

Sales and Marketing

Hotels hoping for holiday season bump

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Pricing, promotions and the right messaging can help attract much-needed travelers this holiday season.





By [Laura Koss-Feder](#)

GLOBAL REPORT—Although it is going to be a very unusual holiday season, hoteliers are hoping that driving trips, staycations and extended trips fueled by clever packages will boost bookings by the COVID-weary public.

“With hotels facing an already smaller pool of potential guests, they will need to compete on price to enhance occupancy levels. Hotels will try to encourage people visiting family and friends over Thanksgiving and Christmas to stay at a hotel versus at someone’s house to encourage social distancing,” said David Sangree, president of Hotel & Leisure Advisors, LLC.

Branded hotels often have more flexibility to offer promotions and deals to brand-loyal consumers and rewards card members, he added. Many brands are offering increased points for booking stays in between or before certain dates.

“Brands will be promoting special offers chainwide, along with offers specific to property,” said Deborah Friedland, managing director of EisnerAmper’s real estate groups and practice leader of hospitality advisory services.

“This includes ski resorts offering attractively-priced packages that combine ski rental, chairlift tickets and visits with Santa; beach resorts pairing accommodations with dining and surf lessons; and destination mountain resorts providing packages that combine accommodations, dining, and pick-your-own Christmas trees.”

She predicted that hotels located in suburban markets and drive-to destination resorts will probably do better over the holiday season than those in urban locations.

Marketing to guests to book trips early or highlighting flexible cancellation policies are key to bring in winter travelers, said Dallas King, GM of the Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott San Diego North/San Marcos in California.

“We know that some travelers aren’t confident in long-distance travel quite yet, but there is a lot of pent-up demand,” King noted. “We are targeting geographically in the local area to encourage our hotel as a drive-to destination and offering special rates for locals visiting their family also helps.”

Other hotels are tweaking their offerings to appeal to travelers during the pandemic. The Hacienda Del Sol Guest Ranch Resort in Tucson, Arizona, is redesigning its F&B to make its Thanksgiving and Christmas buffets more-intimate fine dining with a fixed-price menu, said marketing manager Casey Numetko.

The property’s demographic of local Tucson guests has increased.

“People are looking to get out, but are tending to stay in their surrounding areas versus going to larger cities with bigger COVID-19 outbreaks,” Numetko said.

Hilton properties have numerous packages to help entice visitors, according to Karla Visconti, senior director of communications in the Caribbean and Latin America for the company.

For instance, the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino is offering an extended-stay package, as more people are able to work remotely and might be looking for an vacation that combines business practicality. In the Escape to Happiness package, guests receive a fourth week free, as well as daily breakfast for two, premium WiFi, and a 20% discount on F&B and its spa.

Similarly, in Mexico, the Waldorf Astoria Los Cabos Pedregal is offering a special incentive for longer trips. Guests pay for 21 days, but stay for 30 days, Visconti said.

“Our goal is to provide people with a reason to travel and celebrate again by showing them what is possible in this COVID-19 altered world. As we gear up for a holiday season unlike any other, we understand holiday travel will look different as well,” said Kathleen Reidenbach, chief commercial officer with Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants.

With work and school continuing to be remote for many for the remainder of the year, family vacations are being extended into the fall and the holiday season.

To accommodate traveling families, Kimpton has introduced a Chief Virtual Learning Office in select properties, Reidenbach said. The CVLO is available to help set up virtual classes or troubleshoot with virtual learning applications. As part of the program, the CVLO can also bring snacks, school supplies, and desks or booster seats to help kids and enable parents to focus on their own work.

Like other hotel companies, Kimpton is expecting more driving trips this winter.

“We anticipate families traveling the most during this holiday season, whether that’s to see other family members nearby or to enjoy the holiday season in a new location, likely driving distance from home,” Reidenbach said.

The key to bringing in this incremental business is to have various offerings available for guests and consistently promote them through social media platforms, said Cassie Bond, VP of revenue strategy for Chesapeake Hospitality.

“Give guests a preview of their hotel experience, if they choose to book with you. This is where revenue management and eCommerce have to work in tandem,” she said.

For instance, stay-and-save promotions are very popular right now, as well as anything giving a “free” night with a certain minimum stay required, she said.

“We anticipate couples, families, and even more specifically, millennials, will be traveling this upcoming holiday season. There is pent-up demand, and many vacations were canceled this year, so the countdown is on to get out and continue taking adventures and making memories again.”