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Travel PR and Marketing Agency

THE DAILY SNOOZE

Forget chocolates on the pillow; today's hard-working guest just wants a good night's sleep. *Rosalind Mullen* reports on what you need to do to ensure your guests are well rested

It's not rocket science. Guests who wake up grumpy after a bad night's sleep in your hotel are unlikely to give you a high customer satisfaction rating. Certainly, when it comes to the all-important frequent business traveller, the ability of a hotel to offer the kind of rest that helps them do their job well the next day can be the difference between gaining repeat customers and getting bad online reviews.

It's no wonder, then, that so many of the biggest hotel brands, including Westin, Hyatt and Crowne Plaza, base their marketing campaigns on what they do to ensure a perfect night's sleep. Even some budget chains, such as Premier Inn, offer guests a Good Night Guarantee, which means if they are not 100% satisfied with their stay they're entitled to a full refund. In fact, the budget chain is investing £70m in refurbishing about 13,000 rooms, which is likely to include king size beds, blackout curtains and comfortable pillows.

Yet, research shows that many hotels are still not waking up to the importance of giving their guests a good night's sleep. A survey last year on behalf of ITC hotels found that 70% of business travellers surveyed found it difficult to sleep in the unfamiliar surroundings of a hotel room and some 82% worried that this would affect their business performance the next day.

"We've done a lot of work to make sure our guests sleep well"
Bev King, Z Hotels

As a result, ITC has introduced its Sleep Menu, which includes a choice of pillow sizes and density, a range of calming aromatherapy essential oil sprays, in-room foot massages and even a Dreamkerchief – a one-use-only handkerchief doused in aromatherapy oils and left on the guest's pillow.

"You can offer the finest services and the greatest restaurants housed in the most stunning architecture, but if your guest hasn't slept well, the purpose of their visit is defeated," says ITC Hotels chief executive Nakul Anand.

So what makes for a well-slept guest? A safe environment is a given. The big trend nowadays, however, is for hotels to create allergy-free environments. Hotels such as Z Hotels in Soho and Victoria, Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons, Chewton Glen and Cliveden have invested in Naturalmat mattresses, made from Soil Association organic wool, which is treated naturally to combat mites, moths and



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Z HOTELS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

London boutique brand Z Hotels has a series of low-key design features aimed at giving guests a good night's sleep. "We've done a lot of work to make sure our guests sleep well," says co-founder Bev King.

The group, which has hotels in Soho and Victoria, focuses on stylish design and high-quality features, with room rates starting at £60. At that price, something has to give and in Z Hotels' case it is the room size (the smallest is 9 sq m) and the fact that 15% of bedrooms in Soho and 60% in Victoria are windowless.

This means, in turn, that the focus of the room is on sleeping. Top of the list are bespoke mattresses and mattress protectors, handmade by Naturalmat with Soil Association organic wool and coir. They are well-ventilated and warm as well as anti-bedbug and hypoallergenic.

Z Hotels also specifies the highest-grade cotton bedding and invests in duvets that are 100% wool enclosed in a 100% cotton covers.

"We pay about £75 for our duvets, while other hotels might pay £6-7 for a hollowfibre duvet. Wool is natural and breathable and we haven't had any problem with people with allergies."

King also believes in giving his guests an



oxygen boost. A vent system pumps fresh air into the room, providing eight air changes per hour. He explains that most hotels have an extractor in the bathroom, sucking air out, and the only way it gets back in is under the door.

"When you sleep there is no air movement and you can end up with more carbon dioxide than oxygen. In our rooms the air is forced over the bed, providing a healthier sleep," says King, who also argues that the windowless rooms can be a bonus, as they are dark and quiet.

"Regulars often rebook them for that reason," he says. "Some people think that having no windows is dreadful, but then find they sleep so much better."



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even bedbugs. They also incorporate organic coir fibre, which improves ventilation.

A growing number of companies, including Hilton, Marriott and ITC Hotels, have gone even further, introducing PURE rooms. These use medical grade air-purifiers to provide enhanced air quality and induce a deeper sleep and are particularly targeted at the growing number of asthma and allergy sufferers.

Another modern phenomenon that is interfering with your guests' sleep is their obsession with technology. Mobile phones, tablets, TVs, you name it – all emit blue daylight spectrum light which stimulates the brain and prevents the production of sleep-enhancing melatonin if used within an hour of going to bed. You can't stop your guest from using these devices, but you can leave information around on tent cards to inform them of the repercussions of not switching these devices off, and if possible design the room so the workspace is separate from the sleeping area.

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Nakul Anand, ITC Hotels

Many companies are consulting sleep experts. Dr Chris Idzikowski of the Edinburgh Sleep Centre worked with Crowne Plaza on its Sleep Advantage programme a few years ago and advised that the use of electronic devices, including TV, an hour before bed are detrimental to sleep, along with eating late and drinking caffeine and alcohol.

Of course, the most obvious starting place for a good night's sleep is a comfortable clean bed, good mattress and well-laundered bedding. Consumer Reports' July survey of 44 US hotels discovered that 27% of respondents had at least one complaint – and the most common was an uncomfortable hotel bed. Some 10% cited a luxurious bed and linens as an important factor in choosing a hotel. Other key elements are designing cool, quiet rooms that

can be effectively darkened.

On a less glamorous note, none of these sleep-inducing initiatives will work if your hotel has a bedbug infestation. Rentokil says it carried out 38% more bedbug treatments in 2010 than in 2009 and the problem is getting worse. Sniffer dogs can help to identify any problems early on – and if they do, you need to call in the experts promptly.

Check out our ideal room plan opposite to see what else you can do to put your guests' minds at rest...

Ideal room – guide to a good night's sleep

1 Ambient light Darkness stimulates the secretion of melatonin in our brain, which helps put us to sleep, so light that filters into a hotel room from street lamps can be just enough to wake a guest up. Combat this by using room-darkening curtains and even providing clips to ensure the curtains don't gape. Similarly, prevent light seeping into a room from under the door by fitting door sweeps.

2 Be cruel to be kind Avoid putting chocolates on the bed at turndown – a piece of fruit is healthier, less of a stimulant and will make the guest feel far more refreshed in the morning.

3 Educate your guests Provide DVDs or tent cards that give tips on how to get a good night's sleep. For instance, point out that guests shouldn't work out for three hours before bedtime and should avoid late night TV or computer use. Many hotels also provide podcasts, restful music and so on.

4 Banish bedbugs Make regular checks of sheets for small blood spots, faecal pellets, cast skins, a sickly smell or live sightings. Some hotels employ sniffer dogs so they can find and deal with any infestation quickly. If you do find any bedbugs, call the professionals without delay. Besides ensuring your guests sleep tight, you'll also avoid any unnecessary litigation.



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5 The bed It's not rocket science. Replace any bed if it's creaky and worn. Such is the importance of a good bed that many hotel companies now have custom-made beds. Some even sell them to the public – for instance, Ritz-Carlton's custom-designed Sealy Posturepedic Plush bed.

6 The mattress Invest in a design that is supportive, breathable, well-ventilated, insulated and ideally hypoallergenic. Nowadays, many hotels are choosing environmentally friendly mattresses made with organic wool that are naturally treated to be anti-dust mite, anti-mosquito and anti-moth. You can get mattress covers that are anti-bedbug, too.

7 Luxurious bedding Research shows that guests are more likely to return to a hotel that has crisp sheets made from natural fibres such as cotton or linen, plus a body-hugging duvet or coverlet and maybe even a plump mattress topper to boot – don't forget Westin's famous "Heavenly Bed" – with 10 layers of bedding (for details see www.westin-hotelsathome.com).

8 Pillow talk Guests love the idea of lots of plump pillows – then again, some people like hard ones. As a result, many hotel companies offer guests a choice of up to eight different types of pillow, with varying shape, softness and type of material.

9 Separate work and play Today's computer screens, smartphones, tablets and other electrical gadgets can interfere with good-quality sleep so try to separate the work area and sleeping area when designing a room. And while you can't stop your guests watching late-night TV, you can warn them that TVs emit blue spectrum light, which actually prevents sleep. If you're really keen, give them blue spectrum light-blocking glasses to wear when watching TV or using their iPads.

10 Fish around for new ideas Be creative – for example, the ITC Mughal hotel in Agra, India, has goldfish in every room to help create a relaxed atmosphere

11 Lighting Bright lights on a visit to the bathroom in the middle of the night will play havoc with a guest's circadian rhythm. The newly launched ITC Grand Chola in Chennai, India, has introduced anti-stumble technology in its rooms. This motion-activated LED device from Philips Electronics lights a path from the bed to the bathroom – but ensures it isn't too bright so it won't wake a guest's partner and won't wake the wanderer too much either. This hotel also has iPad2 digital bedside valets to allow guests to control the lighting, air-conditioning, TV and even answer the door without leaving their bed.

12 Air quality, climate and ventilation A cool room aids sleep, but sleep experts also believe that a hypoallergenic environment will promote sleep. ITC Maurya has just launched ITC One Pure Rooms at the hotel's 76-room ITC One Block, which provide continuously circulating air through a medical-grade purifier. The purification techniques remove allergens and irritants from all surfaces, fabrics and the air.

13 Scents and smellies Essential oil room sprays can be calming and can be complemented by a similar range of bathroom smellies.

14 Keep the noise down Keep noisy disturbances from housekeeping or engineering works to a minimum when guests



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are most likely to be asleep. Crowne Plaza, for instance, operates this policy between Sunday and Thursday from 9pm to 10am.

15 Room service If a guest is suffering from jetlag, they may want to eat in the comfort of their own room. But make sure the trolley is removed as soon as possible so they can sleep in a clean, uncluttered environment. Readily available herbal teas will help relaxation, too.

16 Take the strain Your guests are not going to relax if they're worried about waking up in time for an important meeting or early flight. Offer a reliable wake-up call service – Crowne Plaza's Sleep Advantage programme guarantees to call guests within five minutes of their requested wake-up time, or they get the room for free.

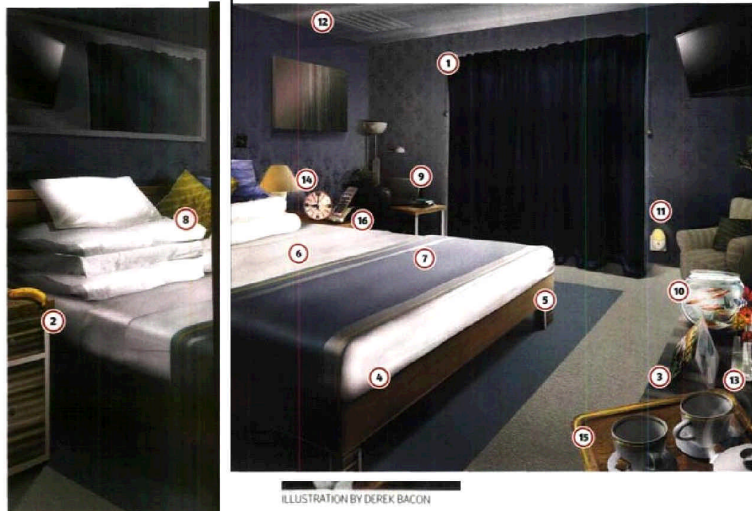


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