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HOTEL STYLE FOR THE WESTERN EYE

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creating a hotel experience that appeals to travellers of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds can be a challenge. They have different expectations, wants and needs, making it difficult for hoteliers to make design decisions and determine how to prioritize investments in a property. Even marketing can be difficult, as the hotel photo that attracts vacationers from one country doesn’t make someone of another nationality even pause as they click through the internet.

Hotelliers, of course, know their markets and clientele best. But I have some advice for hotels catering to westerners. My comments are designed for independent mid-priced hotels with guests on vacation, less so to business hotels. Following some of these tips might help bump a hotel into the boutique category, perhaps enabling a rate increase too.

And who am I to prescribe? I’m a Canadian travel writer visiting three to six continents annually. Over the past few years, I’ve stayed in hundreds of hotel rooms around the world and talked to thousands of travellers about hotel preferences. As the Contributing Editor of a magazine, I write articles aiming to attract our readers — predominantly from the UK, the US, Canada and Australia — to the hotels in our worldwide portfolio.
WESTERNERS OFTEN FIND ROOMS WITH A LOT OF DECORATION TO BE TOO BUSY AND NOT RELAXING.

MINIMALIST ROOMS

Simple decor and a minimalist style go a long way; bonus — it’s easier on the budget. Paint walls a pale, neutral colour. Don’t decorate with framed prints; they often look cheap, especially if hung too high. Instead, show off something local giving a sense of where we are, and, at the same time, helping the local economy. Hang a large textile on a wall or arrange three baskets on a shelf. Or, make your hotel a gallery and hang works by local artists (make prices available too). You likely don’t need much more. Westerners often find rooms with a lot of decoration to be too busy and not relaxing. Even more so after we unpack our belongings.

Be sure there’s enough space for guests to unpack. Bedside tables on both sides of the bed are essential, as is a table or shelving for cameras and small bags. Ideally, every room has two luggage racks — otherwise some guests will put their suitcase on the bed (dirtying your white cover and perhaps spreading bed bugs). A closet with fewer than 10 hangers is paltry. They should all be the same colour (even if plastic) or the hotel looks second-rate.

A desk is ideal, as are two comfortable chairs for guests to sit and chat together. Most people want the ability to make both coffee and tea in their room; quality counts and local teas are better than mass market. A fan is wonderful for anyone disliking air-conditioning, and has the added bonus of muffling sleep-disturbing noise.

WHITE LINENS PERCEIVED AS CLEANER AND MORE LUXURIOUS

Resulting from studies by Westin hotels, most North American and European hotels switched from colourful and patterned linens to white in the 1990s. White beds and towels brighten up a room and make it seem bigger. White reassures guests that their linens are freshly laundered because they can’t hide stains. It fades more evenly, so linens look new longer. Plus, laundry loads of all-white linens don’t have to be separated.

It was only around 2005 that many major hotel chains started washing bedspread covers after every guest. Westerners are occasionally rattled by exposés revealing hotels that, through mistake or policy, aren’t doing thorough linen changes. A non-white bed triggers the thought “has this been washed?”
It’s expensive to add them, but hotel rooms with plenty of easily-accessible power outlets are beloved by all. A person on each side of the bed should be able to have their phone charging and reachable — without needing to unplug lamps or move furniture.

Westerners travel with lots of stuff that needs charging — laptops, tablets, camera batteries and more — and we want convenient places to charge them all at the same time. We understand conserving electricity by using the keycard to activate the room’s power, but when we’re pressed for time we want to charge devices while we’re away from the room. Until your hotel can accommodate this, be sure to inform guests so they can plan around it and not be stuck with uncharged devices.

Weak wifi is a major irritant. Explain to guests if your region doesn’t have great wifi in the first place, but do everything you can to ensure your hotel’s signal is strong in every room. Moving from room to restaurant to lobby is, ideally, seamless without the need to input new passwords. Easy-to-remember passwords are better than random numbers and letters, especially if the system boots users off and they have to re-login. Wifi should be free, but you could consider charging extra for upgraded bandwidth for movie streaming, if necessary.

If your wifi is good enough, you might be able to get away with not having in-room televisions since so many westerners travel with a tablet and Netflix. Be sure to be upfront about it, but feel free to describe it as encouraging us to have a digital detox and focus on the destination.
Few hotels anywhere in the world get lighting right. Especially as we get older, guests want lots of light in the bathroom, at the desk and in the closet. Women in particular want good lighting around the bathroom mirror, which means bright lighting from the side not from above. Few hotels anywhere in the world get lighting right.

**LOTS OF LIGHT, ESPECIALLY IN THE BATHROOM**

Most western hotel guests would prefer locally-made local soaps, shampoos and lotions. We don’t want mass-market brands in tiny plastic bottles shipped across an ocean. Feel free to put liquids in larger containers - ideally pump bottles to help reduce the world’s plastic waste problem. Leave information telling us about the products and sell them in your gift shop.

**LOCALLY-MADE BATH AMENITIES**

The addition of hair conditioner makes westerners perceive a hotel as nicer.

Be sure there’s soap for both the sink and the shower. Travellers do appreciate hand cream and a small bottle of mouthwash. Shaving kits and toothbrush sets are nice (but can just be available on request); combs are a waste of money.

Bathrobes are prized. Large soft towels are perceived as luxe, small rough towels as budget. Make sure there are wall hooks to encourage us to re-use them. Slippers are nice, but be sure it’s obvious they’re brand new. If not, don’t provide them at all. Leaving homemade cookies or local candy is sure to please, as is a small gift of anything locally made, especially if you tell us about a local tradition related to it. A welcome drink of local juice is very boutique; drinking it while doing an in-room check-in is even more so.

In countries where tap water isn’t potable, consider providing 1.5 L bottles of water instead of smaller ones to reduce plastic usage. Better yet, refill glass bottles from large jugs (we’ll need you to reassure us it’s not tap water).

Hotels that loan guests data-enabled mobile phones are a dream, so we can use Google Maps (and call you) if we don’t have a local SIM card. Hotels providing complimentary airport transfer are ideal as it eliminates the need to arrive with local currency and worry about getting lost or being overcharged.

Lunch and dinner buffets are considered second-rate, though they’re fine for breakfast so long as eggs can be cooked to order. Too many buffets, though, have food that’s not kept hot enough, affecting not only quality perceptions but food safety. Staff who are aware of and can accommodate food sensitivities like gluten, dairy and nuts are welcomed.

**AMENITIES THAT HELP BOOST A HOTEL INTO THE BOUTIQUE CATEGORY**

It’s awful that some hotel guests think they can put the bathrobe in their suitcase to take home. But the wording of many hotels’ signs make those of us who wouldn’t dream of stealing feel suspect. Instead, invite us to purchase the items with words like “Our guests love our amenities; if you’d like to take it home, prices are as follows”.

Even better, tell us that the local art and handicrafts decorating the room are also for sale. Telling us about a local tradition or story encourages us to buy more. ¶
NMA OKPARA
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Nma Okpara is a food writer. She loves food, travels, and the adventures she gets from using her mouth. She loves the pureness of food and the journey it takes her through. She tells her story through her pots and pans, and dreams of dining Africa with her readers; showing them the exotiness of the African culture through food.

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Gordon Triegaardt is a travel consultant and CEO of Traveltroll Africa, a company that offers travel to over 20 Africa destinations catering to both leisure and business travellers. Gordon is based in Johannesburg, South Africa but frequently travels across the globe. He is passionate about travel and reads a lot.

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Mark Kevin Ndlovu is the founder and Executive Chairman of the Siyaphula Group of Companies. The group has interests in Agriculture, Energy, Engineering, Travel and Tourism. Mark has over 20 years experience in business and has travelled extensively across the globe.

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MJ as fondly called is a management expert in the field of aviation. Having started her career in the industry as a cabin crew, she seeks to share funny, yet inspirational stories with her audience in the hope that they can become more comfortable with crossing continents and people.

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Olivia is a freelance journalist and editor living in Manhattan, New York. When she is not enjoying life in the "concrete jungle," she is writing abroad, experiencing the world and the incredible humans that occupy it. Olivia has been published in over 20 print and online media and has visited over 90 countries. Her passions include sustainable tourism, education and promoting health access for all.

AFROLEMS
PG 74
Afrolems is an African food blog with a specialization in Nigerian Food. Our main focus is to stylize African food so it can be internationalized. We aim to educate our followers with kitchen tips, Cooking Know-hows and interesting recipes from all over Africa and just modifications of recipes from other cultures. We also like to play with foreign recipes as well.