



THE BED & BATH FACTOR

The importance of the bedroom and bathrooms in hotel rooms can hardly be over-emphasised, as these are the two key differentiators for any hotel to stand apart

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Bath and bed have always been the prime focus in the guest rooms, but the major aspect in the upcoming days will be the level of sophistication which went missing post-pandemic with organisations reverting to the bare minimum. With occupancy increasing and the guests' expectations at an all-time high, the need to get luxury bath linen and environmentally friendly bath amenities would enable hotels to retain their guests.

NEW-AGE FACTOR

The hospitality industry remains an ever-evolving space as trends and preferences continue to emerge as more and more people begin to travel once again. When you walk into a hotel or a homestay room, the first thing you look at is the bathroom, a key factor, especially for the Indian traveller. The other aspect is the bed; especially to see if it is clean and hygienic, and comfortable as well.

Rohit Sethi, Founder of Seclude Homestays & Boutique Resorts, says, "Hotels have moved away from conventional tiling, standard fittings and ceramic wash basins and has gone to inventive design using natural materials and out of the box thinking. Standard Hotel linen is replaced by towels made from Green recycled materials, décor is gone from using paint to moving to limestone finishes, and furniture has moved away from engineered wood to recycled



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AMENITIES THAT MATTER

Currently, there are two ways to look at bath amenities. Firstly, hotels are getting bath amenities designed and customised for guests. This trend has been in place for a while now. Hotels are also looking at eco-friendly amenities to reduce single-use plastic waste. Regarding beds, different hotels have different themes.

Payal Joshi, Executive Housekeeper, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park, says, "We have a program called the Garden Sleep System Bed. In this option, the mattress conforms to the body shape and temperature for utmost comfort. Some hotels also look at luxury mattresses. Therefore, each hotel has its own checklist for

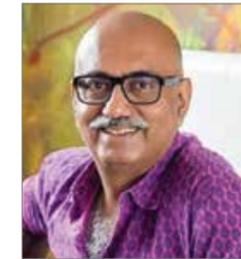
bed and bedding to meet the required standards. For bed linen, most hotels use cotton, but with new trends, options like hemp and linen are also available. The weave of the bed linen is also an important factor that hotels consider; plain, percale or sateen."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

As the hospitality industry has cautiously reopened, accommodation providers have been trying to reassure their customers by implementing additional hygiene measures. Hotels are taking no risks when it comes to the cleaning and changing of linen.

Kasturi Deo, Housekeeping Manager, Grand Hyatt Mumbai, says, "Hotel baths nowadays are more evolved than earlier as new baths with integrated televisions in the mirrors are being installed so guests can be entertained while using the bathroom. Moreover, mirrors are being installed with illumination and heaters, so no steam is covered after a hot shower. Shower cabins or glass can be made opaque for privacy. Mattress toppers with good filling can add that little extra comfort. Fitted mattress protectors that fit the entire mattress are in demand these days. The beds must be able to breathe during the day, and housekeeping must facilitate fresh air circulation."

Prabdip Arora, Director of Rooms, The Westin Mumbai, Powai Lake, avers, "We strongly believe in the concept of #SleepWell and, hence, are always looking out for innovative bath and bed



Rohit Sethi, Founder of Seclude Homestays & Boutique Resorts



Prabdip Arora, Director of Rooms, The Westin Mumbai, Powai Lake



Saanvi Chawla, Interior Designer & Founder, SC Design Studio.

experiences. Our trademark 'Heavenly beds' are designed to offer our guests an elevated sense of relaxation and tranquility. Creative designs for baths and beds have also been taken to a new level. Design architecture makes bath fittings stand out in most luxury hotel settings. A freestanding bathtub is a disruption. Positively, it creates a dramatic effect and has a visually magnetic presence about it. Most hotels, including us at Westin Powai have adopted freestanding bath fittings in a contemporary modern setting."

DESIGN DETAILS

Nowadays, hotel rooms are designed in a very different way. Bringing a bathtub or jacuzzi into the room and introducing metal finishes and decorative lights wherever required is new in baths and hotel beds.

"Use of metals has increased a lot. Earlier it was mostly wooden furniture that was being used but now the use of metals has increased to enhance and bring in a better ambience. Like wrought iron for a rustic or industrial look, chrome for a futuristic look and gold and bronze to enhance the furniture piece. Using different types of lights in the room (pendants, floor lamps, wall hung) is also a popular design aspect. Customised hotel bedroom furniture plays an integral role in guest satisfaction - and not just in terms of comfort; incorporating certain materials and accessories in bath and bed is certain to delight guests' senses and personalise their stay. Metal like gold and bronze are used in furniture with wood and fittings in the bathroom to upscale the style," says interior designer Saanvi Chawla.

POST-PANDEMIC EFFECTS

Post-pandemic, there has been a focus on using eco-friendly amenities. Moreover, it is also important to dispose of the bath amenities in a very hygienic and environment-friendly manner. With the conserve program for hotels, there is an option given to the guests to get the bath and bed linen changed on request. R Vigneshraj, Executive Housekeeper, Con-



➔ Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park has a program called Garden Sleep System Bed.



➔ Each hotel under the Hilton banner has its own checklist for to meet the required standards.

rad Bengaluru, says, "Post-pandemic, we have ensured to rework on the processing of the bed linen - with better wash programs which reduces the wash time but at the same time ensures the highest of wash standards. Regarding the bath, we have ensured to forecast and place adequate supplies before guest arrival, ensuring a reassuring stay for the guests. Hotels are looking at upping the game by working on luxury bed linen programs. Even upscale and upper upscale hotels will eventually shift to bulk dispensing amenities directly tied to sustainability."

BEING SUSTAINABLE

Besides hotels, guests, too, are increasingly making a sustainable shift. They are becoming more conscious of their surroundings and adopting environmentally friendly bath amenities.

Priyanka Singh, Executive Housekeeper, ITC Grand Bharat, Gurugram, explains, "There is a newfound focus on sustainability post the pandemic. Guests are more aware and inquisitive about the cleaning and sanitisation protocols being used in hotels. As travel is back to the pre-pandemic levels, wear and tear of bed linen and

fabrics are on the rise. We are currently testing a new technique called bio-polishing, an environmentally friendly process that helps extend the life and usability of fabrics, particularly that of cotton fibres."

PERSONAL TOUCH

Post-pandemic, the customisation has increased - with hotels trying to grab the attention of the guests with various levels of customisation - embroidery on bathrobes and pillowcases, a to-go bathrobe, embroidered face towels, bath supplies with names etched to the bottles/packaging. Ajit Rai, Housekeeping Manager at The Ritz-Carlton, Pune, says, "turndown amenities are a simple but effective way of letting guests know that we appreciate them. We have placed personalised chocolates and cookies in a wooden chest, making for a perfect evening snack after a long day. A touch of greenery in a room is always an effective mood booster and our bathrooms have a live plant that helps set our guests' day just right. The Ritz-Carlton sleep experience includes a curated menu of a collection of pillows that will make even the most restless of sleepers fall into blissful sleep. Knowing our guests might need a firmer mattress for therapeutic reasons, we do have the ability to swap one in easily. Of course, all preferences are noted so



➔ R Vigneshraj, Executive Housekeeper, Conrad Bengaluru



➔ The luxurious suite at ITC Grand Bharat, Gurugram.

we can easily ensure everything is in place the next time a guest visits their home away from home."

HYGIENE CUES

Identification and sanitisation of high touch points in the hotel, usage of environmentally friendly enzymes for disinfection, action plan to deal with unwell/quarantine guests, and laundry protocols are some new requirements the housekeeping teams must be mindful of. Travellers have emerged from the pandemic with a heightened awareness of cleanliness and hygiene practices and continue to demand that hotels offer the highest levels of sanitation protocols. "Moving away from traditions and modernising and optimising housekeeping processes is a huge focus point in the industry. Hotels have moved away from classic doorknob hangers and should now implement call switches that can be easily tracked from a dashboard from a centralised location. This ensures hotels can provide much faster response times for housekeeping requests and saves a huge number of resources over the traditional way of individually checking each room," adds Rai.

TRENDY TAKE

Smart controls, temperature-controlled bed fittings and voice



➔ The trademark Heavenly beds are designed to offer an elevated sense of relaxation and tranquility to guests at Westin.



➔ Guests are more aware and are inquisitive about the cleaning and sanitisation protocols being used in hotels. (Image courtesy: The Ritz Carlton Pune).



➔ Priyanka Singh, Executive Housekeeper, ITC Grand Bharat Gurugram



➔ Ajit Rai, Housekeeping Manager at The Ritz-Carlton Pune

controls are some trends being seen in the bed and bath space. Automated controls in bath and bed fittings are a welcome change and have become a requirement these days. With technology playing a key role in making services seamless and the guest experience par excellence, hotels today are investing in making the sleep experience as well as the bath fittings in terms of controls, lighting and the like. "A higher number of guests prefer hard beds and harder pillows as compared to before, and this is a trend for healthier living. Rather than new requirements, hotels will have to focus on showcasing to the guests that the products in the bed for example a posturepedic mattress is what will alleviate the back pain they might be experiencing - it is now all about keeping our guests informed about what we are doing and why we are doing it for them," adds Vigneshraj.

The challenges include the upkeep of technological handling of these devices for temperature control or fittings. Mechanical checks in due intervals become essential and most needed from time to time for upkeep and maintenance. The resiliency of the industry to bounce back has been quite remarkable. These are exciting times as we move forward and emerge into a post-pandemic world. Guest satisfaction will continue to be a hotel's first and utmost priority, and it will be interesting to see how hotels continue to adapt and implement new changes in the future. ■