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SCENT BRANDING 101

Aromatherapy solutions in hotels – embedded in a deep-rooted need for wellness — are also powerful tools to transform a guest’s experience and build emotional loyalty

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Mandarin Oriental's branding specialists often talk about how hotel guests remember what they smell more vividly than what they see or hear. According to American scent branding firm, 12.29, a person can recall a smell with 65% accuracy. Scent memories are persistent. Is it any wonder that in India, too, hospitality chains have begun recognising the power of scent, and aromatherapy is now an essential tool to enhance guest experience rather than just a luxury?

Humans have always had a beautiful relationship with scent and aromas. If you go back in history, you realise that aromatherapy has been used by ancient cultures such as Egyptians and the Vedic people, and even finds mention in the Bible. It possesses a unique healing system that uses natural extracts and aromas from essential oils (from plants, flowers, herbs or trees) to promote health and well-being. Hotels deploy aromatherapy solutions in their spas as well as in other spaces to create memorable guest experiences.



➔ Aakash Hongunti, national account manager, Soufflower.

Scintillating scent

Guests expect hotels to offer them not just a comfortable stay but also experiences that help them relax. Irrespective of whether the stay is for business or pleasure, modern-day guests expect hotels to create unparalleled luxury experiences.

We asked providers of aroma scents about the most interesting and fast-selling essential oils that guests prefer. And here is what we found. “Some of the best aromas for enhancing performance are strong and woody rosemary,

which is known to lower stress levels; lemongrass, which energises and relieves tension, anxiety and anger; lavender with its calming properties that helps soothe the mind by relieving stress; jasmine, which is subtly sweet and revitalising, energises a person and boosts his/her performance; and peppermint which stimulates alertness and mental clarity. The mediums through which these aromas are dispersed range from complex diffuser machines placed in the AHU of the hotel to simple mechanisms such as our linen sprays or potpourri," says Aakash Hongunti, national account manager, Soulflower.

Signature fragrances

Most international chains already have pre-approved signature fragrances. For instance, Le Meridien has LMO2, Westin has White Tea by Westin and Aloft has Vibrance. "These signature scents have been developed by ScentAir in our global scenting center in Charlotte, US, in partnership with respective brand owners and implemented globally. Having these scents deployed appropriately in the correct target location is part of a hotel's brand audit, for which Scent Air is responsible. We create a customised scent strategy to boost brand sentiment and increase sales. Our extensive range of scent diffusers perfectly fit any size and space, large or small," says Vikas Gulabrani, director, Blue Corpus Solutions Pvt Ltd. (partners of ScentAir USA).

Many large hotel chains have been releasing their custom-developed signature scents in their hotel lobbies, an interesting way to create brand recall. According to Vishesh Vijayvergiya, perfumer and scent branding consultant at Vedic Aroma Lab™, "The sense of smell is possibly the most under-utilised; it is a sense that never sleeps. An in-depth study is required to successfully customise a signature scent. We have also introduced the concept of an aroma menu in the Indian hospitality space; it offers an unprecedented freedom to guests to choose the aroma of their preference. Soon, scents will be deployed in countless ways to influence our behaviour and shopping patterns, and help control our mood and boost memory."

The wellness factor

Typically used in spas within hotels, aromatherapy is an integral component of the wellness experience offered. It addresses multiple skin



Rahul Sabnani, spa manager, JW Marriott Kolkata

and body concerns, whilst delivering high performance results empowering physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. "At Jiva Spa, we use aromatherapy oil blends to offer solutions for stress relief, restlessness, anorexia and muscular discomforts. The aim is ensure a process by which the body is put into a rest, relax and a restorative state of being, helping to dissolve anxiety and inhibitions," says Rohit Gupta, wellness manager - Taj, North Goa.

Essential oils are a life force of plants, seeds, roots, leaves, flowers and fruits. Their tiny molecules travel through inhalation or skin absorption, depending on the process. The attempt is to ensure that the scent reaches the brain the fastest way possible and provides a sense of emotional calm. As Thomas Halam, spa manager, The Leela Mumbai, says, "In today's fast-paced life, anxiety, depression, stress, insomnia and anger are becoming increasingly common. These naturally extracted essential oils help in relaxing the mind, body and soul."

Aromatherapy has rightly been recognised as an alternate treatment down ages and it encompasses several healing and therapeutic practices. Krishnakali Rao, spa manager, Aura Spa at THE Park Kolkata adds, "Aroma oil and other aroma compounds help to heal several health conditions besides chronic stress. It helps in conditions such as insomnia, sleep deprivation, muscle pain and respiratory infections, besides blood sugar fluctuations." According to Manoj Dhiman, executive housekeeper, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida, "We use aroma diffusers with lemongrass, camphor and eucalyptus aroma oils that have anti-bacterial properties, in the spa rooms,

“An important aspect to keep in mind while selecting a supplier for aromatherapy solutions is the purity/quality of oils. Often, oils are adulterated by adding an inferior product. Quality assurance and certified business are important for starting any type of collaboration.”



Aromatherapy is an integral component of the wellness experience and addresses multiple skin and body concerns.

Scent Branders: The role they play

Scent-branders for hotels consider everything – from the colours and textures of the space to the weather at the destination. Is there pollution? Will doors and windows be closed or open, thereby requiring the scent to blend with outside smells? These are essential logistical concerns. Then they delve into the emotional realm.



➔ Multiple systems, from stand-alone to HVAC-connected units, diffuse fragrance in hotels.



➔ In some of the best spas, guests are enveloped in the hotel's signature fragrance to set the mood.



➔ Shibani Jain, ceo and founder, Baaya Design.



➔ Allan Rodrigues, director of rooms, The Resort Mumbai.



➔ Gaurav Shanker, rooms division manager, Sheraton Grand Pune.

steam rooms and salon areas. This helps keep the air that circulates in the common spaces and wet areas refreshed and disinfected. The aroma oils infuse positive vibes in the ambience and set the mood for relaxation.”

Spa escape

Aroma massages continue to be popular and are offered by several hotels. Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar, executive director, HRH Group of Hotels reveals that at their palace hotels, they use four variants of essential oils – Vishram, which helps in relaxing the mind and body, Pavitra that helps in cleansing the mind and detoxifies the body, Pranati which helps to energise and rejuvenate the body, and Dhyana, a meditation oil that will also help guests sleep well.” At The Imperial New Delhi spa, the hotel uses signature Sufi oils, blended according to the aromatherapy principles of anatomical and aromatic benefits. J Tara Herron, director - The Imperial Spa and Salon states, “For our signature seven blends, we use top-grade pure essential oils and organic carrier oils that are designed to address several common psycho-physiological imbalances. The oil menu, their descriptions, ingredients and benefits are placed in treatment rooms and at the reception. The oil is chosen depending on the results of the wellness consultation and aromatic testing to ensure the correct blend has been used.”

The feel good factor

Interestingly, aromatherapy is not limited to massages alone. The signature scents are used to create a perfect ambience and help guests relax the moment they enter the hotel. “They are now actively used as diffuser fragrances to heighten the senses and create a soothing environment. However, the massages are primarily performed in a spa as the sessions require a specialised therapist or masseur/masseuse,” says Sanjay Kumar Kansodiya, O2 Spa, Novotel, Ahmedabad.

Establishing quality benchmark

Aromatherapy solutions require an entire chain of processes that includes constant monitoring at every step. This check further ensures that the quality the suppliers provide hotels is top-notch. Allan Rodrigues, director of rooms, The Resort Mumbai opines, "Before determining a vendor, thorough lab tests are done with each product range, which ensures genuineness and uniformity in the quality of the product. Also, how and from which part of the world the essences are sourced, along with international certifications that are accepted universally, are major factors."

A hotel brand, while selecting any product or supplier, has to define and understand the kind of experience it wants to offer its guests. "An important aspect to keep in mind while selecting a supplier for aromatherapy solutions is the purity/quality of oils. Often, oils are adulterated by adding an inferior product. It's a little like putting water into milk. Find an honest essential oil supplier to avoid buying an adulterated product. Quality assurance and certified business are important for starting any type of collaboration. Customer service, availability of products, reputation and product tests are other criteria," says Rahul Sabnani, spa manager at JW Marriott Kolkata.

The most effective suppliers are those who offer products or services that match or exceed the needs of the business. According to Tamyola M.S, assistant spa manager, The Ritz-Carlton, Bengaluru, "The lowest price is not always the best value-for-money. If you expect reliability and quality from suppliers, you have to decide how much you are willing to pay for your supplies and the balance you want to strike between cost, reliability, quality and service. Strong service and clear communication is a criteria as the best suppliers will want to talk with the brand regularly to find out their needs and how they can help serve the brand better."

Signature aromas have been employed in different public areas such as lobby, lounge, meeting rooms and room corridors. Each aroma lends its own characteristic scent to an area, according to the blends used to make it.

"In a boutique hotel like Goldfinch Hotel Mumbai, exclusive signature aromas help us create a perfect ambience that helps leave an impression on our guests. We use multiple diffuser systems, including both stand-alone and HVAC-connected units to diffuse fragrance in our hotel spaces. We also use simple candle diffusers in spaces where electrical points are not easily accessible," opines spa manager Salmali Gupta. According to Manoj Chauhan, the spa manager at Sofitel Mumbai BKC, "These oils are not only used in spa treatments but also in public areas such as the lobby, elevators and lift landings. Besides, our signature Amber Orange aromatherapy oil is placed as part of our in-room bath amenities kit."

Trend check

The last decade has seen a tremendous amount of change in the field of aromatherapy and usage of essential oils for massages. "A general trend to move away from synthetic chemicals to more naturally produced cleaning and health products or organic products have brought essential oils to the forefront. They are readily available and hotels can choose from different essential oils and many different brands," says Yogeshwar Bhatt, operation manager, Grand Mercure Mysore.



➡ The signature scent, which is diffused across public areas, stays with the guests even after they have left.



➡ Yogeshwar Bhatt, operations manager, Grand Mercure Mysore.

“The sense of smell is possibly the most under-utilised. An in-depth study is required to successfully customise a signature scent.”
 – Vishesh Vijayvergiya, perfumer and scent branding consultant, Vedic Aroma Lab™

The shift has been in favour of the use of pure aroma oils. Gaurav Shanker, rooms division manager, Sheraton Grand Pune adds, "The shift towards wellness combined with the yet nascent trend of using green, clean beauty products, has led to pure aromatherapy being embraced for its therapeutic benefits. Casting the net wider, destressing scents are also set to see a comeback as fragrance companies refine past efforts at creating mood-enhancing perfumes, now backed by scientific studies, bringing together traditional and modern approaches."

With mood-boosting capabilities – from energising to sleep-inducing, aromatherapy is witnessing a modern makeover. "Fragrance companies and aroma therapists are refining their efforts to create the ultimate mood-enhancing perfumes, incorporating ancient practices with latest scientific studies. The *au courant* trend is the use of scientifically blended oils. Blend-creation means that guests can receive multiple benefits of the product at one time," says Shibani Jain, ceo and founder, Baaya Design.

The nose is the fastest way to the heart. Hotels have caught the scent, commissioning signature fragrances that they hope guests will remember, long after their stays. Scent memories are persistent. They provide a powerful tool to build emotional loyalty. **■**