



**The modern guide to a great  
hotel guest experience**

**expedia group™**



# Creating great hotel experiences for modern guests

Today everything is faster, more accessible and personalized. Innovation from Netflix, Amazon, Uber, Apple and others are shaping consumers' expectations for service and experience.

Delighting the next generation of guests will require hotels to adapt. This guide from Expedia Group suggests simple steps to offering a modern hotel guest experience.



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# What is hotel guest experience?

Hotel guest experience describes the touch points and emotions a traveler experiences interacting with a hotel, beginning with the research and booking experience and extending through to check-out. Aligned with the concept of customer experience in other consumer-facing industries, a consistent guest experience influences a traveler's overall perception of the hotel and the quality, value and level of satisfaction they have with their stay. A positive guest experience can result in [glowing reviews](#), return visits and a brand reputation that contributes to ongoing growth.

## Hotel guest experience is not guest satisfaction

Guest experience and guest satisfaction are related but distinct concepts. Guest experience describes the entirety of a traveler's interaction with a hotel, all the micro-moments that occur through human and digital channels and the physical experience of being on-property. Guest satisfaction is a point-in-time measurement that can capture how happy a traveler is with each micro-moment, as well as the entirety of their experience. Hotels who actively shape their guest experience and confirm satisfaction during a stay are more likely to meet and exceed traveler expectations. The rewards include both a healthy business and the sheer pleasure of delighting guests.

## Creating a modern hotel experience that satisfies guests

The foundation of providing a great guest experience hasn't changed—leave the traveler feeling valued and delighted after every interaction. But experience now includes digital and in-person engagement, significantly increasing the number of touch points and communication channels that must be considered. From pre-stay messages to room amenities, from staff interactions to the ease of booking—hoteliers need to deliver a consistent, high-quality experience. And if that wasn't challenge enough, technology continues to evolve and guest expectations rise, making hitting and exceeding goals for exceptional service an ongoing effort.

This guide lays out two approaches we believe will help you succeed. Ground your guest experience in a set of core principles and then align your efforts to the engagement you have with guests before, during and after a stay. Read on for suggests and tips.



# Principles to shape your guest experience

Guests are satisfied when their expectations are met and thrilled when you exceed them. Although this formula sounds easy, it can't be left to chance. Hoteliers need to actively outline what travelers can expect, work to know their guests—uncovering opportunities to delight them—and then deliver at every turn.

We've outlined four key principles that will help you define a guest experience that stands out to travelers and helps you grow your business

## Be consistent

With so many points of engagement, consistency of message and behavior have become fundamentally important to creating a positive experience.

Be sure not to narrow your focus to the interactions that occur once a guest arrives—that's actually mid-journey for them. Start with the [expectations you set](#) on your website and listings with online travel agents (OTAs) and consider how travelers will experience your brand and level of service from the moment they book until they're asked to leave a review. Inconsistencies add friction to the experience and can result in disappointment.

For example, if booking a stay is effortless but the check-in process is tiresome and slow—you're delivering inconsistent experiences and seeding doubt in the mind of the traveler about how much you value their stay.

However, if booking and check-in are effortless, your staff as warm and helpful as your pre-stay message and the property and room amenities exactly as expected—then you're well on your way to delivering a great experience and earning a [glowing review](#).

## Be proactive

[Deloitte](#) recently published research on the changing expectation of hotel guests, revealing two key data points that support the importance of reaching out to travelers before they arrive and personalizing their on-property experience.

- Occasional interaction meaningfully influences a guest's expectation in a hotel stay and has a significant impact on satisfaction (+/- 23 percent).
- Twenty-five percent were more likely to promote hotels who proactively communicated with them, but only 60 percent were satisfied with proactive communication and 65 percent with personalization of service.

Proactive communication before and during a guest's stay is a huge opportunity to influence how they perceive their experience and gives you the insight to delight them in simple, meaningful ways. From adjoining rooms for a family traveling to a baseball tournament to acknowledging a birthday getaway, doing all you can to create a seamless, personalized stay ensures you're delivering a great guest experience.

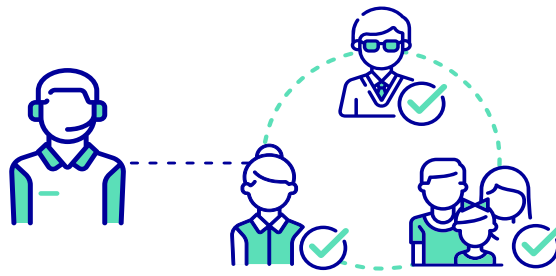
### **Be responsive**

The flip side of being proactive is being responsive to guest needs. This is never more important than when problems arise, as they inevitably will. How you acknowledge concerns and the speed at which you resolve them, will influence how guests feel about their overall experience. A quick response will reinforce that you value your guests and their experiences.

Don't assume that you'll know about every issue a guest has—no doubt you've been surprised by a negative review resulting from a situation you knew nothing about. Confirming guest satisfaction at key points in a stay will help you identify opportunities to go above and beyond and transform an okay stay into a great one.

### **Be authentic**

Creating memorable, even transformative, experiences is why many hoteliers work in hospitality, so let that passion shine through in every guest interaction. From warmly welcoming back repeat guests to providing insider tips on the best running paths, views and things to do—you have the ability to make people feel special. Treating your guests as guests instead of temporary occupants of your rooms, goes a long way toward differentiating your property and creating an experience people can't wait to share.



# Foster the human connection

Increasingly, hotels are adopting technology to better understand guests, personalize experiences and be more responsive. You're no doubt aware of trends involving automation, self-serve tools, AI and using data to better anticipate and learn from guest behavior. Perhaps your property has invested in technology to support your staff or leverages the [tools provided by OTAs](#) and channel managers to stay competitive. These advances help create more seamless experiences, increase traveler convenience and allow properties to run more efficiently. Yet even with the most advanced, integrated, guest-centric technology in place, your staff remains your most valuable asset in creating an exceptional experience.

From welcoming guests to caring for your property, your team has a significant impact on how guests feel when they stay with you. Here are a few tips to ensure you're maximizing your one-on-one interactions.

## Set expectations

A knowledgeable, confident staff is the best way to ensure happy guests. Set clear expectations for a consistent experience and reinforce training with current examples of what responsiveness, quality experience and problem resolution looks like at your property.

Ensure every member of your staff can interact knowledgeably with guests, from offering recommendations and accurately providing directions, information on amenities, hours of service and other basic information about your hotel.

## Encourage going beyond

The best moments to surprise and delight your guests typically can't be planned for, so it's important to empower your staff to seize the opportunity. This could mean giving front-line employees the freedom to invent ways of going the extra mile, or the power to resolve complaints on the spot without calling a manager.

Guests aren't the only ones to benefit from this approach; knowing you trust their expertise and value their views will give your team the confidence to do their very best.

## Create a safe environment for improvement

Use the feedback you receive from guests to demonstrate what a great guest experience feels like and explore how to better manage situations communicated in negative or mixed reviews. Publicly celebrate reviews praising individual staff members, handle negative feedback privately and routinely look for ways to reinforce expectations and inspire your staff.



# Design your strategy around the guest journey

It can be helpful to think about your guest experience strategy in three distinct phases: pre-, during and post-stay— just be sure to be consistent, proactive, responsive and authentic in each.

## Pre-stay

### Set expectations and identify opportunities

When traveler expectations are aligned with the level of service and amenities you provide, it's much easier to provide a great guest experience. Start at the beginning—when travelers are shopping for a place to stay—and ensure you're actively shaping expectations and delivering a consistent experience throughout the pre-stay period. Specifically consider the following.

#### Your website and OTA listings

The detail you provide about your property, rooms, services and policies allow travelers to assess whether staying with you will provide the experience they want. This is a pivotal moment for capturing a booking and securing a positive review.

Having the right, high-quality photos in your gallery is particularly important, as most travelers will use images to evaluate and confirm their impression of your property.

**Delve deeper:** Get guidance on effective hotel [photography](#) and discover how to optimize your [OTA listing](#) to match traveler search criteria with your property.

#### Booking experience

The speed and ease of booking a room will shape a traveler's perception of the guest experience that awaits them. Increasingly, travel transactions occur on smartphones or tablets, so having a mobile-friendly website and booking engine are essential to capturing direct business and reinforces that guests can expect modern tech amenities. The importance of this interaction extends to your indirect [distribution channels](#), including the OTAs you work with, so evaluating the user-friendliness of shopping and booking on third-party sites is also worthwhile.

#### Pre-stay communication

The moment you receive a booking, the guest experience begins in earnest. How quickly you acknowledge the booking, the warmth of your tone, the generosity of the information you provide all shape a guest's perception of their upcoming stay. Execute this stage of the journey well and you build goodwill prior to a guest's arrival.

Taking time to collect information about why they're traveling, when they'll arrive and whether they have any special requests, will help you demonstrate that you know and value the guest and perhaps uncover an opportunity to exceed their expectations.

**Delve deeper:** Learn how you can join forces with [OTAs to create a great guest experience](#).

## During

Demonstrate you know and care. Once a guest arrives, the key is to demonstrate that you've thought about their needs, value their business and care about their comfort and enjoyment. Creating consistency across interactions and aspects of their stay such as comfort, convenience and cleanliness is critical.

### Check-in, check-out and staff interactions

Check-in is another pivotal moment in the guest experience. A warm welcome, personalized if possible (Happy Anniversary!) and quickly handing off keys to guests—while leaving the door open for questions and conversation—is ideal.

The balance of efficiency and human interaction will vary by property. The goal is to define how you will be attentive to guest needs and ensure they feel known. Then educate your staff and deliver consistently across all interactions during a stay.

### Property and room amenities

The right amenities for your property, aside from being clean, well-kept and safe, will often depend on the guests you want to attract. If families are a key audience, free breakfast and a pool might be essential.

For business travelers, the fastest, most reliable Wi-Fi and discounted laundry service might set your property apart.

When it comes to amenities, two things are essential: setting accurate expectations for what will and won't be available and delivering the basics extremely well.

**Delve deeper:** Learn more about [hotel amenities and the modern traveler](#) and explore how to attract the guests you want with amenities.

### Delight and surprise

The opportunity to truly wow your guests with thoughtful touches exists primarily when they're on-property. Using the information gathered prior to arrival and by paying attention during their stay, you'll uncover ways to surprise and delight.

From proactively sharing local knowledge to acknowledging special occasions with handwritten notes and in-room gifts, taking time to personalize a stay exceeds expectations and elevates the overall experience.

**Delve deeper:** Get more tips on [delighting the modern traveler](#).

### Issue resolution

How you respond to problems can make or break a guest experience. Expressing genuine concern and moving quickly to resolve an issue with a room or level of service, can make up for a multitude of missteps. Going above and beyond when a guest has a personal problem—anything from a lost item to a family emergency—creates a deeper connection that is rewarding in its own right and fosters loyalty.

**Delve deeper:** Learn [how OTAs can support issue-resolution during a stay](#).



## Post-stay

A great experience doesn't end when a traveler wheels their suitcase out your door. In fact, it may be the most critical moment to ensure your business benefits from the happiness and satisfaction you've created.

### Post-stay communications

Once a guest departs, send a note of thanks and invite them to review their experience. Go the extra step of explaining that reviews are a vital way for you to spread the word about your property and help you grow your business. Ask, that if they enjoyed their stay, to please provide a 5-star review.

This is an important step whether the guest booked directly or through an indirect channel. Most OTAs will also solicit reviews on your behalf through their platforms.

### Engaging with reviews

When you receive a review, whether the feedback is positive, mixed or negative, it's best to respond. This is part of managing your online reputation and helps you set the expectation of future guests.

***Delve deeper:*** Discover best practices for responding to and [maximizing your reviews](#).



## Three tips for maintaining a great experience

With the foundation in place to deliver consistent experiences that make guests feel valued, it's important that you constantly evolve your strategy to keep pace with changing expectations. Here are three quick ways to stay in tune with what travelers want.

### Mine your reviews to identify trends

Depending on the size of your property, you could receive hundreds or thousands of guest reviews over the course of a year. Finding common themes in your feedback can help you understand what guests consider outstanding about your property, allowing you to strengthen your marketing messages. Simultaneously, you'll be able to recognize where you have friction in your guesting experience. Slow Wi-Fi? Long waits at check-in? Unresponsive staff? Once identified, these are opportunities that can be prioritized and remedied.

If sifting through your reviews sounds labor intensive, explore analytics tools offered by your OTAs. [Guest Insights](#), a free tool from Expedia Group, will do much of the work for you.

### Monitor your competitors

As part of their buying process, travelers will evaluate several places to stay before making

a booking. Those that consider staying with you will also likely vet properties similar to yours.

This is when having a customized competitive set and regularly comparing their listings, rates and reviews to yours, will help you adjust your guest experience to stay competitive.

OTA tools such as [Content score](#), Rev+ or Guest Insights can do this competitive analysis for you. For example, Guest Insights slots your top 24 amenities into three categories—what guests love, room for improvement and needs attention—and compares your ratings for each amenity to that of the competing properties you've selected.

### Maintain a dialog with your staff

As guests give feedback and post reviews, share and discuss them with your team. Invite a two-way conversation about evolving guest behaviors, spikes in new requests and the trends you see in reviews and competitive offers. Encourage them to work together to find creative solutions that are proactive, responsive and authentic to your values.



## Conclusion

With so many property choices and information out there, today's guests are more discerning than ever. Make them feel they've chosen somewhere special by giving them an outstanding guest experience. They'll spread the word to other travelers and they'll want to come back soon.

# Bringing the world closer to you, one booking at a time

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