



WHAT MAKES THE BEST GUEST EXPERIENCE ACCORDING TO 12 TOP INDUSTRY EXPERTS

We went back through some of our interviews with the top hospitality and spa industry experts over the past two years to see what they had to say about what makes the best guest experience

In luxury spas, hotels, and resorts, the difference between a good guest experience and an unforgettable one is in the details. From the atmosphere and treatment menu to service quality and unique personal touches that make customers feel valued and special, there is no one single element that makes that exquisite guest experience. It's everything.

At Spa Executive and Book4Time, we have had the opportunity to gather insights from leaders at the top luxury hotel & resort spa brands in the world – and asked a great many of them about what makes the best guest and wellness experiences. The comments here uncover the core elements that elevate a guest's stay from standard to exceptional, highlighting the innovative approaches and meticulous attention to detail that define luxury in the hospitality industry.

Here's what they had to say:

What makes the best guest & wellness experiences, according to the best of the best



Niamh O'Connell, Vice President of Wellbeing, Jumeirah

Tailored experiences & emotional connections

To create an exceptional guest experience, it's important to understand the demographic of your guests and tailor your offering to their personalized needs and requirements. Before implementing any touchpoints, I will always take a customer-centric approach in the ideation process, to determine how each one elevates the guest's sense of wellbeing. Ultimately, if a guest does not resonate with a touchpoint on an emotional level, it is a missed opportunity to connect with them.

It is also essential to consider the local context of each spa and wellness facility, as incorporating touchpoints which reflect the location and clientele is essential to delivering an

outstanding guest experience on a global level. Jumeirah's spas all have a Middle Eastern influence which also underpins the signature brand experience across the portfolio.

The key to further reinforcing any incredible wellness experience is having a team which is capable of delivering a thoughtful and personalized experience for every guest. A strong team is the foundation of any successful wellness business, so it's essential to ensure that you are offering opportunities for them to learn throughout their careers in order to foster success.

With a global portfolio such as Jumeirah, it is essential to utilize CRM systems to guarantee a consistent guest journey, and to ensure a seamless transfer of information between properties. These systems can then be leveraged to streamline the experience at each property, where a dedicated team member is assigned to oversee the entire guest experience, to ensure their preferences are accounted for, from pre-arrival to post departure. A journey map is also an incredibly helpful tool to assist with identifying when key digital touchpoints can be introduced throughout the customer experience.

Wellbeing through design is also essential to our strategy as I believe it plays a key role in the luxury guest journey to help elevate the customer's sense of wellbeing. Design is a core focus for Jumeirah which also extends within the wellness spaces in the portfolio. Jumeirah's flagship Burj Al Arab Jumeirah is a pioneering example of this key pillar, with the hotel's Talise Spa exuding Arabian opulence to create a strong sense of place while also contributing to an overall sense of wellbeing through its carefully thought-out design. Future designs for Jumeirah's spas will be intuitive, while taking into consideration how the space can make guests feel grounded even in the most urban settings – which will also be reflected beyond the spa throughout properties.



Jennifer Holzworth, Corporate Director of Spa Operations, Montage

Thoughtful wellness journeys

The best wellness experience is one that has been thoughtfully curated. Beginning with intentional and thoughtful design of spaces that promote relaxation and

are rooted in a sense of place for the locale. Whether it's a hydrotherapy circuit for an hour or a wellness retreat for the weekend, curating a wellness journey based on preferences and individual needs through pre-arrival communication, attention to detail, and anticipatory service is key in the overall guest experience. It should include a variety of offerings based on the guests' needs, perhaps introducing them to an offering they haven't experienced before, and provide an overall sense of mental, physical, and emotional well-being.



Vivianne Garcia-Tunon, Vice President of Operations, Wellbeing, Auberge Resorts Collection

Surprising & joyful moments

The ultimate wellness experience is the one that takes guests by delightful surprise! My expertise and fervor revolve around crafting extraordinary moments infused with surprise, joy, and creativity. This could mean commencing a treatment within an oversized sound bowl nestled amidst the Costa Rican mountains, experiencing myofascial release guided by skilled therapists in the heart of Napa Valley, immersing in mindful moments amidst the Sea of Cortez, or handpicking your own herbs for a rejuvenating body treatment in the Northeast. It's in the realm of the curious and unexpected that true magic happens!



Emmanuel Arroyo, Senior Corporate Director of Wellness, Rosewood Hotel Group

Quality services & talent management

The best guest experience is made up of a list of things, but it always comes down to the provider and the quality of the treatments. What does a guest want? They want a great massage. Where does a great massage come from? It comes down to recruiting the right talent and making sure you promote and enhance their strengths by providing them with tools and training to do simple things in an extraordinary way. But it's also about finding the right

product partner and creating experiences that are not only stimulating to the senses but are enriching and inspiring people's lives.



Simon Marxer, Vice President, Spa & Wellbeing, Hyatt & Miraval

Helping guests discover what they truly need

I think what makes the best guest experience is really individual. One of the things that I have learned about creating guest experiences is that a great guest experience is often about discovery. In a Miraval setting, when we talk about it internally we talk about ensuring that we not only offer what guests want, but also what they need. Oftentimes the initial intention of a guest is what they want, and then they discover that they actually need something quite different. It's really supporting that guest through their journey and helping them discover what they truly need, beyond what they may think they want.



Christelle Besnier, General Manager, Biologique Recherche (MEA); previously Senior Spa Director UAE Collection, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

Understanding & anticipating needs

"The great guest experience for us is to be understood. It starts with the reservation team being on hand to fill the needs of the guest, flowing down through the spa professionals to take note of their needs and requests. We have a lot of regular guests that we know well. We know their preferences and can anticipate their needs, their preferred therapist, treatment, techniques, the setup of the room. Obviously we need to go the extra mile to satisfy the guests. Whenever there is an opportunity for us, to pay extra attention and do something that they are not expecting and that makes sense for their experience, we encourage the team to do so. It can be a farewell gift, a little card in the treatment room, a healthy beverage to celebrate a special occasion. We have many stories like this.



Amy Chan, Assistant Group Director of Spa & Wellness, Langham Hospitality Group

Sensory journeys with the utmost attention

What makes a great guest experience? Utmost attention to the entire journey, from the moment you enter the spa, to the five senses; vision of the design, lighting tone and cleanliness; hearing of the Zen music played throughout the spa; smell of the pleasant aroma diffused; taste of the beverages and snacks offered; and the touch of the linen from bathrobes to bedding and ideal setting of the room temperature. All these elements perfectly done together with "soft skills" to create a synergistic space. With colleagues using their training to their appearance in uniform with grooming and overall professionalism, guests will feel they are in a luxurious environment.

Chuan Spa prides itself as an oasis offering a personalized journey towards optimum relaxation and wellbeing. Chuan Spa's tranquil setting enhanced with signature design elements (moon gate, contemplation corner, dream room) and signature treatments made us a luxurious wellness institution in each city we have a presence.



Amanda Fraser, President, Standards & Ratings, Forbes Travel Guide

Genuine & intuitive service

Sometimes the most simple things are what makes the best experience. Yes, it's lovely to offer champagne and flowers and acknowledge birthdays, and it's important to make sure guests have everything at their fingertips. But, sometimes you have to think small to be the most impressive. I think the best guest experiences are the ones that are genuine and naturally intuitive, where you get the sense that the staff have listened to you and have understood what you need and responded accordingly. It's that nice balance between a conversation and hard work.

I can share a story, and you'll probably think "Oh my gosh, well, that's so simple." Because it is. I was staying in a hotel and had left a gratuity for my housekeeping attendant, because I always do, and then I left my room. When I came back later in the afternoon, there was a note from the housekeeper that said, "Ms. Frasier, thank you for the blessings. Have a lovely day." The fact that somebody that worked for the hotel had taken the time to write that and to share that mutual kind of respect and acknowledgement was something that has stuck with me.

Nobody had necessarily told that young man or young woman to do that, but they wanted to do it. That to me was an impressive element that spoke volumes about that hotel's culture and the staff. The things that stick with me the most are always the things that are unexpected and that come from the heart.



Arabelle del Pilar Rosario, Spa & Wellness
Director Dominican Republic, Melia
Hotels International

Anticipating needs & reading the client's energy

A great guest experience requires that we are proactive and anticipate people's needs. When they arrive at the spa, we should know what they need and provide it before they ask. The therapist has to be able to connect with the guest. If a client is shy, has a problem they're not comfortable talking about, or doesn't feel confident with the therapist, they're not going to feel good about the service. It matters that the therapist is in a good mood and carries good energy. If they feel rushed because they're behind, if there's a personal situation, or they don't feel well, this needs to be resolved before they work on the client.

Sometimes we have to make adjustments behind the curtain and change therapists. We need to know how to read a situation. If a client is complicated and has been assigned a therapist who isn't suited to take care of them, we have to make a switch to the one that is going to heal this client and make them change their mood and energy. If the guest is nervous, sad, or mad, or they're expecting something big, and we don't have the right person to connect with them and provide what they're expecting, we completely damage the spa experience for this client.

Sometimes a client just wants the service and they don't want to talk to anyone. So, the therapist adapts themselves to the clients. We look at the client's energy and adapt the therapist to the client. That is what we do here and we see the result and it's amazing.



Pat Makozak, Senior Spa Director, Four
Seasons Hotels and Resorts

Intuitive attention to creating unscripted moments

The best experience is intuitive. It takes a certain kind of individual to be aware and present, to listen, and to understand what the guest needs before the guest even knows they need it.

It's a memorable surprise when you're offered something or given the chance to experience something that is there just for you. It's those unscripted moments when a guest sees that somebody has thoughtfully picked up on something they've said and created something just for them.



Jennifer Lynn, Director of Spa & Wellness,
Fontainebleau Las Vegas

Emotionally engaging environments

A great guest experience is about evoking emotions and creating a positive memory. Some of my most memorable spa moments had a strong sense of place, along with anticipatory and genuine service that tantalized my senses. Beautifully appointed, strategically designed and well-maintained spaces, memorable essences in the treatment room products and throughout the spa delivered by genuine wellness professionals. Simply stated, but not so easy!



Verena Lasvigne-Fox, International
Spa Consultant, Spa & Wellness
Industry Expert

Exquisite focus on the details

An excellent guest experience requires detail and consistency. At Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia at Comcast Center it was important that we distinguish our spa and give it a concept, an identity and a soul. This is less common in the US and is something I brought with me from other parts of the world. The spa is a crystal concept. This theme made sense to me because it is in the Comcast Technology Center, which is one of the tallest buildings in the United States and a technology building, and there is a relationship between technology and crystals. I didn't want to do something gimmicky, but something sincere and authentic, and this came together and made sense.

There are seven treatment rooms named after seven crystals, which are also connected to seven chakras. Each room has a singing bowl infused with the crystals associated with that room, and there are 700 lbs of crystals that you can't see, walled up inside the walls, providing positive vibes and energies. There are crystals throughout the spa and the team works with crystal infused oils. Instead of a typical hot stone massage, there is a crystal massage, and at the end of the treatment, the guests get a crystal to take home.



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