

Beyond the basics

However, hotel suites are now more than just luxury rooms to sleep in; they can also be at the centre of indulgent experiences. If luxury experience is the word, no one does it better than Taj's palace hotels. Butlers and the housekeeping team detail out the smallest of preferences which help personalise a guest's stay. Umaid Bhawan Palace's general manager Mehrnavaz Avari offers an insight, "Our guests appreciate the small touches that we leave behind in the rooms, such as a palace logo bookmark along with their book placed by the bed. During our evening service, we place souvenirs in the room, such as luggage tags with the palace logo or a camel leather diary, cufflinks with Umaid Bhawan insignia, silk scarfs, customised perfumes by royal perfumers, traditional woolen shawl 'pattu' for the gentlemen and Rajputi rings for the ladies. We share these beautiful memories with our guests along with a personalised note emphasising the local origin of these gifts."

The process of personalisation and customisation at Umaid Bhawan Palace starts once guests reserve accommodation. The team relentlessly works to ascertain personal preferences by researching profiles online, understanding their interests and incorporating them in the essential services. This could be as basic as a non-smoking room preference to an exceptionally complex dietary requirement based on food allergen.

According to Avari, luxury is no longer about products, given the global shift in consumer behaviour. "It is clear that experiences have a higher weightage over material things and amenities such as silk robes and stocked up minibars. What really sets a luxury palace hotel apart is providing authentic and genuinely personalised experiences, based on individual preferences. Our guests want their adobe to be set at the very precise temperature they like and the bed to be made as per their preference." At Umaid Bhawan Palace, for instance, the team adds personal touches to the room by placing well-researched family pictures discreetly in the suite.

Bespoke experiences, clearly, is what differentiate a regular hotel from a superlative one. Hotels such as Fairmont Jaipur specialise in personalised in-room setups to celebrate special occasions, from birthdays to anniversaries. The hotel also offers kid-friendly amenities and services within the room — they are welcome by the royal mascot, 'Prince - the parrot' and are gifted a kids' kit bag that includes a slate, chalk and a Rajasthani puppet. Often, the housekeeping staff sets up a special small tent, besides baby slippers and bathrobes.

Among the bespoke amenities within their suites, St Regis Mumbai counts eco-friendly luxury products from a local company that



➔ Inara is putting in product research for innovative amenities.



➔ Customised bath products for solo women travellers are placed in The Imperial, New Delhi's Eliza Room.



➔ Vijay Wanchoo - SR. EVP & GM The Imperial, New Delhi.



➔ Sonia Banerjee, director of rooms, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru.

help create awareness about the environment.

Guests staying at The Imperial New Delhi's ELIZA rooms booked by single women travellers are pampered with gifts such as manicure sets, an essential kit from Forest Essentials and hand-crafted flower arrangements. "From room amenities to bathroom accessories, the rooms have everything a woman can imagine. Eliza rooms have enhanced security measures; the calls are screened before they are put through. The rooms have female housekeeping staff and lady butlers. The most interesting aspect is the 'feminine touch' — the soft linen and the bathrobe are in shades of pink," adds Vijay Wanchoo, Sr. EVP & GM, The Imperial New Delhi.

For most hotels, single women travellers have emerged as a good market. JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru offers silk bathrobes and pot-pourri takeaways. Sonali Banerjee, director of rooms says, "Sweet little gestures make a great impact on a guests' overall experience, especially solo business travellers."

Ultimately, as Aman Dhoundiyal, director of rooms, W Goa contends, guests remember personalised service and amenities. "Pre-empting their needs and delivering more than their expectations goes a long way in making a guest's stay memorable."

Curating F&B experiences

F&B experiences play a rather important role in in-room amenities

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- Mehrnavaz Avari, general manager, Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur.



➡ The Roseate New Delhi organises unique dining experiences by the pool deck in all the Roseate Pool rooms.

in social media and on other rating sites.” Oriental has customised amenities for hospitality groups across categories — from the Taj Group to Ginger Hotels, Lemon Tree Hotels, the Ascott Group (Chennai) and Golkonda Hotels (Hyderabad).

Brands such as Inara are putting in product research and development to come up with personalised products. Aditya Kumar of Mountain Valley Springs India, which makes the Inara brand says, “Last summer, we launched the Water Lily and Citrus Leaf collection for the Marriott premium brands, which is available in 23 units including Marriott Resorts, Le Meridiens, Renaissance and Marriott Suite & Apartments. We received rave reviews and feedback on this collection from guests who were keen to buy the range, which is completely free of sulphates, parabens, colouring agents or synthetics, for their personal use.”

Inara uses the finest quality ingredients to create products that are authentically Indian and qualitatively global. “Our innovative extraction processes and traditional know-how leverage the natural benefits of the plants. The emphasis is on following sustainable practices. Hotels now prefer handmade luxurious amenities, which contain natural aromatic oils, essential oil aromas and nourishing salts,” says Kumar.

Hotels, clearly, are looking for responsibly-sourced amenities, including cruelty-free line of products that are environmentally sustainable, including recyclable water bottles and disposables.

According to Kochar, most hotels order people-centric products such as kids’ kits or single ladies kits as special amenities, besides environmentally sustainable products. “Bio-degradable packaging and products such as toothbrush and comb are a huge hit in a conscious effort to reduce plastic waste. Hotels are compelled to become more environment friendly to meet governmental regulations on waste disposal; guests themselves are very familiar with environmental issues.”

Turndown service and departure gifts

Hotels often add special touches to turndown service by leav-



Luxury, for me, is experiential. It is a grand culture, both individualistic and distinguished. One can sink into a world of unprecedented excesses and be close and personal with sheer magnificence in the rooms.”

- Vijay Wanchoo, Sr. EVP & GM, The Imperial New Delhi

ing little thoughtful gifts. If at Niraamaya Retreats, the house-keeping staff leaves little cards explaining either an Ayurveda concept or a culinary ingredient and its importance in Ayurveda, at Fairmont Jaipur, traditional souvenirs are placed in the room along with a handwritten note. The Imperial New Delhi leaves a box of signature SUFI oils from The Imperial Spa as a take home memory in some of the suites. At JW Marriott Bengaluru, guests are treated with Channapatna toys as iconic souvenirs from Karnataka. Sheraton Grand Bangalore’s takeaway gifts, particularly for their long-stayed guests include fridge magnets with some iconic monument from Bengaluru, Channapatna toys and keys chains.

My favourite memory of the best turndown service and takeaway gifts was once again at an Aman property. Amankora Thimphu had asked a Buddhist monk to bless our onward journey and offer us a silk scarf or the *khat*.

The team would leave beautiful books on wildlife in the region or short stories written by Bhutanese authors during turn down service. **H**