



# ENERGETIC ENTERTAINMENT

In-room entertainment in hotel rooms is changing as the world moves to a connected, on-your-fingertips model

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Hotels have always been focused on technological enhancements to improve specific touchpoints of the guest journey and provide innovative solutions. Entertainment plays an integral role in the guest experience today.

## DO THE NEW

Guests wish for the hotel television experience to mirror the at-home TV experience. They prefer to view their content in their rooms or bring their own device (BYOD) with their favourites pre-loaded. Bjorn Fernandes, Director of Sales & Marketing, The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake, explains, "As the epicentre of entertainment, the hotel provides both these options for the new-age traveller in conjunction with the company's ingrained philosophy to 'Play Well'. We also provide a service called 'video on demand' and 'pay-per-view programming' to give our guests the flexibility to choose from the plethora of content we have in our database, which we also keep upgrading. Most guests use the video-on-demand service simply for the ease of convenience."

Today, most modern hotel rooms are equipped with the latest devices, such as Wi-Fi-enabled smart interactive televisions, Amazon fire sticks for on-demand entertainment, and Alexa. Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts, says, "In



➤ Bjorn Fernandes, Director of Sales & Marketing, The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake

today's connected world, guests are pleased to find tech devices in the room that make them work and play with ease. However, I do believe that people continue to remain at the heart of hospitality, albeit with a touch of high-end technology. We are seeing a rise of about 8-10% in terms of people who prefer using Netflix in-room, especially during workcations and staycations. We have seen an uptick in the usage of in-room entertainment, especially post-pandemic. Some guests even request for gaming consoles such as X Boxes and Playstations, and we cater to such requirements too."

## CONNECTED WORLD

Suba Group of Hotels has iPad Minis in their four-star properties for in-room services. Through the iPad,

guests can operate the electrical pieces of equipment like lights, air conditioners, and LEDs and remotely open the door lock. They can also access the camera remotely. Through the iPad, they can even place in-room dining orders. The iPads have more than 5000 songs and 1500 movies which can be enjoyed on Smart TVs. "Furthermore, we launched a new product called BYOD, which is currently in the testing phase. Since post-pandemic, the focus is on safety and hygiene and social distancing, we believe that guests will appreciate and adopt the BYOD feature. Through this, guests can connect their devices to the hotel Wi-Fi and control in-room facilities. This will ensure privacy as well as sanitisation. All hotel alerts and updates will be sent on their registered devices, including reservation confirmation, welcome messages, Wi-Fi codes, and thank you messages," points out Mansur Mehta, Managing Director, Suba Group of Hotels.

## CONTEMPORARY CUES

At Andaz Delhi, the team has IP TV installed for all guests as this enables guests to screen their favourite movie or series directly. It also assists the hotel in showcasing specials or promotional activities and can provide details about guest invoices, weather forecasts, restaurant menus, personalised messages related to welcome, fire drills, and maintenance hours. By casting, guests can cast Netflix/prime or other subscriptions from their own ID. The interphase is much faster than the usual apps. Raman Deep Singh Kapur, Director of Operations, Andaz Delhi, says, "Guests really appreciate the services, as the room becomes an extension of their own living room. A lot of hotels are investing in technology which not only will entertain you but will also make it way easier for you to control temp. In the room adjust the lights and colours of the room as per your mood and assist you in placing food orders. The biggest challenge with technology is eliminating the human touch, which I admire. A tired business traveller will always appreciate a sincere and concerned chat once he returns to the hotel. Upgra-



➤ Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts



➤ Mansur Mehta, MD, Suba Group of Hotels



➤ Raman Deep Singh Kapur, Director of Operations, Andaz Delhi

dition also means training the team extensively."

## DEVICE DETAILS

At the Westin Goa, all rooms have iHome on the bedside for ease of wireless charging, Bluetooth connection, FM, music, and other functions. "We have switched to smart televisions, which allow streaming OTT content in the comfort of the room. We have highly engaging recreation activities on our hotel channel, which also appears on the television, allowing our guests to view their favourite programs. We also have the Firestick, another great option we keep handy for guests' usage. Most guests need to mirror or cast from their iPhones, which is often a challenge on most smart TVs, as they are only compatible with Android phones. Very soon, in-room dining orders will also be placed from the room television. Guests will expect a touchscreen TV; kids games will be a crucial add-on," avers Devidyuti Ghosh, Director of Operations, The Westin Goa.

At DoubleTree by Hilton Goa - Panaji, all televisions in suites are connected to major OTT platforms like Netflix and Prime. Guests can effortlessly continue watching their favourite series from the last seen



➤ Some of the latest in-room entertainment trends include touch screen thermostats, automatic temperature-controlled spaces, air filter systems, service robots, and smart bathroom. Courtesy Suba Group of Hotels.

episode. This is an addition to the regular entertainment channels that can also be viewed through a set-top box.

**GUEST GRATIFICATION**

In the past couple of years, several online channels have been launched, and it's not feasible for hotels to include them all, as it shoots up the cost and not all the guest end up using them. We, hence, have tied up with a service provider; this allows us to have these channels on request by paying a considerable pre-paid amount, making it cost-effective and aiding customer satisfaction. Guests spend time watching the television and utilising the DTH service and work-in-room service provided, where one can customise the channels as per their preference.

Both in-room and out-room entertainment are in demand at most hotels. Rakesh Kumar, Associate Director of Rooms, Clarks Exotica, says, "Most of the guests who visit the Resort either be-



At Double Tree by Hilton Goa - Panaji, televisions in suites are connected to major OTT platforms like Netflix and similar.



Devidyuti Ghosh, Director of Operations, The Westin Goa



Rakesh Kumar, Associate Director of Rooms, Clarks Exotica

long to the MICE or the wedding segment. Most of the MICE guests come here to attend conferences which start around 8 or 9 am, and in between, they rest in the room and join the conference again until night. During their rest time, the guests might utilise the DTH services provided. Guests generally have their lunch, hi-tea, and dinner in the allotted banquet space, or they are involved in recreational activities like tennis, badminton, chess, billiards, snooker, table tennis, squash, swimming pool, etc."

**TREND CHECK**

Some latest in-room entertainment trends include touch screen thermostats, automatic temperature-controlled spaces, air filter systems, service robots, and smart bathrooms. A comprehensive range of in-room entertainment services that are compatible with third-party applications that offer a high-quality and personalised guest experience has become a necessity in today's time.

Service providers are also coming up with better packages and customer-centric in-room entertainment. Tushar Joshi, Rooms Division Manager, Novotel Pune, adds, "Trav-



Guests can effortlessly continue watching their favorite series from the last seen episode Double Tree by Hilton Goa - Panaji. This is an addition to the regular entertainment channels that can also be viewed through a set top box.



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elling and working trends are completely changed, and guests are clubbing their stays with work from the hotel instead of work from home. With the acceptance of working from home, hotels are experiencing a lot of trends where guests are travelling for vacations with family and simultaneously working. There is also an increasing trend of booking suite rooms for work privacy, and they don't mind spending more. While we all thought that post the pandemic, people would be more cautious with their spending; it's been the other way round. Since most of them saved a lot on travelling to the office, wearing expensive office-wear and maintaining them, saving on office meals, etc., which empowers them to spend more with their loved ones."

**DO IT RIGHT**

While digitisation has revolutionised in-room entertainment, this has led to immense pressure and demand for a strong internet connection for these devices to telecast seamlessly. Not having one can be a downer, as guests do not appreciate interruptions. Constant buffering during telecasts will undoubtedly test the patience of the viewer. Kedar Komarpant, Chief Engineer, DoubleTree by Hilton Goa - Panaji, observes, "Guests have taken it well and have appreciated the gesture in our interactions, and some have even taken the liberty to mention it on our social media platforms. It is important to note that the correct devices are used for screening. If not, digital security can be compromised with the presence of spyware or malicious content. In addition, care needs to be taken while setting up such devices to prevent encrypted storage of viewer information for potential misuse. It's best to take expert guidance before implementing such devices in the network."

While significant initial capital needs to be pumped in to get the best, some common trends include voice-controlled lighting, HVAC and Alexa integration. The expectations of hotel guests are constantly changing, and it is important to evolve with them. "We have upgraded our Wi-Fi systems to provide fibre-based speeds of 100 Mbps even in remote areas. Smart TV & Bluetooth-enabled speakers are the next enablers. Guests can now stream content from their favourite OTT provider and play music from their own devices directly on TV or stream to the Bluetooth-enabled speakers in some cases. Just to add some extra factor experience, we also have projectors and screen for a full theatre experience, experimenting with having installed them in the rooms of Cliffs Edge, Ramgarh," says R



Tushar Joshi, Rooms Division Manager, Novotel Pune



Kedar Komarpant, Chief Engineer, DoubleTree by Hilton Goa - Panaji



Rohit Sethi, Co-founder, Seclude

Sethi, Founder, Seclude.

**IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES**

As with any electronics, there is a certain lifespan and wear and tear, which must be considered. The challenges are more to do with damaged property and recovering the cost. Regular AMCs with local vendors are also extremely helpful for a quick resolution. Hospitality technology needs to be very dynamic and demanding, in tune with the guests' requirements getting more and more refined and specific to their needs and how they view and value service.

In-room entertainment will be a basic requirement in coming years, and there will be the need to have online streaming apps available handy and inbuilt. Plug-and-play will be an expectation and help hotels attract more business by making it available for customers. More and more meetings will happen online to save costs and time, hence up gradation in coming years is necessary. The hospitality industry will have to pursue change to be in the competition and meet the expectations of Gen Z. In-room entertainment is the key feature that attracts customers to any hotel today. They remember the service and the fun they had because of the convenience of technology. The new-age travellers specifically look for features to amp up their overall hotel experience. They like the technological comforts of their homes to follow them on their trips and expect instant and seamless connectivity from their devices. ■