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HOTELS SEE CORPORATE, GROUP DEMAND GROWTH AS 2023 CLOSES OUT

Hotels are poised to have a strong finish in 2023 thanks to growing corporate demand and solid leisure demand, according to a recent survey of more than 4,000 travelers commissioned by the American Hotel & Lodging Association.

The survey, conducted by Morning Consult in mid-September and published by AHLA in November, showed 68 percent of those surveyed whose jobs involved business travel planned to travel overnight for business in the last three months of the year. By comparison, only 59 percent said the same in a similar survey this time last year.

The percentage of leisure travelers planning at least an overnight trip from October through December was 37 percent, down two percentage points compared with the 2022 survey. However, the survey also indicated that holiday travel is on the rise. Thirty-two percent of respondents said they were planning an overnight trip for Thanksgiving, up four percentage points year over year, and 34 percent were planning travel for Christmas, up from 31 percent in 2022.

In addition, the survey showed that attitudes toward travel have returned to pre-pandemic norms, according to AHLA. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they are just as likely now to stay in a hotel as they were prior to the pandemic, and about 70 percent of business travelers said they are traveling as much or more than they were in the pre-pandemic years.

“Hotels are going above and beyond to take excellent care of guests as travel approaches pre-COVID levels, and this survey underscores that fact,” AHLA president and CEO Chip Rogers said in a statement. “America’s nearly 62,500 hotels are a bright spot for the nation’s economy.”

Hotel executives said they are seeing an upward trajectory for corporate travel demand during their recent third-quarter earnings calls, and they also are projecting increases in

corporate rates for 2024.

Hilton Worldwide CEO Christopher Nassetta, for example, said the company saw business transient revenue per available room increase 5 percent year over year during the third quarter. As negotiations for 2024 rates continue, Nassetta said increases appear to be in the upper single digits.

Marriott International reported similar results, with business transient revenue for the U.S. and Canada up about 4 percent year over year in the third quarter, according to Marriott president and CEO Anthony Capuano. Small and medium-sized companies continue to lead in that growth, as larger companies have been slower to recover, in part due to economic conditions and companies’ sustainability goals, he said.

Hyatt Hotels Corp., meanwhile, said its transient business travel revenue was up 19 percent year over year during the third quarter, reaching about 90 percent of 2019 levels. Like Hilton, Hyatt is projecting corporate rates to be up in the high single digits year over year for 2024, according to CEO Mark Hoplamazian.

For IHG Hotels & Resorts, global business transient revenue was up 6 percent year over year in the third quarter, beating 2019 levels by 3 percent, amid “the further normalization of global working habits” and “the return of more meetings, conferences and events,” according to IHG CEO Elie Maalouf. Rate growth has driven that recovery, with IHG’s average daily rate up 4.1 percent year over year during the quarter.

The big standout in recovery for many hoteliers is group travel. Nassetta said Hilton’s group demand was “off the hook” in the third quarter, with group revenue per available room up 8 percent year over year — three percentage points higher than each business transient and leisure levels.

At Hyatt, group room revenue increased 10 percent year over year in the third quarter,

and it outpaced 2019 levels by 5 percent. Hoplamazian said corporate group travel is the fastest growing segment, but he added that association, regional and specialty groups are showing strength as well.



Marriott also cited strength in group demand, with group revenue up 5 percent year over year in the U.S. and Canada and up 9 percent year over year globally during the third quarter. Capuano said group business will “continue to be a meaningful driver of revenue growth going forward.”

Nassetta said large group business in particular would grow in 2024, with small and medium-sized groups dominating the recovery thus far.

Even so, PwC in November cautioned that occupancy growth for U.S. hotels next year might be a bit weaker than it expected. The firm now projects U.S. hotel occupancy for the full year 2023 will be 63 percent, up 0.7 percentage points year over year and slightly below its May projection of 63.4 percent. Next year, PwC projects occupancy will be “relatively flat.”

PwC projects U.S. hotel rates will continue to increase in 2024, albeit at more moderate rates compared with double-digit percentages seen in recent previous years.

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PARTNER UPDATES

HOTEL BRAND DEVELOPMENT HAS STRONG MOMENTUM INTO 2024

With the announcement of numerous new hotel brands in recent years, some of those brands will see their debut properties next year, particularly within the Hilton family's 2024 roadmap. Marriott continues to add to its brand portfolio with a new midscale brand for Europe, the Middle East and Africa. InterContinental, meanwhile, is planning some big changes for its flagship brand, while Omni has tapped a luxury hotel veteran to help with its own brand overhaul.

Hilton

Hilton Plans Wide Range of Global Openings

Among Hilton's exponential growth planned in 2024, here are 24 new properties to be on the lookout for around the world. These featured hotels include the debut of some of the company's newest brands that will be "setting records, marking milestones and creating memorable stays," the company announced recently.

In the Americas, new Hilton properties in 2024 include the highly-anticipated Signia by Hilton Atlanta, a 976-room hotel set to open in January. The hotel is connected by walkway to the Georgia World Congress Center and is the largest ground-up development project in downtown Atlanta in the last 40 years.

Hilton's newest lifestyle brand, Tempo by Hilton, will be opening its second property in Louisville in March 2024, followed by a third property in Nashville. Plus, the Motto by Hilton brand will be expanding its Americas presence with a new property in Bentonville, Ark., sometime in the second quarter of 2024.

Other 2024 hotel openings in the US include Embassy Suites by Hilton Gatlinburg Resort located alongside the Great Smoky

Mountains National Park, a Homewood Suites by Hilton and Canopy by Hilton hotel in Nashville, plus a new property at Cloudland at McLeMores Resort Lookout Mountain in Georgia, which will be a part of the Curio Collection by Hilton brand. Additionally, the Wākea Waikiki Beach in Hawaii will be joining Hilton's luxury portfolio under the LXR Hotels & Resorts brand next year and soon will begin a custom design renovation.

Elsewhere in the Americas, Hilton will open its first property in Bermuda next year with the Bermudian Beach Resort, as part of the Tapestry Collection by Hilton brand. The company also will open Zemi Miches All-Inclusive Resort near Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, as part of the Curio Collection by Hilton.



Waldorf-Astoria Seychelles

Hilton's openings in Europe, the Middle East and Africa next year include two new properties in the Seychelles: a Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts on Platte Island and a Canopy by Hilton property on Mahé's à la Mouche beach. The Hampton by Hilton brand will be opening two properties in the region, including its African debut with a property in Johannesburg's business district and what will be Europe's largest Hampton by Hilton in Vienna. One of Hilton's luxury brands, Conrad

Hotels & Resorts, will open its first fully residential, luxury development in Manama, Bahrain. Plus, a Curio Collection by Hilton property is set to debut in Florence with the opening of Anglo American Hotel Florence.



Conrad Singapore Orchard

In the Asia-Pacific region, the Hilton openings include seven new properties, starting on New Year's Day with the anticipated full opening of Conrad Singapore Orchard. Additionally, Hilton's flagship brand will open properties in three cities across the region, including the Hilton Shanghai City Center, Hilton Kyoto in Japan, and Hilton Kathmandu in Nepal. Motto by Hilton, a lifestyle brand, will open a new property in Hong Kong, and a DoubleTree by Hilton hotel will open in Vientiane, Laos. Plus, the first luxury Hilton hotel in Chongqing, China will open under the Conrad Hotels & Resorts brand.



Conrad Chongqing

Before the year concludes, we want to share that in October Hilton opened the first property under its new, premium economy brand: Spark by Hilton. This conversion property, Spark by Hilton Mystic Groton, located in Connecticut, is just the beginning as there are more than 400 opportunities in various stages of development for the Spark by Hilton brand, according to Hilton.



InterContinental Announces Brand Transformation Plans

InterContinental Hotels & Resorts in October announced a new “global brand evolution” that it said will be “paving the way for the luxury traveller of tomorrow.”



Concierge Gallery

“This isn’t a rebrand or repositioning; rather, it’s a comprehensive transformation from start to finish of InterContinental, ensuring we stay at the forefront of crafting a luxury experience for the modern luxury traveler,” IHG VP of luxury brands Tom Rowntree said in a statement. “Collaborating

with our 215 hotels worldwide, we are committed to delivering precisely what today’s and tomorrow’s guests, owners and colleagues require.”

Initiatives include food and beverage programs backed by science aimed at helping guests reduce travel fatigue as well as a guest room design also meant to reduce fatigue, in collaboration with neuroscience-based designer Isabelle Sjovall.

In addition, InterContinental is developing “Concierge Galleries” for its lobbies, with access to cultural knowledge beyond a service desk, such as interactive displays, library spaces or art installations. InterContinental also is adding an “Incredible Occasions” program with the ability to book intimate spaces for special moments such as birthdays or baby showers.



Marriott Launches New Four Points Brand for EMEA

Marriott this fall announced a new midscale brand for Europe, the Middle East and Africa; Four Points Express by Sheraton, targeting business and leisure travelers looking for an affordable price range.

The first two properties will be converted properties in Turkey, with the Four Points Express by Sheraton Antalya and Four Points Express by Sheraton Bursa Nilüfer. They will be followed by a property in London, and Marriott expects additional projects in the U.K., London, and Belgium.

The midscale tier is a big opportunity in the EMEA region, according to Marriott EMEA president Satya Anand. “Midscale

is a resilient industry segment that currently represents almost 1.2 million rooms in EMEA, and 68 percent of those rooms are unbranded,” according to Anand.



Four Points Express by Sheraton



Omni Adds New COO

Former Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts executive Vince Parrotta has joined Omni Hotels & Resorts as its first chief operating officer, Omni announced in recent months.

Omni president Kurt Alexander said Parrotta will be a “key resource” for Omni given his focus on quality at Four Seasons as Omni plans its first brand refresh in more than a decade. As a part of that, Omni has committed \$1.5 billion in portfolio enhancements over the next five years.

“The timing is right for us to add a COO to our leadership team as we double down on our commitment to elevating our brand and elevating the guest experience,” according to Parrotta.



BRAZIL ADDS E-VISA OPTION FOR U.S., CANADA AND AUSTRALIA TRAVELERS PRIOR TO WAIVER EXPIRATION

Brazil’s visa waiver for travelers from the U.S., Canada and Australia will expire in January, but the country has developed an electronic visa program to ease the process for travelers from those countries.

Since June 2019, Brazil has allowed citizens of those three countries along with Japan to visit without a visa for up to 90 days, extendable by a further 90 days during the stay. That policy, however, was put in place with the expectation that the countries would implement a reciprocal policy for Brazilian travelers. While Japan and Brazil reached a bilateral agreement for a reciprocal visa

waiver program in September, the U.S., Canada and Australia have not, so the waiver will expire on Jan. 10, 2024.

This month, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced a new platform for electronic visas, via technology company VFS Global, for visitors from the three countries for travel beginning on that date. Travelers can apply online and obtain a visa at the cost of US\$80.90 per person. Those visas allow multiple entries and are valid for 10 years for U.S. residents and for five years for Australians and Canadians.

Once travelers apply through the

platform, they will receive a PDF file of their visa, which they can print and bring with them. They also should keep a copy on their phone.

Processing time for visas on the platform typically is about five days, but VFS Global recommends travelers apply at least two months in advance of travel, if possible, in case there are any issues with the application. The company also recommends travelers going to Brazil within a few days of the visa waiver expiration get a visa just in case there are travel delays that cause them to travel after the expiration date.

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WHAT INNOVATIONS LIE AHEAD FOR TRAVEL IN 2024?

Travel technology provider Amadeus has published its annual list of travel trends to watch in 2024, based on research from its data science teams and analysis of its own travel data. The following are a few that stand to transform the way people travel and the way suppliers cater to those needs.

‘Lite’ (and Heavy) Business Class

Airlines have been seeing growing demand for business class travel, and they aim to keep that going via “unbundled” business class fares that let travelers save while giving up some of the perks that typically go with such fares.

It’s not a new idea, of course, with Emirates having introduced limited business class tickets that did not include lounge access, upgrade abilities or full seat selection back in 2019. Several airlines have since followed suit, including Qatar Airways, Japan’s Zipair, Finnair and, this year, Air France, and KLM. Other limitations that might come with such fares might include lower mileage accrual or charges associated with changes. For many travelers, a cheaper way to the front of the plane will be well worth it.

At the same time, some airlines are adding even more elite business class offerings available only in small numbers per each flight, which could be an extra satisfier to travelers willing to spend top dollar. Such offerings include Virgin Atlantic’s Upper Class Retreat Seat, JetBlue’s Mint Studio and Air France’s bulkhead seats in newly configured Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, according to Amadeus.

These offerings will continue to grow next year, with both Air New Zealand and Lufthansa planning to add new luxe products in 2024.

Flying Taxis

The Paris Olympics will generate global excitement next year, but the travel industry has an extra reason to watch the games closely. German aircraft manufacturer Volocopter plans to provide a fleet of electric powered vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOL) during the Olympics, which will be one of the first electric air taxi networks.

Across the English Channel, green energy company Ecotricity plans to debut a green-hydrogen powered electric airline. There’s also the possibility electric aircraft will make their first appearance in South Korea next year.

Beyond 2024, Joby Aviation expects it will start flights with eVOTL aircraft in 2025, and Virgin Atlantic in the UK also has plans for a fleet of eVOTL aircraft that could be operating a city-to-city network in 2025, Amadeus reports.

Like electric cars have in the auto space, electric aircraft will be a boon to sustainability efforts, providing lower emission options for short trips, such as between urban areas, nearby airports or for island-hopping.

Smart Concierges

Artificial intelligence dominated the news cycle in 2023, particularly with the emergence of ChatGPT, and Amadeus projects more travel applications for the technology in 2024.

Generative Artificial Intelligence already is helping travelers with trip planning and searching, letting travelers fine-tune their searches with conversational interaction with a chatbot rather than through filters. But that doesn’t mean such technology will be replacing the need for travel agents entirely.

Rather, the next generation of GAI should help agencies add better efficiency to

their customer service — dealing with simple servicing or managing customer reviews, for example, which gives agents more time to deal with issues that need the human touch, according to Amadeus.

Follow the Music

Big-name musical acts proved themselves a magnet for travelers this year, and that should accelerate further into 2024, according to Amadeus.

When Coldplay announced its 2024 tour dates this year, for example, there was a significant uptick in flight searches around some of the concerts. Flight searches to Romania for the week of Coldplay’s show there, for example, were 91 percent higher compared with the previous week. Similarly, flights to Athens increased 62 percent in the week the concert there was announced, Amadeus data indicated.

Not surprisingly, as one of the hottest acts in the music business today, Taylor Swift also has proven to be a driving force for travel. Amadeus data shows a correlation between bookings in the Asia Pacific region and the dates of Swift’s concerts, for example, and bookings in Australia also are up massively during the time of her shows in February 2024.



Voloport



hospitality alliance for responsible procurement

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HOSPITALITY COMPANIES FORM ALLIANCE TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Several leading hospitality companies in recent months announced an alliance with sustainability ratings provider EcoVadis to accelerate sustainable practices in the industry.

Members of the newly created Hospitality Alliance for Responsible Procurement include Accor, Hilton, IHG Hotels & Resorts, Marriott International and Radisson Hotel Group, as well as global hospitality group purchasing organizations Avendra and Entegra. The companies aim to develop a brood-based assessment program and platform for sustainability in the

hospitality industry value chain, according to the alliance.

“It is through partnerships and industry-wide collaboration that the hospitality industry can maximize its collective impact,” EcoVadis chief customer officer Richard Eyram said in a statement. “By joining forces, enabling more strategic focus and sharing best practices, HARP members can focus on positive outcomes that help pave the way towards their sustainability targets.”

HARP is using EcoVadis’ sustainability rating methodology and scorecards as

well as its improvement platform to assess hospitality suppliers, such as providers of cleaning products or food and beverage offerings. The founding members already had rated more than 2,000 suppliers as of the alliance’s founding in October, and they were working to expand that number,

With those ratings, HARP member suppliers can access capacity-building and engagement activities, tools, and best practices to work for targeted improvements, according to the alliance.

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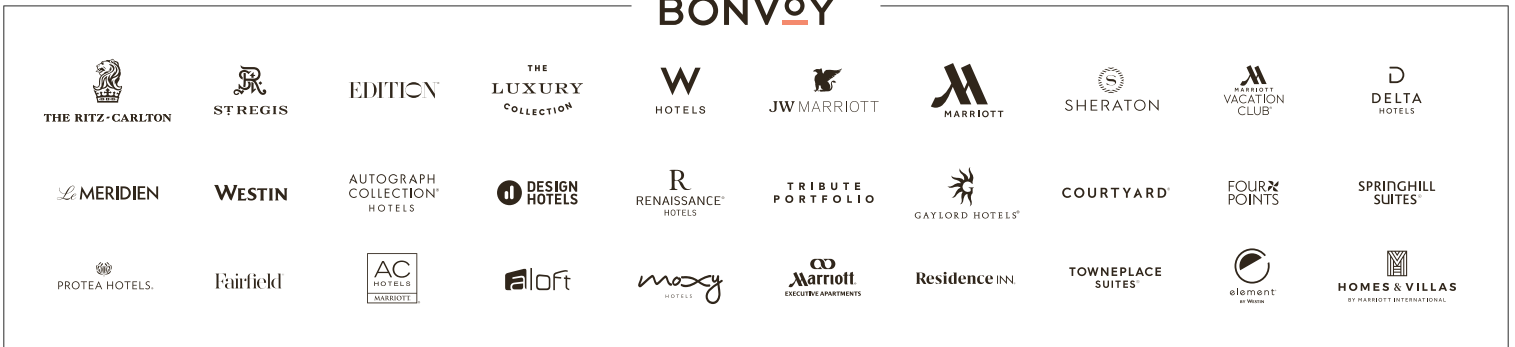
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