A Breath of Fresh Air for Luxury Hotels

Trees, potted plants and "green walls" may not be conventional forms of interior design, but with growing demand for sustainable, eco-friendly hospitality, hotels are upping their efforts to incorporate "green atmospherics" into their indoor spaces. Whilst people's behaviour is known to be shaped by their physical surroundings, the specific effects of living plants, scent, air quality, natural light and green spaces are not yet known. Focusing on the luxury hotel sector, the SHTM's Professor Jin-Soo Lee and colleagues explored the influence of various dimensions of green atmospherics on the well-being and behavioural intentions of hotel guests and employees. Their findings could help luxury hotel managers deliver a more enjoyable experience for guests and take better care of their employees while also reducing their environmental impact.

Connecting with Spaces

The hotel sector is a major contributor to pollution, waste and environmental damage. Hotels not only generate large volumes of greenhouse gases, grey water and food waste but also consume substantial natural resources. As the tourism industry continues to grow, so does the need to provide more eco-friendly lodging for travellers. Rising to this challenge, many hotels are making moves to minimise their environmental impact by implementing green initiatives, which simultaneously meet the growing customer demand for sustainable hospitality. Increasingly, the researchers note, "individuals embrace sustainability as not only a design preference, but also a moral code".

"Green atmospherics" describes a healthy, eco-friendly physical environment. Hotels keen to foster green atmospherics might furnish their indoor spaces with living trees, potted plants, green rest areas, fresh air, natural light and good ventilation. "Visitors and employees in a hotel are therefore interacting with various elements of its green indoor atmospherics", say the researchers. According to previous studies, interacting with green and healthy atmospherics can boost guests' positive experiences of hotels. Indoor atmospherics may influence cognitive, emotional and physical responses as well as behaviours such as retention, loyalty and word-of-mouth intention.

According to the researchers, the beneficial effects of green atmospherics can be explained by the "stimulus organism response theory", which formed the backdrop of this research. This theory holds that environmental attributes act as stimuli that influence a person's mental state, which in turn affects their behaviour. "In particular," say the authors, "environmental psychologists argue that positive behaviours derive from individuals' well-being and happiness through positive experiences". Accordingly, green indoor atmospherics are likely to foster positive responses and behaviours in hotel guests.

Green Atmospherics and Well-being

In modern society, the chance to connect with nature is usually joyfully welcomed, with intuitive links to mental well-being. In hotels, green atmospherics are conducive to a positive state of mind that results in a greater sense of well-being. Mental well-being is "a crucial concept for both patrons and workers", emphasise the authors. For instance, employees are more willing to work in places that promote their well-being. The authors hypothesised that green atmospherics in hotels enhance the mental well-being of both hotel guests and employees.

In turn, mental well-being is known to affect decision making and behaviour. Research has found that mental well-being significantly predicts hotel employees' green behaviour. "Mental well-being brings diverse outcomes that are beneficial to the company", say the authors. These outcomes can include an enhanced sense of belonging, loyalty and purchase/recommendation intentions and behaviours. Building on these findings, the researchers aimed to determine how mental well-being affects the behavioural intentions of hotel guests and employees.

Finally, the researchers considered the role of "place dependence", defined as a sense of deep connection with spaces that meet one's functional and emotional needs. "Travellers who feel comfortable and familiar with a place are likely to have strong place dependence or attachment and to revisit the place", explain the authors. Mental well-being has been found to determine place dependence, which can in turn affect customers' purchase intentions, loyalty, and other behaviours. To explore these connections in greater depth, the researchers investigated the influence of mental well-being on place dependence and how place dependence can in turn affect behavioural intentions in the context of green atmospherics in hotels.

Quizzing Guests and Employees

In an elegant two-phase experiment, the researchers explored the nuanced relationships between elements of green atmospherics and the well-being, place dependence and behavioural intentions of hotel employees and guests. In Phase 1, focus group discussions with five hotel guests, five hotel employees and three hospitality management professors revealed seven important attributes of green indoor atmospherics, which were assigned to three major categories: green ambient conditions (air quality, scent, natural light), green items (e.g. living plants) and green spaces/areas (e.g. green rest areas).

Phase 2 was a field survey conducted at luxury hotels in South Korean cities. Over 10 days, 253 hotel guests with a mean age of 35 were recruited from different indoor spaces in their hotels to complete a questionnaire. Data from 247 employees, aged 32.5 on average, were also collected on site from the same luxury hotels. All of the participants completed a questionnaire that measured their mental well-being, place dependence and behavioural intentions.

Getting the Most from Green Atmospherics

A key novel contribution of this study lies in its categorisation of the attributes of green indoor atmospherics in luxury hotels into green ambient conditions, green items and green spaces/areas. The researchers found that these constructs influenced the formation of mental well-being, place dependence and behavioural intentions among hotel guests and hotel employees. Supporting stimulus organism response theory, this finding highlights "the role of green indoor atmospherics in inducing guests' and employees' mental well-being perception", say

the researchers, "which leads to increased place dependence and behavioural intentions".

Mental well-being and place dependence not only directly triggered behavioural intentions but also indirectly influenced behavioural intentions by maximising the influence of green indoor atmospherics. Through targeted efforts to enhance mental well-being and place dependence, say the authors, hotels could optimise their use of green ambient conditions, green items and green spaces/areas. "This will fortify the effect of these concepts in building guest and employee intentions to remain with the hotel, say positive things about the hotel, and have loyalty to the hotel."

The power of green atmospherics to make guests feel healthy and happy, and the pivotal role of mental well-being, highlights a unique opportunity for hotels. "Offering mental well-being to hotel guests and hotel employees is a vital step for the increased intentions to remain with the hotel, say positive things about the hotel, and be loyal to the hotel", clarify the authors. Managers could diversify their efforts to enhance guests' and employees' well-being by, for example, improving social interactions for guests through leisure facility discounts and strengthening social relationships between colleagues through team building activities.

The final noteworthy finding is that of the three dimensions of green atmospherics, green ambient conditions most strongly influenced guests' well-being, whereas these three dimensions had more or less equal effects on the mental well-being of employees. "It is thus essential for luxury hotel proprietors to focus more on fortifying the ambient conditions within the hotel and its performance in order to attain a stronger level of mental well-being among their guests", note the researchers. Additionally, at a similar level of mental well-

being, guests more actively built behavioural intentions than employees did.

Green Hotels and Beyond

This insightful study identifies mental well-being as a key driver of the influence of green atmospherics in hotels on behavioural intentions, particularly those of guests. The findings also indicate a clear need to tailor strategies for promoting green atmospherics to different groups. "To effectively enhance mental well-being and behavioural intentions", conclude the authors, "luxury hotel proprietors should develop and use tactics that are different for guests and for employees". The insights afforded by this study also have exciting implications for creating green atmospherics in other indoor service settings, such as restaurants and cruise ships.

POINTS TO NOTE

- Hotels are increasingly incorporating "green atmospherics" into their indoor spaces to meet demand for sustainable hospitality.

- Different attributes of green indoor atmospherics can enhance the mental well-being, place dependence and behavioural intentions of hotel guests and employees.

- Green ambient conditions such as air quality, scent and natural light had the greatest positive impact on guests' mental well-being.

- Hotels should carefully tailor their use of green indoor elements to target groups (e.g. guests and customers).

Han, Heesup, Lee, Jin-Soo, and Koo, Bonhak (2021). Impact of Green Atmospherics on Guest and Employee Well-Being Response, Place Dependence, and Behavior in the Luxury Hotel Sector. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 29, Issue 10, pp. 1613-1634.

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