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The Official Publication of AAHOA

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION, HOSPITALITY, AND AAHOA

Unpacking what the next four years may look like under a returning presidency and how AAHOA approaches shifts in government

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5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

1



IT'S TIME TO REGISTER FOR THE HYPE CONFERENCE!

The 2025 AAHOA HYPE Conference will take place February 6-7, 2025, at the Andaz Mexico City Condesa. Building on this year's inaugural event, the conference empowers young professionals with the tools, resources, and connections needed to thrive in the evolving hospitality landscape. Make sure to mark your calendars and join us for what promises to be a transformative experience. Find more information at AAHOA.com/HYPE.



TOP ARTICLES IN TODAY'S HOTELIER MAGAZINE FOR 2023

It's the last month of 2024. Prepare for the new year by looking back at a conversation with politician, philanthropist, and hotelier Dr. Ruby Dhalla, CEO and president of the Dhalla Group of Companies. This article was one of the most-read articles in *Today's Hotelier* magazine in 2023. Read it at bit.ly/4eAFQpR.

2

CELEBRATING AAHOA'S TRIUMPHS IN 2024 AND THE PROMISE OF 2025

This has been a standout year for AAHOA – filled with milestones that laid a strong foundation for continued success in 2025. AAHOA led two key advocacy fly-ins to Washington, D.C., saw its Greater Los Angeles Area members honored by the Los Angeles City Council, made its first-ever strategic investment, raised historic PAC funds for the AAHOA PAC, and united with other organizations to oppose the *Safe Hotels Act* in New York City. The association also engaged with politicians nationwide through Hotel Owners Conferences & Trade shows, Town Hall Meetings, and Back-of-the-House tours. With momentum building, AAHOA is eager for the exciting opportunities 2025 will bring.



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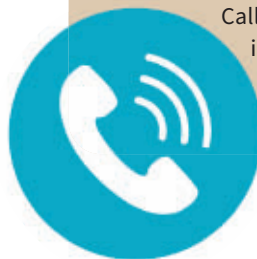
UNLOCK YOUR VOTING POWER FOR AAHOACON25

December is here, and it's not just the holiday season that's exciting. AAHOA Members have a thrilling opportunity to shape the future with the 2025 AAHOA Elections. To be eligible to cast your ballot in the 2025 AAHOA Elections, you must do one of the following: (1) Become a Lifetime Member on or before December 31, 2024; or (2) Have paid Annual Membership dues no less than twice in the previous three calendar years; and renew your annual membership for 2025 on or before Sunday, March 2, 2025. The next AAHOA Elections will take place during AAHOACON25. Make sure you're ready to have your voice heard.



AAHOA RELAUNCHES 1-888-MY-AAHOA

AAHOA is excited to relaunch the 1-888-MY-AAHOA Member Call Center as part of our ongoing commitment to enhance member support and engagement. This service gives AAHOA Members access to the resources, guidance, and solutions they need to succeed in today's competitive franchise landscape. Focusing on helping you make money, save money, and protect your investments, the 1-888-MY-AAHOA Call Center is here to assist with franchising issues, legal and business challenges, and education resources. Visit AAHOA.com/HelpLine to learn more.



4



MIRAJ S. PATEL,
MBA, CHO, CHIA

AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2024-2025)

“

By focusing on our core areas – brand mandates, industry disruptors, evolving costs, and regulatory challenges – we will help our members thrive in the coming year.”

Navigating 2025: Innovation, adaptation, and AAHOA's focus

“The most reliable way to forecast the future is to try to understand the present.” – *John Naisbitt*

AS WE NEAR THE END OF 2024, THE hotel industry is poised at a critical crossroads. Our ability to innovate, adapt, and remain unified will shape the challenges and opportunities we face in 2025. At AAHOA, we're dedicated to guiding our members through these transitions with a clear focus on four key areas: brand mandates, industry disruptors, evolving costs, and regulatory challenges. Here's how these focus areas will intersect with our industry forecast for the coming year.

BRANDS AND PROFITABILITY: ADAPTING TO GUEST EXPECTATIONS

The evolving expectations of travelers – favoring personalized, sustainable, and tech-savvy experiences – directly influence profitability. Brands are increasingly mandating standards that can impact our bottom lines. To address this, AAHOA is committed to uniting our members to educate, innovate, and challenge these market shifts through a free enterprise approach. By doing so, we can better align with shifting guest preferences and leverage new technologies and sustainability practices that will drive profitability.

INDUSTRY DISRUPTORS: ENSURING FAIR COMPETITION

The rise of short-term rentals continues to disrupt our industry. For 2025, it's crucial to ensure these disruptors operate on a level playing field with traditional hotels. AAHOA will advocate for fair regulations and standards that apply equally to all accommodations. This will help maintain the quality and consistency our guests expect while helping to ensure short-term rentals don't gain an unfair competitive advantage.

EVOLVING COSTS: ENHANCING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Economic pressures, including rising interest rates and operational costs, affect our industry. Compared to sectors like airlines, our business and rate models need to evolve to improve profitability and operational efficiency. AAHOA is focused on helping members navigate these challenges by promoting strategies for cost management, investing in technology, and exploring new revenue streams. Adapting our business models will be essential to maintaining profitability in an increasingly competitive environment.

REGULATORY CHALLENGES: STAYING AHEAD OF LEGISLATION

The regulatory landscape is becoming more complex, with new laws impacting various aspects of our industry. From potential long-term legal liabilities to evolving labor laws and sustainability mandates, staying informed and proactive is essential. AAHOA is dedicated to advocating for policies that support our members and revising our educational efforts to ensure relevance and consistency across local, state, and federal levels. Your active participation will be crucial in shaping a favorable regulatory environment.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we step into 2025, our industry will face new patterns in guest preferences, business travel, and economic conditions. Embracing innovation and adapting to these changes will be key to our success. At AAHOA, we're committed to providing the resources, advocacy, and support needed to navigate these transitions effectively. By focusing on our core areas – brand mandates, industry disruptors, evolving costs, and regulatory challenges – we will help our members thrive in the coming year.

Here's to a transformative and successful 2025! ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Hit the ground running

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.” – *C.S. Lewis*

“
Already, AAHOA is laying the groundwork for an exciting and transformative 2025, and our lineup of events is designed to empower members, foster growth, and position AAHOA as a leader in the hospitality industry.”

WITH ONE YEAR ENDING, IT'S TIME TO TURN OUR FOCUS toward the future. Already, AAHOA is laying the groundwork for an exciting and transformative 2025, and our lineup of events is designed to empower members, foster growth, and position AAHOA as a leader in the hospitality industry. Here is a look at what is ahead.

One of the most anticipated events is our HYPE (Helping Young Professionals Evolve) Conference, February 6-7, in Mexico City. This initiative focuses on the next generation of hotel leaders and entrepreneurs. HYPE will help young professionals build their leadership skills and drive innovation with immersive workshops, dynamic discussions, and unparalleled networking sessions. The international setting of Mexico City will offer a unique cultural perspective, further enriching the experience. We are excited about the planned mentorship and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, ensuring the future of AAHOA is diverse and forward-thinking.

In the spring, we will gather for our Spring National Advocacy Conference on March 11-12 in Washington, D.C. As always, this is a vital opportunity to make our voices heard on Capitol Hill. With key legislation on labor, taxation, and industry regulations on the horizon, AAHOA Members will meet with lawmakers to advocate for issues that directly affect our businesses.

AAHOACON25 will be held in vibrant New Orleans, with the theme “New Ideas, New Connections, New Orleans.” Bringing together thousands of hoteliers, industry leaders, and partners, this conference will showcase cutting-edge trends, technologies, and opportunities in hospitality. With a dynamic trade show, enriching educational sessions, and a powerful keynote lineup, AAHOACON25 will be the place to connect, learn, and grow.

Finally, 2025 will also see our AAHOA Elections, a critical process that brings new leadership to our association. Engaging in this democratic process is a cornerstone of AAHOA's values, and we encourage all eligible members to participate and have their voices heard.

As we look ahead, these events will be key in shaping the future of our industry. I look forward to the innovation, growth, and success that 2025 will bring to our industry for all of us. ■

Advocacy and the new administration

Examining the effect of governmental turnover on AAHOA's advocacy efforts

by CARTER DAVIS

NEXT MONTH, PRESIDENT Donald Trump will once again take the oath of the President of the United States as he becomes the 47th United States President. His election to the country's highest office marked the culmination of a hugely contentious election cycle, which included numerous races for governor, seats in Congress, and many others. Now, a much clearer picture of the next four years is beginning to emerge from the fog of campaign season.

As the incoming administration starts to take shape and more is learned about policy priorities and legislative agendas across the country, AAHOA is paying close attention and developing its own strategies for addressing the hospitality industry's most pressing concerns – whether that's formulating a plan of attack to deal with possible legislative changes or taking a more proactive stance to support industry-friendly bills such as the *LIONS (Loans In Our Neighborhood) Act*, introduced by Rep. Shri Thanedar (D-MI).

One part of AAHOA's holistic approach to advocacy includes its partnership with Neal A. Patel, managing partner of Patel Partners, a bipartisan, bicameral government affairs consulting firm located on Capitol Hill. Having a constant presence in America's halls of power enables AAHOA to



Neal A. Patel, managing partner of Patel Partners, a bipartisan, bicameral government affairs consulting firm located on Capitol Hill

establish, maintain, and strengthen relationships with legislators on a constant basis.

AAHOA, he explained, remains rock-solid in its stance on the key issues affecting the industry and is well-positioned to adjust its messaging or the partners with whom it works, to create the greatest impact.

As an additional resource in this area, AAHOA relies on the experience of Senior Director of State Government Affairs Daniel New. In his role, New brings more than a decade of expertise as a government affairs professional with a rich history of industry advocacy.

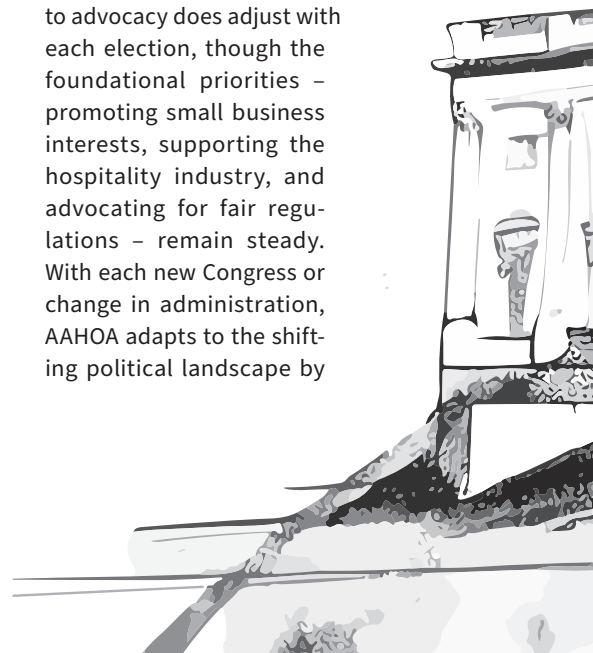
We sat down with Patel and New to get a better picture of what AAHOA Members might expect from the Trump administration and to take a glimpse at the policy priorities AAHOA's leadership is working to address in the coming year.



Daniel New, AAHOA's senior director of government affairs

HOW MUCH, IF ANY, DOES AAHOA'S APPROACH TO ADVOCACY CHANGE WITH EACH ELECTION?

Neal A. Patel: AAHOA's approach to advocacy does adjust with each election, though the foundational priorities – promoting small business interests, supporting the hospitality industry, and advocating for fair regulations – remain steady. With each new Congress or change in administration, AAHOA adapts to the shifting political landscape by



assessing the priorities and policy directions of incoming elected officials.

When elections result in a new majority or introduce legislators with differing perspectives on business-related issues, AAHOA may emphasize different aspects of its advocacy agenda to align with those shifts. For instance, if newly elected leaders prioritize tax reform, AAHOA might focus more intensely on tax-related issues, whereas a focus on labor rights might lead to intensified advocacy for workforce policies that support the hospitality industry.

Moreover, AAHOA engages in relationship-building with new members of Congress and key committee leaders following elections to ensure member voices are represented and well-understood.

WHAT ARE LIKELY TO BE THE KEY CONCERNS FOR THE INDUSTRY, FROM A LEGISLATIVE PERSPECTIVE, DURING THE NEXT FOUR YEARS?

Neal A. Patel: With President Trump in office and Republicans holding a majority in the Senate and also the House of Representatives, we can expect the legislative landscape to prioritize pro-business policies, which could create a more favorable climate for hotel owners.



Nonetheless, certain industry concerns remain consistent across any administration. Key focus areas include labor law reforms, tax policies, and regulatory matters that directly impact hotel operations. Even with business-friendly intentions, challenges like labor shortages, potential changes to wage standards, and visa policies affecting seasonal workers remain critical. AAHOA will continue to monitor and address these issues as any shifts in these areas could impact the costs and management of hospitality workforces.

Moreover, tax reform is likely to stay on the agenda, with opportunities to advocate for policies that could benefit small business owners, such as tax incentives for property improvements with bonus depreciation. Finally, credit card swipe fees and the push for transparency will continue to be significant as hotels seek to lower operational costs and increase reinvestment in their properties.

HOW DOES AAHOA PLAN ITS ADVOCACY PRIORITIES IN THE LONG-TERM KNOWING THERE'S TURNOVER IN GOVERNMENT EVERY YEAR?

Neal A. Patel: AAHOA builds its advocacy priorities on foundational issues that are relevant across election cycles, ensuring a level of continuity even as government representatives change. By focusing on areas like workforce issues, tax reform, and access to capital, we're able to create a steady framework that aligns with member needs and adapts as political landscapes shift. Our team works year-round to foster relationships with lawmakers, helping them understand the unique challenges of hotel ownership

2025 Legislative Priorities

- Labor
- Lawsuits/Tort Reform
- Insurance
- Short-Term Rentals Parity
- Taxes
- Tourism Dollars
- Human Trafficking Awareness Training for Short-Term Rentals
- Maintaining Innkeeper/Guest Relations
- Protecting All Workforce Options for Hotels

and the impact of policy decisions on the industry.

To maintain consistency, AAHOA also relies on long-term partnerships with organizations and coalitions that support our legislative goals, amplifying our voice on the issues that matter most to hoteliers. Furthermore, we continuously gather feedback from members to ensure we're focused on the most pressing challenges they face. The goal is to keep our advocacy agile yet rooted in key industry priorities that stand the test of political turnover.

WHICH STATE ELECTIONS WAS AAHOA WATCHING ESPECIALLY CLOSE?

Daniel New: We watched all gubernatorial and attorney general races. We specifically watched North Carolina and Pennsylvania to see if federal voting trends would trickle down the ticket and signal priority changes on the state level as well. Outside of that, there weren't too many state races happening that would yield surprising results or shifts. We will have more to watch in 2026 when

36 states host gubernatorial elections and elections for their state senate and house positions.

There were two ballot measure issues we were watching: minimum wage and corporate taxes. Alaska, California, and Missouri all had minimum wage ballot measures, which all could have major impacts on our hoteliers. As we continue to have discussions about raising the minimum wage in California, it appears the people have voted no to the state increasing the minimum wage to \$18/hour by 2026. However, Alaska and Missouri have passed measures to increase their minimum wage to \$15/hour and provide paid sick leave. This will require us to educate our members on how to be compliant.

The final issue in Oregon we were watching would have increased the corporate tax rate to give residents \$1,600. After hearing the impact this would have on the budget, the governor, lieutenant governor, and many Democrats and Republicans joined together to ask voters to vote no. We're happy to see everyone work together as almost 80% of the voters said no. ■

Mark your calendar!

Be sure to join AAHOA in March for the annual Spring National Advocacy Conference for the semi-annual installment of AAHOA's best opportunity to connect with legislators in a face-to-face, highly personal setting.

SPRING NATIONAL ADVOCACY CONFERENCE

Washington, D.C., March 11-12, 2025

AAHOA.com/Advocacy/Government-Affairs



HYPE CONFERENCE

2025

FEBRUARY

6-7

2025

MEXICO CITY, MX

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Get ready to experience the energy of Mexico City at the 2025 AAHOA HYPE Conference, which will be hosted at the stunning Andaz Mexico City Condesa!

This can't-miss event is all about empowering the next generation of hospitality leaders with cutting-edge insights, networking opportunities, and inspiring sessions designed to fuel your growth.

Take advantage of this unforgettable chance to level up your career while exploring the vibrant culture of Mexico City.



TAKEOFF

time



ROMAN SAMBORSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Blended travel as the big boost for all segments in 2025

by ADAM and LARRY MOGELONSKY

B LEISURE HAS BEEN A BUZZWORD SINCE well before the pandemic, but when that event catalyzed the adoption and acceptance of remote and hybrid work, the notion of blending traditionally disparate travel segments has taken on a whole new, and lucrative, meaning. Entering 2025, though, the concept of combining business and leisure – hence the “bleisure” portmanteau – no longer really encompasses all the different travel behaviors and sources of revenue hotels can activate.

The newer, but more ambiguous, umbrella term of “blended travel” can not only imply any combination of corporate, group, or leisure, but it doesn’t presuppose business first, leisure second. Hence, this term better accounts for emerging microsegments like digital nomadism and nomad executives, and how guest context can change over time or across different properties within a brand.

What to know

Within this banner term of blended travel, here are five guest behaviors to consider:

1 SHOULDER NIGHT TRAVEL

This term is the most obvious one and is quintessentially bleisure (although it need not be business-first); a guest comes in as part of a group block or corporate rate then decides to extend a night on either end to get settled or tour the environs.

2 PLUS-ONE TRAVEL

This is most likely where a couple travels together; one attends meetings while the other works remotely or uses the facilities (with newer technology features allowing hotels to parse the profile data to measure revenue per guest or RevPAG).

3 EXTENDED STAY

Revenue managers must first build a rate plan that has price breaks for encouraging stays longer than a week, but there also needs to be certain hotel features in place like kitchenettes, grab-and-go food outlets, good gyms, laundry service, and others.

4 PROJECT SPRINT

A newer term, this occurs when remote teams regroup in person to more rapidly and intensively complete a different task, thereby necessitating different types of collaborative spaces, places to recharge or reflect, and, of course, excellent F&B.

5 LEISURE-FIRST REMOTE

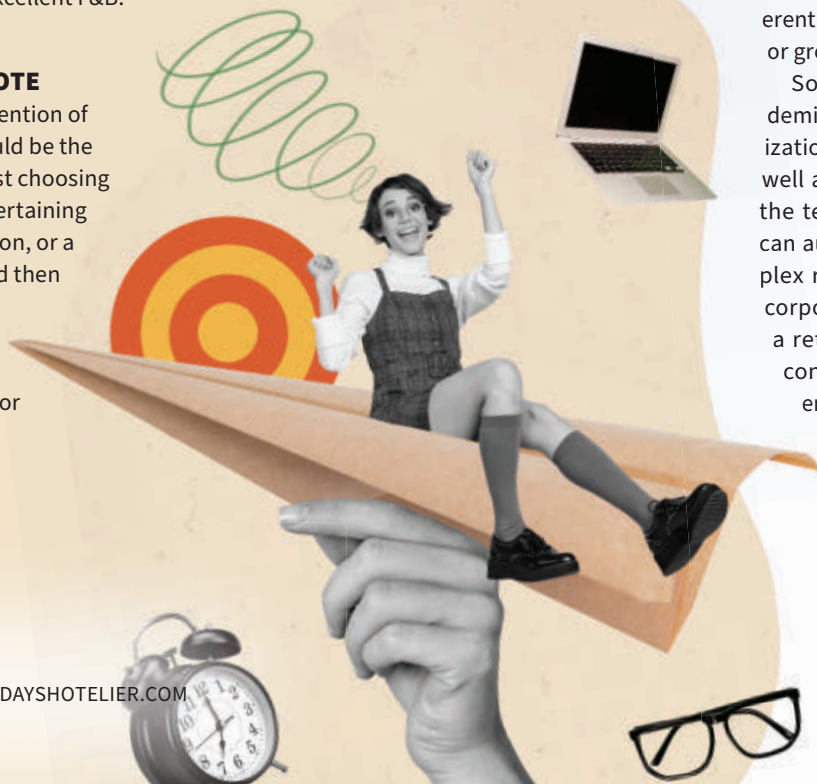
Harkening back to the mention of microsegments, this would be the anti-bleisure, with a guest choosing your hotel first as an entertaining weekend, a family vacation, or a wellness destination, and then tacking on a midweek night or two to take meetings in the area or use the business center for remote work purposes.

In a word, blended travel is adaptable. And that is why it should be a critical part of every hotel's commercial strategy for the year ahead. With some statistics pointing to a flatlining of leisure travel, continued growth across all hotel categories for this segment is questionable given that we're now fully over the post-pandemic revenge-travel surge. Instead, there's great potential in ramping up a hotel's experiential corporate and meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) revenues, then looking to squeeze out more juice from these contracts by enabling stay extensions or more ancillary spend (total revenue or TRevPAR increases).

WHY BLENDED TRAVEL NOW?

The notion of tacking on a leisure night to a group room block or preferential corporate rate has existed for many decades now, only it wasn't economical to pursue at scale because most of these reservations had to be completed manually – both from the customer's perspective via an email thread or phone call as well as from the hotel team's side to process the request. Moreover, promoting these shoulder nights was difficult because event planners typically weren't properly incentivized to repeatedly communicate the preferential rate within their company or group.

So, why now? Well, the pandemic catalyzed both the normalization of work from anywhere, as well as a rapid redevelopment of the technology ecosystems that can automate these sorts of complex reservations. Even as many corporations are now mandating a return-to-the-office policy to control for productivity, boost employee loyalty, and heighten collaboration, hybrid work setups – as well as fully remote companies – will remain a core part of our daily lives. This combination drives up demand for blended travel stays while





also giving that demand a more frictionless onramp to be converted into revenue.

But it doesn't stop there. With the cultural acceptance of hybrid and remote work, companies have realized they still need teams to periodically regroup together in person, both for collaboration and endearing them to the company. If an employee is purely remote with no meetups, they'll have Zoom open on one screen for videoconferencing with the rest of the team, and their CV will be open on their second monitor – like a mercenary, always at the ready to swap in a better offer from another company recruiting a remote workforce.

Teams need to meet. And there's no better place for that than hosting an event at a great hotel while also paying for the company's employees to explore the world. In this new age of hybrid work, MICE and corporate travel have become a leading, non-salary inducement for talent retention.

AMENITIZATION OR COMMODITIZATION

The major caveat or red flag within this megatrend is that blended travel heavily favors hotels with amenities, onsite programming, and, in a general sense, things to do in or around the hotel. The word we propose for this is "amenitization" to inscribe both the totality of what's currently available as well as what you have in store for future renovations, events, or menu updates.

The full-service resort is the classic example, wherein guests are far less likely to have a long length of stay (LOS) if said property doesn't have golf, recreational activities, area partners, a spa, or a strong culinary presentation. The opposite of amenitization is commoditization; every hotel room is interchangeable within a given market and thus the market sets the price, not the hotel. There will always be demand for heads-in-beds hotels within the budget, limited-service, or midscale categories, but it will be far harder to drive LOS for guests thinking within a blended travel context.

“

In a word, blended travel is adaptable. And that is why it should be a critical part of every hotel's commercial strategy for the year ahead.”

The onsite amenities simply have to be there to support growth here, not just for individuals looking to visit friends for an extra day after a conference, but also to convince event or corporate travel planners to select your hotel in the first place. Knowing that travel stipends will boost team retention or that experiential venues will make for a more memorable event, said planners are increasingly opting for hotels that check all the service and amenity boxes.

These are hotels where planners can host a multi-day conference or social gathering without having to go through the hassle of organizing the logistics for an offsite within the itinerary. No one wants, or has the time, to arrange for additional shuttle buses and deal with third parties.

The word here is "dynamic." Think fluid indoor-outdoor spaces. Think creative teambuilding activities or add-ons, whether that's a fireworks display at night or a wine tasting as part of a cocktail reception. Think great F&B, both for banqueting as well as having multiple restaurants capable of hosting private dining so that no two events within the itinerary need to take place at the same location twice. We've seen hotels convert a secondary, casual dining outlet into a bowling alley that can facilitate buyouts. And yes, also think full spa buyouts or other wellness enhancements.

STAY ON YOUR TOES

To be dynamic and experiential, a hotel may have to hire a designer and undergo a property improvement plan, while also bringing on task managers to develop new programs for which guests with a blended travel mindset are looking. But remember this isn't just about maximizing the chances of getting extra shoulder nights or more ancillaries; it's also about winning the contract in the first place, which will often be at a higher total value given all the experiential add-ons.

Blended travel has huge promise for 2025, and yet the hospitality industry is as competitive as ever, with hotels all over the world waking up to the symbiotic relationship between experiential offerings, conversions, and total revenues. There's an inherent risk of commoditization should you choose not to innovate and spend on amenitization. Or, as one incredibly shrewd hotel company CEO put it to us, "Sometimes you have to spend a little more to make a lot more." ■



Together, Adam (left) and Larry Mogelonsky are the world's most published hospitality

writing team, with more than a decade's worth of material online. As the partners of Hotel Mogel Consulting Ltd., Larry focuses on the hotel operations and marketing, while Adam specializes in technology and wellness. Their experience encompasses properties around North America and Europe, with a focus on independent properties of all sizes. Their work includes seven books, the latest focused on increasing profits from wine sales in an environment of tight labor markets. You can reach them at adam@hotelmogel.com to discuss your business challenges or to book speaking engagements.

Trust your data

In an unpredictable world,
business-intelligence
software helps light the way

by NICK FORTUNA

BEN CAMPBELL DOESN'T EXPECT HIS BUSINESS-intelligence software to predict the next global financial crisis, pandemic, foreign war, or natural disaster, but he trusts it to recognize patterns and reveal key insights that will boost revenue across his portfolio of 20 hotels.

During the past two decades, hoteliers have experienced singular events that have rendered all business projections useless and sent the industry into a tailspin. Against that backdrop, does it even make sense to invest time and resources into predicting performance, or should you just plow forward, cross your fingers, and run your hotels the best you can?

Campbell, chief executive of the Greenville, SC-based management company Hospitality America, chose a side in that debate this autumn, announcing his company had upgraded its tech stack. In light of world events, he said it's difficult to make long-term projections, but revenue-management and property-management software can help to optimize operations in the short term.

Over time, the impact on the bottom line should be substantial, he said.

"We plan to uncover patterns throughout the revenue cycle to better equip our leaders with the insights necessary to make informed, impactful, tactical adjustments," Campbell said. "By delivering real-time key performance indicators to our hotel leaders, we can better understand and manage critical metrics such as labor costs, energy usage, and maintenance expenses."

In turn, that data can provide a greater understanding of current trends while also helping hoteliers create more accurate forecasts for their short- and long-term future.

DATA DIG

Dr. Mehmet Erdem, hospitality professor and department chair at UNLV, said that, like airlines, major hospitality companies are using revenue-management software to forecast demand and adjust prices based on guests' "price sensitivity." But among smaller companies, advanced software "isn't as commonly used as you might think," so those hoteliers are missing opportunities to maximize occupancy rates and revenue, he said.

In the past, many hoteliers tried to project performance with an Excel spreadsheet, tracking a limited set of data such as bookings, cancellations, and room rates. Now, however, software powered by artificial intelligence is capturing a comprehensive view of customer behavior, empowering hoteliers to make better decisions, Erdem said.

Looking at bookings specifically, business-intelligence software can track how many customers visit a brand's website to view rates for specific dates but fail to follow through. That information provides clues as to how much demand there will be for those dates and what customers are willing to pay, so hoteliers can adjust their rates accordingly, Erdem said.

TO THE FUTURE

Using historical data, hoteliers can compare current bookings for specific dates with those from prior years. If bookings are below normal, hoteliers can reduce prices and launch promotions, but if business is strong, they can increase prices and release fewer rooms to high-commission online travel agencies.

Without that same-date data, hoteliers will leave revenue on the table, but if they try to collect and analyze that data manually, they're sure to find it tedious and cumbersome, Erdem said.

"These technologies are developing very rapidly, and they're definitely making



Business-intelligence software is getting better at factoring weather, flight cancellations, event calendars, local headlines, and social-media activity into its recommendations. That's in addition to broader economic indicators such as GDP growth, consumer confidence, inflation, unemployment rates, credit-card balances, and consumer trends."

projections more accurate," he said. "I can assure you we're getting really good at understanding the price sensitivity of consumers."

Business-intelligence software is getting better at factoring weather, flight cancellations, event calendars, local headlines, and social-media activity into its recommendations. That's in addition to broader economic indicators such as GDP growth, consumer confidence, inflation, unemployment rates, credit-card balances, and consumer trends.

Leveraging data from Smith Travel Research and other services, hotels can benchmark themselves against similar properties in comparable markets. Those services also track new hotel construction across markets and the overall health of the industry, giving business-intelligence software a clearer picture of trends.

TREND TRACKING

As business dynamics change, the software updates its recommendations to optimize performance, but decisions ultimately are left up to humans. That's why hotel companies are still insisting on experienced jobseekers when hiring for roles such as revenue analyst or director of revenue management, Erdem said.

Machine learning is a powerful tool, giving hoteliers flexibility and agility, but they can't just set it and forget. Sometimes, hoteliers must lean on their understanding of their local markets and trust their gut, overruling the software's recommendations, Erdem added.

"AI is enabling the system to learn as data comes in, so a week from now, the system will be better than it is today," he said. "The technology is there to help us make better, more-informed decisions, but we still need decision makers with expertise. A person is going to look at all the variables and make a decision, but the technology will speed it up."

At Hospitality America, the upgraded tech stack will provide insights into the types of customers booked for future dates and how hotels can best accommodate them, Campbell said. When youth sports teams are scheduled to arrive, for example, hotels will schedule more housekeeping staff and order more cleaning supplies.

Similarly, hotels will stock up on food and beverages that appeal to families with kids instead of business travelers visiting for a convention. Hospitality America tracks eight different business segments to see which are outpacing expectations and which aren't, and those insights inform decisions around rates, promotions, staffing, and procurement, Campbell said.

By harnessing operational data, hotels can improve their margins while maintaining a high level of customer service, he added. External events are beyond hoteliers' control, but data analytics enable hotels to set goals for each month, quarter, or year and hold teams accountable.

"The way we're going to continue to get [average daily rate] increases is by

focusing on our business mix,” he said. “A leisure traveler is going to engage with our hotel in a much different way than a business traveler, so we want to understand those ebbs and flows and adjust our business model accordingly on a 90- to 120-day basis.”

MAKE IT WORK

Hospitality America’s business-intelligence strategy involves integrating all data feeds into its Microsoft 365 platform and consolidating information from property-management systems, revenue-management tools, customer reviews, market reports, and competing hotels. Campbell said the AI-powered system will help the company to evaluate the effectiveness of loyalty programs, drive the personalization of guest services, and improve customer retention.

The system also should help the company save money through predictive maintenance, addressing equipment and facility issues before they escalate into costly problems. Hospitality America will be able to compare performance across properties to identify underperforming assets and share best practices from high-performing hotels, according to Wes Cargen, vice president of business intelligence.

“Agility in decision-making is crucial in today’s fast-paced hospitality landscape,” Cargen said. “The new dashboards and reporting tools we will be building internally will empower hotel leaders and corporate executives to drill down into data for quicker, more-informed decision-making. In an increasingly competitive market, business intelligence provides the insights necessary to stay ahead and maximize profitability.”

Erdem, of UNLV, said even the best data analysis will result in some errant predictions, especially as unexpected events unfold, but by investing in newer forecasting tools, hoteliers can better position their properties for success.

“The more data points you have, the more informed your decisions will be,” he said. “You combine the best technology available with your most talented employees, and that’s as good as it gets.” ■



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Education initiative

White House hosts exclusive briefing for AAHOA Members on small business initiatives

by TEAM AAHOA



White House Senior Advisor for Public Engagement Kota Mizutani (left) and AAHOA Chairman (2024-2025) Miraj. S. Patel greeting attendees to the White House's virtual briefing on industry issues, designed specifically to help AAHOA Members navigate the current economic landscape.



IN LATE OCTOBER, AAHOA MEMBERS PARTICIPATED IN an exclusive virtual briefing hosted by the Biden-Harris Administration. The session, organized by the White House Office of Public Engagement, focused on key issues affecting small businesses and provided an update on the current economic landscape.

During the briefing, senior Administration officials discussed federal efforts aimed at supporting small business owners, including initiatives related to access to Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, efforts to improve the supply chain, and providing greater transparency with resort fees and junk fees that impact the industry. The officials included White House Senior Advisor for Public Engagement Kota Mizutani, Small Business Administration Deputy Administrator Dilawar Syed, Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy Karlin Gatton, and Special Assistant to the President for Manufacturing & Industrial Policy Monica Gorman, both with the National Economic Council.

“As all three of our speakers highlighted, a huge thank you to all the members of the Asian American Hotel Owners Association – all the business leaders here who are putting in the work on the ground to make our economy run,” Mizutani said. “Thank you so much for all that you do.”

“This briefing underscores how important AAHOA and its members are to the ongoing conversation around small business policies,” said AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel, who welcomed

members to the briefing. “Having the opportunity to hear directly from senior government officials about these key issues is crucial as our members continue to navigate today’s evolving economic environment.”

“We are grateful that the Administration recognized the importance of engaging with AAHOA and our members on the challenges small businesses face,” said AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake. “The insights shared today will empower our hotel owners to make informed decisions as they steer through current industry challenges.”

Get. It. Done.

On a virtually constant basis, AAHOA is evaluating countless factors in the name of improving the industry for its members. While taking stock of current needs and identifying potential hazards on the horizon in the name of unfriendly legislation or negative trends that likely will need legislative attention, AAHOA works diligently to craft its federal policy priorities.

While the AAHOA Board of Directors are crafting on the association's 2025 federal policy priorities, it's helpful to consider those of the previous year as we look back at a year filled with plenty of hard work, tireless networking and education efforts, as well as a few wins along the way.

Never let it be said AAHOA doesn't have the industry's best interests in mind when it comes to its advocacy efforts, and the initiatives below are proof of an organization unwilling to sit idly while the industry's needs remain as urgent as ever.



AAHOA's 2024 Federal Policy Priorities

-  Further developing strategic relationships with the Small Business Administration to improve access to capital
-  Human trafficking awareness training and prevention
-  Returning and retaining the hospitality workforce in a competitive labor market
-  Pushing for liability protections from frivolous lawsuits



Credit card fees



Working with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to address merger guidelines, responsible franchise rule updates, and transparency issues related to junk fees



Tax reform including the preservation of:

- IRC Section 1031 Like Kind Exchanges
- Stepped-Up Basis
- Section 199A Small Business Deductions

Plot your path

The critical role of forecasting in managing independently owned properties

by AARYAN PATEL and JIN LAXMIDAS

FORECASTING PLAYS A PIVOTAL role in the success of independently owned hotels and motels. These small businesses often lack the corporate safety nets that franchise-affiliated properties enjoy and must be especially attuned to predicting demand, managing resources efficiently, and preparing for market fluctuations.

The independent hotelier must be open to learning what technology and resources are available to help them develop new skills and train staff without breaking the bank.

For independent operators, the ability to anticipate changes in occupancy rates, seasonal shifts, and local market trends can directly impact revenue, guest satisfaction, and long-term viability.

1

MAXIMIZING OCCUPANCY AND REVENUE

One of the primary advantages of effective forecasting in the hospitality industry is its potential to optimize occupancy rates. Hoteliers must anticipate periods of high and low demand with precision, as occupancy rates are closely tied to a property's profitability. An accurate forecast allows hotel managers to implement flexible pricing strategies, adjusting room rates based on expected demand. For instance, during periods of peak occupancy, managers can raise rates to maximize revenue, while during off-peak seasons, they can offer promotions or discounts to attract more guests.

Revenue management, a discipline that relies heavily on forecasting, helps hotels achieve a delicate balance between supply and demand. In many cases, independently owned properties have limited resources compared to large hotel chains, making precise forecasting even more essential. By analyzing historical data and current market trends, independent hotel owners can implement dynamic pricing models to capture the maximum possible revenue, regardless of market conditions.

2

STAFFING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Labor costs represent one of the largest expenses for independently owned hotels and motels. Effective forecasting helps managers determine appropriate staffing levels for any given period. Overstaffing during low-occupancy periods leads to unnecessary labor costs, while understaffing during high-demand periods can negatively affect guest satisfaction and the overall guest experience.

Cooperating with local hospitality management schools and local high schools that offer hospitality programs often provides a source of flexible labor in the form of interns, allowing the hotel to quickly ramp up staffing during periods of peak demand.

Using forecasting tools to estimate demand also enables more efficient allocation of other resources, such as housekeeping supplies, food and beverage inventories, and maintenance services. For example, if a hotel expects a surge in guests due to a local event, it can stockpile supplies in advance, ensuring the property is prepared to accommodate the influx. Similarly, predicting periods of low occupancy allows hoteliers to adjust inventory orders and reduce waste, which is particularly important for independently owned properties operating on tight budgets.

Staff development training is often available to small businesses through a state's workforce commission.



PREPARING FOR SEASONAL VARIABILITY

Independent hotel owners must pay close attention to seasonal patterns that affect demand. For properties located in vacation destinations, weather conditions, school holidays, and regional events can all significantly impact occupancy. Forecasting based on these factors allows managers to tailor marketing efforts and operational strategies accordingly.

For example, a beachfront motel may experience high demand during the summer months, while a ski resort may rely on winter visitors. In both cases, independent hotel operators must not only predict when these high-occupancy periods will occur but also prepare for the offseason. This preparation may involve offering special packages or collaborating with local businesses, state and local visitors bureaus, or tourist promotion agencies such as CVBs and local economic development offices to create promotions that attract guests during slower periods.

By analyzing past occupancy trends and incorporating external factors such as economic conditions or changes in local tourism, forecasting tools provide a roadmap for navigating seasonal variability. Independent hotels that do not engage in effective forecasting may struggle to capitalize on high-demand periods or, worse, find themselves unprepared for market downturns.



ADAPTING TO MARKET SHIFTS AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

The hospitality industry is vulnerable to a range of external factors, including changes in the economy, consumer preferences, and competition. Independent hotels, which may not have the brand recognition or financial backing of larger hotel chains, are especially sensitive to these market fluctuations. Forecasting provides a proactive approach to anticipating such changes.



One of the primary advantages of effective forecasting in the hospitality industry is its potential to optimize occupancy rates. Hoteliers must anticipate periods of high and low demand with precision, as occupancy rates are closely tied to a property’s profitability.”

For example, during economic downturns, consumers may reduce discretionary spending on travel. By forecasting the potential impact of these trends, hotel and motel managers can adjust their operations, such as by offering lower-priced accommodations or value-added services that appeal to cost-conscious travelers. Additionally, forecasting can help independent hotel operators identify emerging markets or new customer segments, allowing them to diversify their revenue streams and reduce dependence on any single demographic.

Forecasting also is essential when responding to competition. If a new hotel opens in the area, it may affect the demand for existing independently owned properties. Hoteliers who use forecasting to anticipate this shift can adjust their marketing strategies, room rates, and services to maintain competitiveness.



ENHANCING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

In today’s competitive hospitality landscape, the guest experience is a critical determinant of a hotel’s reputation and success. Independent hotel operators

must deliver exceptional service to differentiate themselves from larger hotel chains. Forecasting plays an indirect, but vital, role in ensuring a positive guest experience by allowing managers to allocate the right amount of staff, prepare the necessary resources, and offer timely promotions that enhance guest satisfaction.

By aligning staffing levels, amenities, and services with anticipated demand, independent hoteliers can create a seamless experience for guests, leading to positive reviews and repeat business. Moreover, forecasting allows hotel managers to anticipate guest needs during special events, holidays, or peak travel seasons, ensuring the hotel is well-equipped to meet and exceed guest expectations.

TAKEAWAYS

For independently owned hotels and motels, forecasting is not just a tool for managing daily operations – it’s a strategic imperative that can determine the long-term success of the business. By accurately predicting demand, adjusting pricing, staffing appropriately, and preparing for market shifts, hotel and motel managers can create resilient, efficient, and profitable properties. In an industry where margins often are tight and competition is fierce, the ability to forecast effectively provides independent hotels with a significant competitive edge, ensuring they can thrive in both favorable and challenging market conditions. ■



Aaryan Patel



Jin Laxmidas

AAHOA Independent Hotelier Committee members Aaryan Patel and Jin Laxmidas share a commitment to help hoteliers become – and stay – independent.

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Integral insights

Know when to start the debt financing search as you refinance a maturing loan

by RUSHI SHAH

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE is a leveraged-finance business. Rarely do property buyers or developers purchase large assets with all cash or equity. Instead, they'll put debt on the real estate to optimize the capital structure and maximize return on equity. Debt also can provide tax savings, making real estate investment attractive. Hence, proper planning with debt in mind is an important exercise before refinancing or investing in a hotel or other commercial real estate assets.

Debt strategy should begin with considering what type of debt and when it will mature. Debt maturity can be an extremely sensitive topic for many hotel owners. The capital markets are known to be temperamental, and the availability of debt can run hot or cold due to global and domestic events outside a borrower's control. This trepidation only increases for larger transactions, as the bigger the loan, the more people involved, the more moving pieces and often the more time it takes to close. Larger loans can take up to six months to complete, compared to an average of 45 to 90 days for a plain vanilla hotel loan closing.

GOING TO MARKET

The next step in the process of securing debt financing that best aligns with the asset is to canvass the market for options. A qualified intermediary working on the borrower's behalf usually takes the lead in the financing search. During this stage, the intermediary will conduct a preliminary analysis to present the financing opportunity to capital sources in the best



light. Borrowers will be asked to provide historical and projected financials, management tactics, and market trends, as well as evidence of pending opportunities that may improve the property's cashflow. These variables will be analyzed along with the sponsor's background and financial strength. This fact-gathering and repurposing of complex financials into a more user-friendly and standardized format can take from two to three weeks – or longer if the sponsor is a debt financing rookie.

Once the data elements are documented and evaluated, the next step in the debt transaction process is to test the market. The intermediary will create a professional pitch book, or package, and submit it to potential capital sources to consider the deal and provide a quote. Having a strong advisor advocating for the deal can be pivotal in getting lenders' attention and successfully navigating their questions and requirements. Once the back-and-forth with the lender and the intermediary is completed, a quote matrix is generated outlining the available debt landscape. This compilation reflects what the market is willing to offer for the asset in terms of debt financing.

MAKING A CHOICE

After comparing debt financing offers, it is time for the borrower to pick a winning horse and negotiate a term sheet. The intermediary will draw on his or her experience and prowess to identify what loan terms can be negotiated and devise cures for any lender pain points, such as the amount of reserves required to remove recourse, interest only vs. amortization periods, and lockbox or

other credit enhancements. After about a week of negotiations, the lender will prepare and submit a full-fledged credit or investment memo to its credit committee requesting that the deal be considered and approved. During this pre-flight process, there's real work involved, with professionals digging into the data, asking follow-up questions, and looking for any blind spots or potential pitfalls or weaknesses within the deal that might arise during due diligence.

WAITING FOR A DECISION

How in depth a credit committee review is and how long it lasts can vary by loan product type. For example, a conventional bank loan origination team spends extra time completing this stage because it's providing a fully baked memo to the bank's credit committee to approve. This contrasts with a CMBS lender, which can submit a short-form memo because a more detailed analysis isn't produced until after most third-party reports are returned. This surprises some borrowers, as there's an overall misnomer the CMBS process is more onerous than a conventional loan. But because CMBS loans don't require personal recourse from the sponsor, a fully completed CMBS credit

memo can't be submitted until every morsel of information about the property is verified and evidenced by a third-party report. During this stage, lawyers will simultaneously work on loan documents as well as ensure a clear title for the lender to put a first lien on. Once the final due diligence is completed, the credit memo is submitted for approvals for the money to be released and the loan can be closed.

PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

Clearly, there are many moving pieces within a loan transaction and it can take a long time to find the right lender, negotiate the right deal, and get to the closing table. It's imperative to start early and allow enough time to navigate the process, especially when refinancing an imminently maturing loan. By being proactive and getting an experienced intermediary involved at the beginning of a financing search, hotel owners can minimize the risk of the transaction stalling or going sideways and avoid the pain of missing a refinance deadline. ■



Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high leverage, nonrecourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full- and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.



A breath of

fresh air

Sleep tourism and enhanced air quality

by HALEY PAYNE

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL Council on Aging, more than one-third of Americans are getting less than seven hours of sleep a night. As people seek to cure their fatigue, sleep is no longer just a nightly routine; it's becoming the centerpiece of an emerging travel trend – sleep tourism.

Expected to grow by a remarkable \$409.8 billion between 2023 and 2028, this new approach to travel is shifting the focus from merely exploring new destinations to catching up on some much-needed Zs. This emerging wellness-focused trend prioritizes the quality of travelers' sleep, with hotels introducing a variety of amenities to cater to their needs. From meditation classes and spa treatments to aromatherapy sessions, hoteliers are enhancing their offerings to ensure guests enjoy a rejuvenating stay. Among these offerings, improved air quality stands out as a crucial, yet often overlooked, amenity hoteliers can utilize to ensure a comfortable stay for their guests.

AIR QUALITY AND SLEEP

Air is something we often take for granted. But the moment we step into a room filled with the stale scent of musty sheets or the stuffy atmosphere of poor ventilation, we quickly realize just how essential "pure air" truly is.

This holds particularly true when it comes to sleep quality. Poor air quality can lead to considerable discomfort and

“A relatively recent phenomenon, sleep tourism will dominate the travel industry for years to come. Focusing on the increasingly health-conscious traveler, hoteliers have a unique opportunity to position themselves as sanctuaries of wellness and relaxation for weary guests.”

disrupt sleep patterns. Irritants such as airborne pollutants and allergens, for example, can trigger respiratory issues or worsen existing allergies, making it more challenging for guests to fall asleep and stay asleep throughout the night. Additionally, a lack of proper ventilation can create stuffy air, which may contribute to feelings of restlessness and discomfort.

In contrast, clean and well-ventilated air in a hotel guest room plays a significant role in ensuring guests enjoy peaceful, uninterrupted sleep. Improved air quality not only reduces stress but also

promotes easier breathing, facilitates the body's transition into a restful state, and enhances the overall quality of sleep. What's more, higher levels of airborne particles can increase the risk of spreading harmful viruses or bacteria, and improved air quality can help lower the risk of airborne illnesses affecting guests. Ensuring a purified and well-circulated air environment is crucial for maximizing guest comfort and sleep quality, underscoring the importance of addressing air quality in hotel accommodations.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

Hoteliers have endless possibilities at their disposal when it comes to enhancing air quality in their accommodations. Strategies such as eliminating common irritants – like feather pillows – and offering hypoallergenic alternatives such as mattress protectors and pillow encasements can provide an extra layer of protection against dust mites and other common allergens. Additionally, establishing pet-free zones and limiting the use of strong fragrances in public spaces can help accommodate guests with allergies or asthma. This proactive approach helps minimize the body's efforts to combat irritants, ensuring guests wake up feeling refreshed and revitalized.

Technology offers hoteliers another valuable tool to ensure high indoor air quality. By integrating advanced air purification systems with modern HVAC technologies, they can create a fresher, healthier

environment for their guests. These systems work together to remove airborne contaminants, such as dust, allergens, and pollutants, from the air while HVAC systems ensure optimal ventilation and temperature control. By integrating these advanced filtration and climate control solutions, hoteliers can create a cleaner, healthier environment for guests, reducing the risk of respiratory issues and ensuring a more comfortable stay. This dual approach not only boosts overall guest satisfaction but also supports better sleep and wellbeing.

A relatively recent phenomenon, sleep tourism will dominate the travel industry for years to come. Focusing on the increasingly health-conscious traveler, hoteliers have a unique opportunity to position themselves as sanctuaries of wellness and relaxation for weary guests. By focusing on both the elimination of common irritants and the integration of advanced air purification and HVAC systems, hotels can significantly enhance their guests' sleep quality. This comprehensive approach to improving air quality not only addresses the need for comfort and health but also aligns with the broader wellness trends shaping the future of travel. As the sleep tourism market continues to evolve, investing in enhanced air quality will become crucial for hotels aiming to stand out in a competitive market and provide an exceptional, sleep-focused guest experience. ■



Haley Payne is Head of Commercial for Pure Wellness, driving its growth and success, by overseeing sales, marketing, and account-management departments.

Having been with the company since 2007, she has a passion for cultivating the purest and highest quality environments for each and every hotel guest, and she can be reached at hpayne@pureroom.com.



Streamline your services

Finding efficient and elegant solutions

by RICHARD ADAMS

IT'S NO SECRET THE PANDEMIC wreaked havoc on hotels. Struggling to fill rooms while retaining staff at a time when things were changing rapidly was nothing short of an immense challenge. And, while four years have passed since that tumultuous time, the lessons learned can still be felt operationally today. Many hotels have changed the way business is conducted, including getting creative in the way they fulfill the service requests of their guests.

GETTING CREATIVE

Properties have slowly been transitioning from employing a skeleton crew to finally being able to re-hire the right talent to fill essential roles. In the meantime, creativity has taken flight with new and innovative solutions that can provide

swift action to guests with necessary and direct attention. For example, many hotels now utilize robotic technology to assist with tasks like operating elevators autonomously or delivering necessities straight to a guest's room. Not only does this touch-free machinery allow staff to focus on high-priority tasks instead; it also improves the guest experience thanks to an accurate and timely response.

SIMPLIFYING THE ASK

Another solution that concentrates on improving staff efficiency comes in the form of smart sensor systems. These devices are strategically placed around the guest room so that with just a simple wave, a guest can request restocks on items. This could be additional towels

in the bathroom, more pods in the coffee machine, or a minibar refill. Some platforms also can be used by a guest to address a cleanliness issue like when their used room service tray needs to be picked up, in addition to maintaining cleanliness in public restrooms. Management can track the request from an initial alert through completion. This not only automates the workflow but allows for accountability in ensuring the guest's needs are being continuously met.

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

When it comes to apps, many hotels are also implementing their own for guest-facing use. These offer features like ease of check-in and a quick download of the folio statement to simplify the stay. Apps

like the Hyatt brand’s World of Hyatt are equipped with even more management tools like allowing a guest to view their rewards points balance and track their progress toward the various membership tiers in addition to phone and messaging member support. By having all this right at their fingertips, guests can skip the stress and relax at their destination.

BUSINESS AS (NOT-SO) USUAL

Moving out of the pandemic, an increased awareness on cleanliness took flight. This means establishments were forced to pivot away from their once-regular ways of conducting business. And many of those implementations in the hotel industry are still here to stay today. From bagged breakfast options to transitioning to easy-to-refill bulk amenities to sanitation stations set up throughout, properties are continuing to switch to a new way of living. Newer software offerings even make the checkout process contactless, allowing guests to pre-select their departure time or request a later option for an extra fee

– without ever needing to speak to a person. This post-pandemic shift can be felt in many products where a guest can still tailor their stay to their individual needs, without needing to call the front desk.

As hotels continue to redefine their operations from the world that they once knew pre-pandemic, the development of new solutions can help guide them forward. From robotics to self-serving technology to no-contact options, innovation is helping to fulfill guest needs in both a timely and creative manner. And it’s a win-win for all: Hotels streamline business to improve their bottom line while guests enjoy a greater experience that keeps them returning time and time again. ■



Richard Adams is the Co-Founder and CEO of Hygiene IQ, a hygiene and supply management solution. He specializes in product development and assisting startups from concept to exit. He can be reached at richard@hygieneiq.com.

“From robotics to self-serving technology to no-contact options, innovation is helping to fulfill guest needs in both a timely and creative manner.”

The wellness-driven evolution
of hospitality design

Serenity now

by SONYA HAFEEY

THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IS UNDERGOING A SIGNIFICANT transformation, driven by the evolving preferences and expectations of modern travelers. In recent years, the industry has placed a heightened emphasis on wellness as an integral part of the guest experience.

Recognizing the growing demand for holistic well-being, hotels and resorts are channeling wellness through their personalized services, food and beverage offerings, and designing flexible spaces that foster a sense of community. From serene spas and mindful exercise areas to nutritious dining options and lounges, these establishments are redefining luxury and comfort. This approach not only caters to the physical health of guests but also nurtures their mental and emotional well-being, creating a space where visitors can feel rejuvenated. By integrating wellness into every aspect of their operations, hospitality spaces are setting new standards for guest satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately contributing to a more balanced and healthier lifestyle.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LOCO

Condado Palm Inn

FROM COOKIE-CUTTER TO WELLNESS-ORIENTED DESIGN

A key element of the wellness-oriented design trend is the enhanced connection between indoor and outdoor spaces. Hotels increasingly are placing equal emphasis on interior and exterior environments, creating seamless transitions between the two. Features such as clubhouses, rooftop pools, and cabanas are designed to offer guests easy access to nature and provide them with environments that promote rejuvenation. This approach not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the spaces but also supports the holistic well-being of guests by offering them a peaceful retreat from the stresses of daily life.

Traditionally, hotel design has followed a standardized approach prioritizing uniformity and efficiency. However, the growing emphasis on wellness has inspired a movement toward more thoughtful, community-oriented design. The rise in solo travel has further fueled this shift, in particular.

As more individuals choose to travel alone, they increasingly seek opportunities to connect with others and immerse themselves in local communities. Hotels that embrace a community-centered approach to design can meet these evolving needs by creating spaces that encourage interaction and foster a sense of camaraderie among solo travelers. Individuals with strong social networks report higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness, highlighting the importance of creating environments that support social connections. By designing spaces that promote social interaction and community engagement, hotels can play a vital role in enhancing the mental and emotional well-being of their guests.

In addition to fostering community and connection, modern hotels also are addressing the diverse needs of their guests through the introduction of multifunctional spaces and upgraded amenities. Today's travelers expect more than just a place to sleep; they seek environments that cater to both their professional and personal lives. To meet these demands, hotels are incorporating co-working areas, grab-and-go cafés, private workspaces, and social lounges into their designs. These spaces provide guests with convenient and versatile environments where they can work, relax, and socialize. By offering distinct physical spaces dedicated to productivity, hotels help guests mentally separate work from leisure, enhancing focus and reducing stress. The inclusion of coworking spaces also fosters a community atmosphere, allowing for networking and collaboration, which further supports the balance between work and personal time. A development that could become more popular in the future is the idea of sensory rooms being introduced as adaptable, soundproof spaces that cater

“

By designing spaces that promote social interaction and community engagement, hotels can play a vital role in enhancing the mental and emotional well-being of their guests.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILL PRYCE



The Spa at PGA National

grounding guests in their environment. For instance, Condado Palm Inn embraces its tropical surroundings by featuring corridor motifs and guest rooms adorned with palm tree décor and vibrant color palettes, evoking the lush, vibrant atmosphere of its locale. Similarly, The Spa at PGA National uses soft whites, washed woods, champagne highlights, and subtle accents of blushy corals and palm prints, creating a serene, coastal-inspired retreat that resonates with the natural beauty of its surroundings. These thoughtful design choices not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the spaces but also create environments that are both calming and culturally enriching. This holistic approach ensures guests not only have a comfortable place to stay but also enjoy a meaningful experience that connects them to the unique character of the destination.

The hospitality industry’s evolution reflects a broader trend towards personalization and wellness. By shifting away from cookie-cutter designs and embracing biophilic design, local culture, and personalized services, hospitality brands are prioritizing the needs of their guests. The emphasis on these trends illustrates how the industry is ensuring a more holistic and guest-centric future. ■

to different personalities and preferences. These multipurpose rooms offer opportunities for sound baths, meditation, yoga, and virtual therapy sessions, providing guests with ultimate privacy and a safe space in some cases.

The rise of wellness tourism has driven hotels to elevate their fitness and recovery offerings. Wellness tourism is defined as travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one’s wellbeing. Many hotels now feature fitness amenities worthy of elite athletes, such as high-performance equipment, cryotherapy, hyperbaric chambers, and cold plunges, allowing guests to engage in new wellness practices that improve both their mental and physical health.

UNIQUE SPACES THAT SUPPORT HIGH-TOURIST AREAS

Connecting the decor to the nature and landscapes of the surrounding area further enhances this sense of immersion,



Sonya Haffey is the CEO of V Starr, a South Florida-based interior design firm where she has led operations for more than 14 years. With her extensive experience, Haffey played a crucial role in transitioning V Starr from a focus on residential projects to including a strong commercial presence. Working closely with Venus Williams, the founder/CEO of V Starr, Haffey oversees various projects, bringing together their strengths to create impactful designs.

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Are you missing the bigger picture?

A guide to tackling escalating construction costs

by JAKE ZWAAGSTRA

HOTEL CONSTRUCTION costs have been steadily increasing with inflation year-over-year, resulting in a slowdown of new developments in some markets. Owners are facing unusually high bids from contractors, leading them to seek additional bids and even cancel projects when they seem financially unviable. That said, the hospitality industry is highly profitable right now, with ADR and RevPAR reaching all-time highs as of late.

How, then, can owners overcome the initial challenges of getting a project off the ground? There's no silver bullet, but there are three key strategies owners can implement to increase their success, and it ultimately comes down to finding the right project partners.



1 THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Unprecedented costs and construction challenges necessitate a change of thinking. If traditional methods aren't working, it's time to consider other paths. Working directly with a contractor might not provide the most holistic view of the facts at hand. What owners don't always know is partnering with a skilled owner's representative can pay off in the long run, by bringing in an industry expert who is well versed in all aspects of the development process, and who will shoulder the responsibility for navigating all challenges and ensuring costs are kept in check.

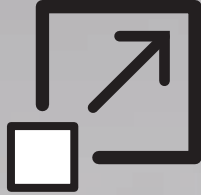
The value an owner's representative brings to the hotel development process lies in their ability to bring the right voices to the table at the right time. They have a broad perspective, informed by an up-to-date understanding of industry trends, which is crucial in making informed decisions. It's a complicated market and a good partner will know how to work backwards into a budget. For example, an owner's representative can accurately approximate how construction costs are going to escalate over the course of a project lifecycle, and build an appropriate buffer into the overall budget. Similarly, a skilled owner's representative can get creative when it comes to the ongoing labor problem. Every region has unique labor laws and pricing trends. An owner's representative will have a wider net to pull from and can put in the leg work to find a contracting partner who can draw from a labor pool with higher value.

“

Unprecedented costs and construction challenges necessitate a change of thinking. If traditional methods aren't working, it's time to consider other paths.”

2

THINK LARGER SCALE



One of the first questions an owner should consider before embarking on any projects is, “Do I have any other projects in the pipeline that I can combine with this one?” It might seem counterintuitive when attempting to tackle escalating costs, but by grouping multiple projects together, owners actually can find better pricing and participation from project partners.

Approaching a \$10 million project requires the same steps as a \$50 million project, but at the higher level you will have the opportunity to work with contractors who have access to a greater labor pool and more opportunities for strategic pricing. For example, as hotel owners in Dallas consider the approaching World Cup in 2026, they naturally will be aiming to update their properties in advance of the big event. They should be looking to group these planned updates with their other properties – in Austin, or Denver, for example – to get access to competitive pricing and ultimately get the most bang for their buck.

Smaller, individual properties also can benefit from working with a project partner who will be able to group their project with two or three other hotels in a similar locale. This doesn't mean your project will end up looking identical to a competitor. You'll still have plenty of opportunities to distinguish yourself and gain a competitive edge in your distinct niche, but by combining segments like basic furniture packages, everyone can benefit from a discounted rate. None of us exist in a silo, and it's time to start approaching our challenges in a more global, strategic way.

well-informed decisions. Bringing in an experienced project partner who will shoulder the heavy lift of navigating the many voices and factors involved throughout the development process will ultimately ensure that an owner gets the highest value out of their planned project. An owner's representative is an extension of the owner themselves and works to ensure all stakeholders have the best possible understanding of all factors at play as they make crucial decisions regarding the success of their project. ■

3

BRING THE RIGHT VOICES TO THE TABLE

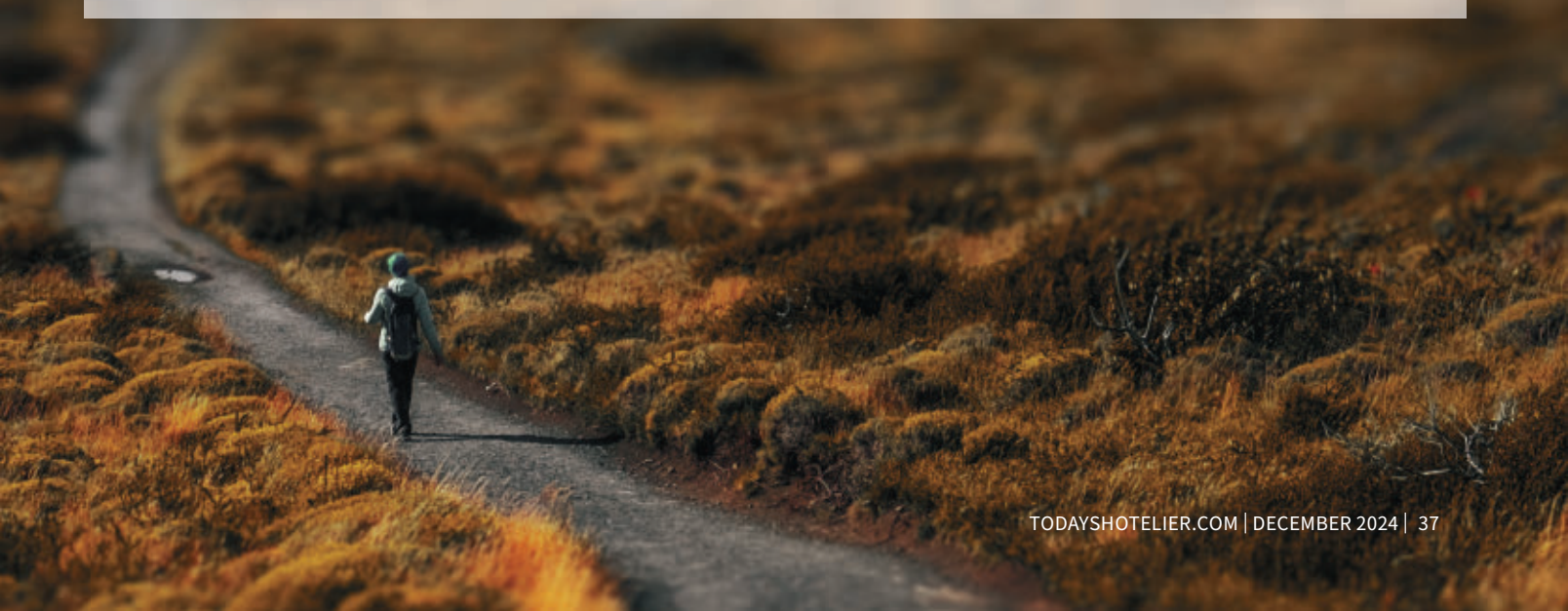


A successful hotel development process is entirely dependent on having the right voices in the room at the right times, which ensures owners can make



CEO Jake Zwaagstra founded TriCelta Development with a vision of providing superior service to project owners. A proven leader in the hospitality industry, Jake

draws on 20-plus years of design-build experience to articulate and realize his clients' visions. His commitment to transparency, efficiency, and integrity ensures the timely delivery of projects while maximizing savings and quality.



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AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION



The North Texas Region Charity Golf Tournament featured more than 100 players and raised nearly \$60,000 for charities: AAHOA Charitable Foundation, Businesses Ending Slavery & Trafficking (BEST), NANU Foundation, Nora's Home, SLPS Aastha, and Bavaji Charities.



Eastern Director at Large Nilesh Patel presented AAHOA legislative updates at the Memphis Metropolitan Hotel & Lodging Association's Lodging Summit.



AAHOA Lifetime Member Vijay Patel received this year's Lifetime Achievement award at the Washington Hospitality Association Conference.



The Washington DC Area Regional Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show welcomed 160 attendees and raised nearly \$50,000 for PAC.



Mukesh Patel was recognized as a Kentucky Colonel, one of the highest honors bestowed by the governor of Kentucky. This title is awarded to individuals who demonstrate outstanding service and accomplishments, often contributing positively to their communities and beyond.



Washington DC Area Regional Director Deepak Patel hosted a Back-of-the-House Tour with Rep. Glenn Ivey (D-MD) at the TownePlace Suites in College Park.



The North Carolina Region, led by Regional Director Pinkesh Patel and Ambassadors Chintan Patel, Keyur Patel, and Sanjay Patel, recently held a Town Hall in Fayetteville, NC. Some 115 people attended the event.



The Arkansas Region held a voter registration drive as part of its sponsorship of a local volleyball tournament. Waylan Arnold, with the Arkansas Secretary of State's Office, attended.



AAHOA Mid South Regional Director Ajay Patel, Mid South Ambassador Amit Nathu, and other AAHOA Members met with George Bray, 40th mayor of Paducah, KY, at a local event.



The Southeast Texas Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show welcomed more than 500 attendees, gained 22 new members, and raised \$125,000-plus in PAC donations.



The South Pacific Region held a Town Hall in San Diego, CA. More than 140 people attended, \$10,000 was raised for PAC, and two new lifetime members were gained.



The AAHOA Mid Atlantic Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show welcomed more than 350 attendees, gained 16 new members, and raised a record-breaking \$110,000-plus for PAC.



AAHOA Lifetime Member Atul Patel was named the 2024 Innovator of the Year by the Iowa Hotel & Lodging Association (IHLA).



Alabama Regional Director Sanjay Patel and AAHOA Ambassador Rupen Patel attended an event where Goldman Sachs announced it would bring its \$100 million initiative to help small businesses in rural areas to Alabama.

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The following companies provide generous ongoing support to AAHOA and its members. A heartfelt and sincere thank you is extended to every one of our Industry Partners for their contributions to AAHOA and the industry at large. When searching for a provider, consider doing business with the Industry Partners.



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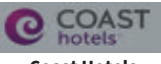
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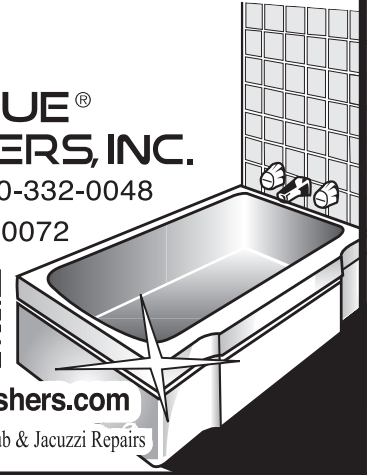
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VOTE IN AAHOA ELECTIONS

Requirements for Eligibility

- Be a current member who has renewed their membership at least forty-five (45) days prior to the election; and
- Become a Lifetime Member no later than the calendar year prior to Election Day, or paid Annual Member dues no less than twice in the previous three calendar years; or
- Be an eligible spouse whose name was included on the membership application; and
- Present proper photo identification (e.g., driver's license).

Requirements Explained

OPTION 1



Become a Lifetime Member on or before **December 31, 2024**

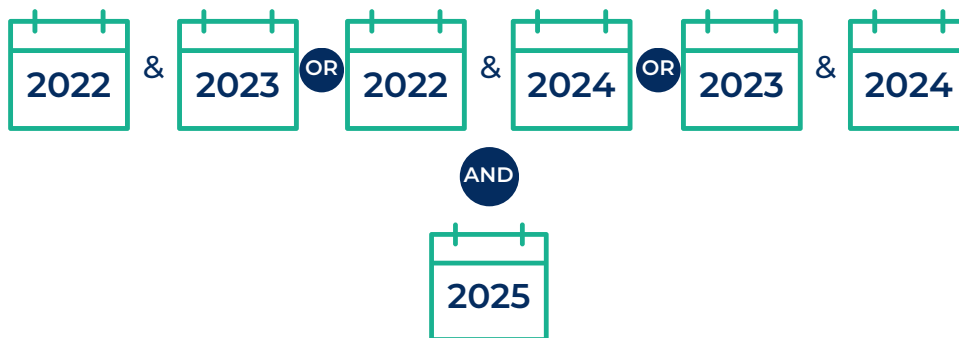
OPTION 2



Pay your Annual Membership dues on or before **March 2, 2025**

Annual Members Must also Satisfy the Following

If you're an Annual Member, you must have paid your Annual Membership dues no less than **twice** in the previous **three calendar years** and renew your annual membership for 2025 on or before **Sunday, March 2, 2025**. If you're a Lifetime Member who joined on or before **Dec. 31, 2024**, you satisfy the requirements to participate in the 2025 AAHOA election.

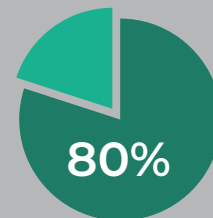


Reminders



- Renewing your 2024 membership also **impacts your eligibility** to vote in the 2025 AAHOA election.
- You can sign up for automatic renewals or upgrade your membership 24/7 at MyAAHOA.com.
- The 2025 AAHOA Elections will take place online, and all eligible voters will be able to participate, regardless of geographic location.

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¹Nilson ranking March 2023

²JPMorgan Chase Q4 2022 Earnings Presentation

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