness lifestyle when traveling. Wellness isn't just the physical aspect of a balanced wellbeing, it also encompasses beauty, healthy diet, relaxation, stress relief and meditation. All these elements should be considered when designing a hotel.

In a recent [Spafinder Wellness 365 consumer survey](#), travelers indicated they are looking to have more wellness options in their destinations, such as healthier food, spa/massage, nature experiences, eco-conscious properties, gyms with cardio and weights, healthy sleep programs and meditation/mindfulness programming.

The focus on wellness design has become an extension of sustainable design that many hospitality brands are embracing.

A few years ago, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide created the Element brand to attract the eco-friendly guest. The focus was on sustainable products and construction methods as well as sustainability in the operations of the hotel. It was the first hotel brand to mandate that the product would be designed and built at the minimal level of LEED Certified.

Wellness is the sustainability, balance and enrichment of our physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual selves. Today, more and more [hotel chains are creating designated brands](#) to appeal to the wellness traveler. InterContinental Hotels Group has developed the Even brand that focuses on guests' total wellbeing. Others, such as MGM Grand in Las Vegas, have instituted wellness floors where wellness amenities, including air and water purification systems; hypo-allergenic materials; antibacterial surfaces; and state-of-the-art lighting for restful sleep are present in each room on the floor. It has evidently been so well received that MGM is expanding the number of rooms with these features.

Incorporating wellness in public spaces

There are plenty of ways to incorporate wellness elements into an existing hotel.

In the public areas, food options in the market/sundries area can offer healthier fare. HEPA filters can be added to restrict airborne contaminants. Expanding the



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fitness center with workout space and additional fitness equipment is another option. The days of a “two-bay” fitness center with one piece of each type of equipment are slowly disappearing. The technology in fitness equipment has also grown to include individual TV screens and iPod docking stations to allow guests to personalize their workouts.

Cardio equipment will always be in demand in the fitness center, but guests are increasingly looking for open spaces for yoga, meditation and to focus on their core and balance. Some brands are retooling their standards of design and construction to require these larger fitness centers. Some hotels even offer classes in aerobics, Zumba, yoga and spinning. Hotel staff need to be familiar with nearby parks and outdoor areas where guests can be offered the means to engage in walking, running, hiking, biking, and other sporting and tour activities.

It is evident in recent property improvement plans that brands are trying to accommodate this growing demand. One way to increase the size of the fitness center is through the elimination of the locker room. Depending on local ordinances and building codes, these days a smaller, ADA-compliant restroom is sufficient for the needs of the guests in the fitness center. If possible, a single unisex bathroom also will allow you to capture the space utilized by the second one.

Incorporating wellness in guestrooms

In the guestroom, guests are looking for more of a “retreat” atmosphere. A bigger emphasis is put on developing a serene sleep experience with premier bedding, pillow options and a complete blackout feel in the room. Ergonomic task chairs are becoming the standard for most brands, and healthier options in the minibar is also gaining traction.

Lighting is also important. It is essential to incorporate a mix of natural, task and ambient lighting to capture all the different needs of the guest. Technological strides have been made by PTAC manufacturers to also lessen the noise associated with these individual HVAC units to minimize compressor noise.

In the bathrooms, spa-like fixtures such as rain showerheads are being added to aid in guests' relaxation escape. These once-pricey plumbing fixtures are now commonplace and are much more economical, allowing them to be utilized in every tier of hotel. Incorporating elements such as these enhance the guest experience and can lead to repeat business.

Good business sense

Being sensitive to healthy travel is also good business. According to research conducted by SRI International, wellness tourism is a \$439-billion market worldwide that is expected to increase 9% annually through 2017.

With statistics like these, it is clear that the relationship between wellness and hospitality is one that is not going away anytime soon. As this trend rapidly grows, hoteliers should keep in mind that a guest who lives a balanced lifestyle at home should be able to live the same way while traveling. A hotel visit should be an extension of guests' lives, giving them everything they would need to keep their daily routines in working order.

Integrating a few key wellness items is a great place to start.

Jonathan C. Nehmer, AIA, ISHC, president of Jonathan Nehmer + Associates, Inc., is a hospitality industry veteran with more than 30 years of experience in all facets of architecture and interior design, design management, project management, and construction administration. Since 1989, JN+A has led the hospitality industry in Architecture, Project Management, and Interior Design for hotel and resort projects around the globe. Visit the company's website, www.nehmer.com, for more information.

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April 21 2014

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