



n°1

# Rethinking Guest Experience

technology sustainability

guest experience

With the collaboration of experts from

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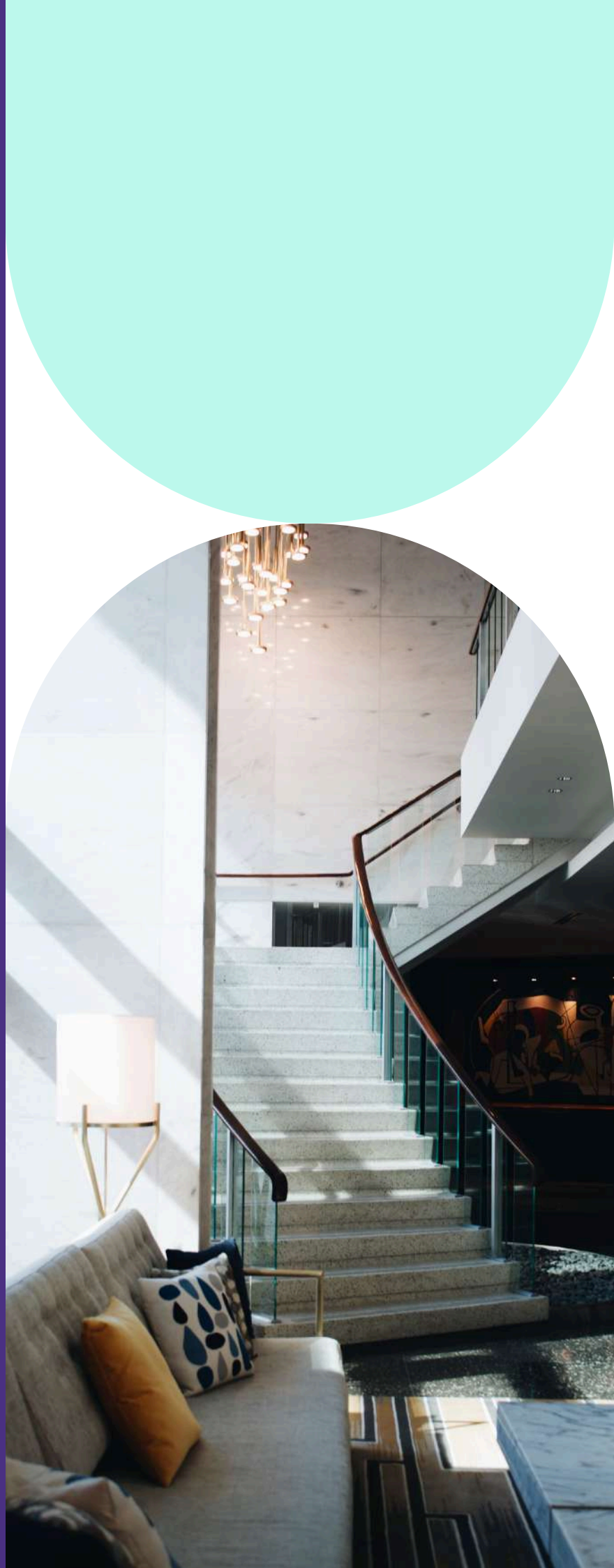
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CEO of STAY

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secretary of the **Hotel Alliance**  
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Director of **Hotel Gran Bilbao** and President  
of the **AEDH - Basque Country**  
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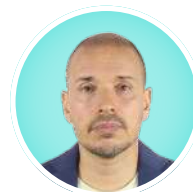
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Experience Design and Innovation  
Director in **NH**  
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# Joan Lladó

CEO of STAY

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## **Guest Experience:** The importance of active listening

The hotel industry is changing and dynamic. Ever since it began. Every day, more emphatically. Competitiveness is strong, technology is unstoppable, and efforts to satisfy the guest are endless.

The mission of STAY is to help hotels, large and small, improve the guest experience. Creating a communication channel between staff and clients. Making tourist life easier by centralizing all hotel services. Among many other things.

Listening to our customers is an important part of our success. As is listening to the entire sector. And transform their demands and needs into user-friendly technological solutions that enhance guests' experience. To keep up with the changes, we have to keep our eyes wide open. For this reason, we ask hotel industry experts periodically. And share their thoughts with you. Knowing the market's needs is essential. We are starting with two questions that are easy to ask and hard to answer. In the past two years, **how has the guest experience evolved?** Taking a look at the progress in this field: **Where are we going?**



## Fernando Gallardo

Hotel critic at *El País* (1978–2022) and secretary of the *Hotel Alliance*

EL PAÍS

Fernando Gallardo has worked as an expert writer on hotels for *El País* for more than 44 years. He has lectured worldwide on sustainability and innovation due to his restless mind.

Currently, he is chairman of Eurofintech and founder of the *Hotel Alliance*. He is always one step ahead.



## Jorge Álvarez Diéguez

Director of *Hotel Gran Bilbao* and President of the AEDH - Basque Country

“

The hotel industry is experiencing an accelerated shift to simplify processes and implement technology in order to make travel more comfortable, exciting and sustainable

”

1

### How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

Observing the habits of travelers, we can say that the guest experience has not changed at all due to the pandemic since the same behaviors, the same expectations, and identical aspirations are observed.

**The process of simplification of procedures has, however, been accelerated in recent years.** Travel needs to become more comfortable, exciting, rich, and sustainable through technology. The result is an increased level of personalization of the tourist offer, which logically leads to better insight into the customer from the industry.

2

### What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

An emphasis on understanding the guest's needs and aspirations is where the guest experience is headed. **This forces the hotel industry to prioritize technological solutions over human services.** As long as digital tools solve problems and aspirations more quickly, with higher quality and at a lower cost. Human attention is, contrary to many people's beliefs, a luxury that requires a more skilled and better paid workforce.

With a weakening middle class, the tourist trend will also tend to weaken in terms of average supply, average prices, and average experiences. Luxurious hotels will grow at the same time as low-cost hotels or tourist apartments.



## Jorge Álvarez Diéguez

Director of *Hotel Gran Bilbao* and  
President of the *AEDH - Basque Country*



Jorge Álvarez Diéguez has been chosen as one of the top 150 most influential people in the tourism industry in Spain. It should come as no surprise to anyone who has talked to him. Passion, perseverance, humor, and attitude have been his keys to success for 20 years. He has managed the Hotel Gran Bilbao since 2009 and has earned a master's degree in coaching. This is why he puts people first. He therefore focuses on the person when discussing the hotel sector, guests, and future technology. Change does not fear him. It seems he even enjoys it.



Continues...

“ We have the opportunity to be more human than ever while also being more technological than ever before. A well-understood combination will enhance the guest experience ”

### 1 How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

Even before the pandemic, we were quite clear about our focus on the guest experience. Since 2015, we have had a specific position on the guest experience. One of our employees worked as a guest experience specialist, tracking the whole customer journey. Let me tell you what we did. This person was constantly moving around the hotel. Her job was to provide personalized attention. For example, at breakfast. Every morning, she welcomed guests and asked about their experience at the end.

Whenever she felt that the guests were satisfied, she would "attack" to improve our online. The goal was to react to even the smallest detail that could be improved: "Avocado was missing", a guest could clarify. The next day, we would make sure the guest enjoyed his avocado. Little things make a difference.

**Personalized service is how we deliver value to customers. It's about being close. Taking care of our guests is our number one priority.** Did we find out it was your birthday when you checked in? We have a system. So you get a cupcake and a candle in your room. Personalized QR codes in the mirrors, containing information about each guest... it's a magical experience. The above are just a few examples of how to put the person at the center.

All this, as I said, was worked on before the pandemic. I saw, as a director, where the sector was headed. Answering your question, what has come after goes in that direction. There was the pandemic. Things happened. Since we were already ahead of the market, I sought to go a little further. Keep moving ahead.

Technology's trend is undeniable. **Digitization will allow us to streamline repetitive tasks. It's going to reinvent the concept of reception as well.** My thoughts? Delete it as it is known to us.

# Jorge Álvarez Diéguez

Director of Hotel Gran Bilbao and  
President of the AEDH - Basque Country



## 2

### What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

We have an opportunity to become more human than ever and more technological than ever before. A well-applied combination of both can greatly enhance a world-class guest experience. But we'll have a hard time finding the right staff. We will find it difficult to hire staff who have the values, skills, and attitudes necessary for a high-quality online reputation and guest experience. I am sure it will not be easy. I plan to offer good remuneration. For them to feel that their role is crucial.

But I'm starting with our employees. All departments, and the people who I perceive have this potential, will spend a few hours a day in the guest experience position. It's important that they become aware of this model that we're heading towards. **Talents have to leave their desks and stop sitting in front of a computer.**

With technology, processes are cut, for example, automatic check-ins and check-outs. Receptionists can stop being receptionists, and become ambassadors, specialists in guest experience, and put their energy into what they do best. Communicate, assist, create a positive customer experience, and boost our online reputation. Due to this reason, in order to gradually absorb this culture, the heads of marketing, management, and sub-management, plus the heads of events, and reception frequently do guest experience at breakfast. I have a coaching background. You must remove barriers, fears, and comfort zones. We are working on that.

Additionally, I wish to emphasize the importance of sustainability. This is an increasingly important social demand. A factor that is taken into account when choosing a hotel, indeed. Foreign tourists in particular. **We have eliminated 95% of paper from our daily activities. We no longer use printers. The same goes for plastic. Likewise for glass.** Do you want to know how far we go to protect the planet? We have gotten rid of all our water bottles. A natural, cold, hot, and sparkling water machine has been installed on each floor. It is complimentary. By doing so, we avoid a daily truck drive to the hotel. We save energy and reduce glass consumption. Reusable bottles are available for those who need them. In an effort to offer a paperless experience, our company has been going digital for some time. Our chat service is very human. With a full-time employee to ensure its proper implementation. Whether she is online or not, you can see her face and name in the chat room. 98% of customers are satisfied, and 91% of issues are resolved. Human value is a differential value to me. The use of technology will improve efficiency and allow our team members in the hotels to shine and bring out the best of whom they are. While boosting our brand image.



### Sandra Pérez Carracedo

Experience Design and Innovation  
Director in NH



## Sandra Pérez Carracedo

Experience Design and Innovation Director in NH



Sandra Carracedo has been in charge of designing the customer experience for each brand in the NH portfolio for more than 7 years. By studying and understanding customer feedback (review pages, automated semantic analysis, internal surveys, and social media), she has been responsible for identifying consumer insights and developing action plans for each business unit, which improves the customer experience and income for the company. Her opinions on the subject are considered a reference in the sector.



## Samuli Nieminen

Head of Seamless Customer Experience en Meliá Hotelss

“ **As technology advances, staff must be freed from mechanical tasks and transformed into hotel ambassadors** ”

### 1 How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

Hotel experience evaluation priorities have changed over time. From focusing on more basic aspects (such as breakfast, internet access, etc.) to other aspects that are not included in the hotel's services and facilities. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on personalization during the stay. Selecting an accommodation that has a local touch is becoming increasingly important. A great hotel needs to reflect the culture and gastronomy of the place where it is situated... And to do this, **technology is crucial. It provides faster and simpler services** (online check-in/out, digitization of services, direct communication channels...). **Sustainability is another important pillar.** There's more and more concern when selecting an accommodation or choosing one brand over another (carbon footprint, eliminating paper and plastic, sustainable alternatives, energy efficiency). Similarly, there should be a plan for sanitary measures (which help to ensure the comfort of the guest).

### 2 What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

Technology must continue to provide customers with an easy-to-use experience. The hotel staff should be able to devote as much time as possible to each guest. Adding value to their stay at the hotel and in the city. **As a result of technology, staff should do less mechanical work. Hotel receptionists should concentrate on being ambassadors.** I think the industry needs to move forward on ideas we've already started like *Lobbies Alive*. In other words, connect the hotel in a deeper way with the neighborhood/city where it is located. Show your local pride. Instead of waiting areas, **create spaces for socialization and work.** An atmosphere where clients or people want to stay. We must be able to build on the four pillars of digitization, security, sustainability, and local touch. In a nutshell, adapting to a clientele that has grown and evolved: more explorer than traveler, where local attributes are most valuable. The traveler has changed from a Business traveler to a Leisure traveler. They are seeking experiences that contribute to them: Travelers who are more aware of the world and who embrace actions that support a more sustainable world. A way of working that has changed and is more flexible, fully connected travelers who seek simple and quick processes.



## Samuli Nieminen

Head of Seamless Customer Experience en **Meliá Hotels**



Samuli Nieminen is responsible for the seamless customer experience at Meliá hotels. With great passion, he describes Meliá's experience as an expert in the field, who has witnessed firsthand the rapid changes that have occurred in the industry. By utilizing concepts such as personalization, digitization, process simplification, and sustainability, the chain has become a leader in guest experience. Understanding and respecting the culture of the area.



Continues...

“ Guests don't just want the best views or the best rooms, they want to live extraordinary experiences; at Meliá, we have managed to personalize their stay ”

### 1 How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

There has been a remarkable advance in digitization, which has streamlined not only customer processes but also those known as “back of the house”. By digitizing these processes and centralizing purely administrative tasks, we at Meliá Hotels Internacional have been able to provide more personalized services to our clients, ensuring a satisfying experience that lives up to their expectations.

There has been a significant change in the trend of travelers. **Today's guest is not only interested in the best room or hotel view. It goes deeper than that. They want to have extraordinary experiences at the destination.** Establish a connection to the local area and culture. Feel them. Being a part of the destination, rather than just a link. A hotel lobby is transformed into a place full of life with its own soul.

Moreover, we offer a wide range of experiences in our various brands, as well as a full calendar of cultural events and tempting gastronomic options, attracting both tourists and locals. Our hotels collaborate with local artists, artisans, and associations in order to promote their work and embrace their inclusion in our lobbies, rooms, uniforms, amenities, etc. There has been a surge in remote workers as well, for whom we have adapted our hotels, providing work areas equipped with all the required comforts. One example of this would be our Out Of Office concept at Inside Zaragoza, a new Bleisure Coworking space.

### 2 What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

As part of improving the guest experience in the near future, it is important to provide all customers with inspirational values that transcend the concept of a simple purchase. Let them discover new destinations, live new experiences, feel the essence of the place from the first moment... and for this reason, we advocate going even further towards a full personalization of the client's stay, not



# Samuli Nieminen

Head of Seamless Customer Experience en **Meliá Hotels**



“ We have to focus on sustainable tourism, since travelers today place an increased emphasis on selecting hotels that are environmentally friendly. ”

only during the stay at the hotel but also throughout the stay in the hotel customer journey. A seamless customer experience across all channels is equally important.

We have to focus on sustainable tourism, since travelers today place an increased emphasis on selecting hotels that are environmentally friendly. There are several aspects that hotels need to pay attention to, starting with the selection of sustainable materials, saving energy and water, offering local products (Km 0) in their gastronomic offerings, eliminating paper and single-use plastic, etc.

The Gran Meliá Hotel on Menorca, which will open its doors in the summer, will be the first hotel in the Balearic Islands to be virtually carbon-neutral, such as the Hotel Villa Le Blanc on Menorca.

In addition to improving the experience, **another step is focusing on the niche of travelers with pets, whose numbers are on the rise.** In terms of accommodation and services offered, there should be a clear adaptation of hotels to the needs and desires of these families. Develop a holistic pet-friendly program that goes beyond simply housing a pet, creating spaces welcoming to the whole family.



## Araceli Budia

Director of Customer Experience at Blau Hotels



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Director of Customer Experience at **Blau Hotels**

**blau.hotels**

Araceli Budia is director of customer experience at Blau Hotels. Blau's clients appreciate her diverse background –she trained in dramatic art before joining the hotel sector– which adds creativity to her daily duties. Budia shares some very interesting details about the transformation of the hospitality sector, including how the guest experience has evolved at her brand. With an eye to the past as well as the immediate future.



Continues...

“ Technology allows us to customize the offer and respect the time of our clients, but it also empowers our staff to serve as ambassadors by putting the focus back on them ”

### 1 How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

One of the biggest changes has been the digitization process. Both external –client-focused– and internal –process-oriented–. The talk of acceleration is true. Due to the pandemic, the deadlines for achieving this digitization have shortened. All of this was on our agenda at Blau. It is important for us to personalize the experience. When making decisions, we keep several buyer personas in mind. While considering digitization, we thought that some clients might not accept the technology with the necessary naturalness.

The degree of digitization was not high. Still, we were surprised. That same niche now expects you to be digital. We assumed these guests wouldn't be so tech-savvy, but it turns out they use devices to do many of their tasks. So we saw an opportunity for implementation; **digital tools have gone from “option” to “necessity”**.

We originally wanted to digitize all kinds of information through our web app. What we have learned, however, is that digitization must be humanized. These tools can help personalize the guest experience as well. People can add that extra value, that human touch. By digitizing hotel processes, hotel workers will have more time to build loyalty and empathize with guests.

### 2 What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

In line with the previous answer, the time your staff saves from digitization processes can be better spent exceeding guests' expectations. Turn the focus from people to people. We are heading in that direction. A lot of companies tend to digitize. As a result, they stop growing because everything is done. But you have to take it one step further.

# Araceli Budia

Director of Customer Experience at *Blau Hotels*

**blau.hotels**

“ The time your staff saves by digitizing should be used to exceed your guests' expectations ”

We work harder every day. Each day, we have less and less free time. On vacation, you want to make the most of your free time. These technological changes in the past two years should be reflected in the reception.

As we understand it today, this shouldn't exist. Check-ins, maps, info... you can get it all online.

However, the people who work in hotels add value that technology cannot. For example, by utilizing technology, we can tell our guests which employees are specialists in certain areas –sports, gastronomy or music– so they can turn to the right person for the best advice and experience. **Technology will help clients enjoy a memorable stay, as well as our employees giving their best as ambassadors, while they respect the client's time.** It is my daily goal to implement new ideas supported by technology that provide the guest with a memorable experience. At Blau, we seek to take advantage of the opportunities provided by digitalization.



## Raúl Benito García

COO - Chief Operating Officer.  
*Palladium Hotel Group*



## Raúl Benito García

COO - Chief Operating Officer.  
Palladium Hotel Group

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Rafael Benito declares himself to be "in love with his work". A quick glance at his profile reveals his multifaceted nature. The senior engineer, specialized in economics, has over 25 years of experience in industries such as large distribution, food, aviation, and tourism and hospitality. His experience is currently applied to leading the Palladium's global operations: permanent innovation, process optimization, agile, lucrative, and sustainable expansion... His answers are a master class to be considered.



Continues...

“ It is unforgivable to speak of simplification without attempting to digitize. A modernization that would have taken 10 years has been completed by obligation in one year ”

### How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

The pandemic has trained us to make more agile decisions with less information, which has greatly increased our commitment to digital, automation, process optimization, and identifying what is truly important and what is not. Incredibly, a whole industry has been modernized in a year instead of ten. It has ceased to be a hackneyed expression in forums and masters and has become a real obligation for hoteliers who want to differentiate themselves, and who want to survive. Next to this concept, and on the same level, is the "Employee Centric perspective". Our commitment to people as a differentiating element has been strengthened.

Likewise, sustainability policies will be around for a long time. In terms of environmental commitment, yes, but also in terms of economic and social commitment. If a chain does not internalize these principles, it is doomed to fail. In addition to checking comments on hotel networks, the client will also investigate the chain's sustainability policy. As part of your experience, you have to make these commitments. To this end, a long time ago the size of the television, the size of the bed, and the number of amenities in the bathroom were considered "hygienic" values for the customer. They no longer represent differential values. **People are the true differential value. The client will never forget the smile of the waiter when serving an exotic cocktail on the terrace while enjoying the sunset over the sea.** Values of hygiene (which must be of the highest possible quality) are the complement to unforgettable experiences that mark customer satisfaction.

Every hotelier should prioritize guest satisfaction. The company must internalize it, make it a daily part of management. An analyst who does not eat breakfast while analyzing GRI (Global Review Index) and NPS (Net Promoter Score) data can be successful in the very short term, but not in the medium or long term, which should be the true focus. We at Palladium Group have already identified this obligation and have incorporated it into our mission to transform our customers into fans through the experiences we create.

# Raúl Benito García

COO - Chief Operating Officer.  
Palladium Hotel Group

PALLADIUM  
HOTEL GROUP

Likewise, simplification of customer relationship models is a key factor to generating a great stay during, before and after your stay. The neglect of the word digitization when talking about simplification is unforgivable in today's society. **With approximately 6.5 billion mobile devices in 2020, taking advantage of the communication possibilities they offer and integrating them correctly into a hotel's value proposition can be extremely beneficial for both customers and the hotel.** Because of this, our apps provide our clients with real-time information about what happens in the hotel, book the services they love in real time, and interact with our team to personalize your stay as much as possible.

It is important to note, however, that simplification and customization are not mutually exclusive. Every client is unique and requires a different service. With our CRM we can obtain information on the preferences and tastes of our clients, so we can anticipate their needs and desires, personalizing their stay and offering at all times an ad hoc offer that helps us provide them with a unique experience. Our Palladium Rewards Loyalty Program takes customization to a higher level, as we reward our fans for their loyalty with a very comprehensive catalog of benefits that make them feel like they're special.

## 2

### What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

Artificial intelligence and big data will be key to anticipating customer tastes, needs, and preferences. Possibly even before a guest arrives at the hotel. We are already working on these projects at Palladium Hotel Group, and we expect to see results this year.

**The biggest chains must prepare for the arrival of the new generations, born in the digital age, with different expectations and tastes, and with a very strong social and environmental component.** To differentiate our products very effectively, we must be very agile in tailoring our offer to the different generations.

As a result, we will be forced to make extremely agile decisions as we break into previously untapped markets. There will also be new leisure products emerging, far from the traditional model we understand as tourism, and knowing how to combine both products will be a challenge and a necessity.



Rubén Arribas y  
Rachel Pregunta

Tourism and travel influencers  
(@gamintraveler)



## Rubén Arribas y Rachel Pregunta

Tourism and travel influencers  
@gamintraveler

**GAMINTRAVELER**  
*A Travel Blog*

Rubén Arribas and Rachel Pregunta are two of the most popular Spanish-speaking influencers in the travel and tourism industry. In the Instagram universe, they are known as Gamintraveler. With more than 127,000 followers, they have traveled around the planet for 7 years, with an emphasis on Southeast Asia, the Philippines, and Europe. To put it in simple terms. They live the hotel lifestyle. A leading voice in the hotel and technology industries.

“Hotel digitization was a reality even before the pandemic. Mobile apps help us save time and paper”

### 1 How has the concept of guest experience changed over the last two years?

My opinion is that the guest experience around the world has improved in the last two years. However, not necessarily for matters relating to the pandemic. In 2019, digitization in the hotel industry was a reality. After the pandemic, the trend accelerated, but we had been experiencing it before. There has been a dramatic increase in the speed and agility of all processes. Likewise, it must also be sustainable, something that we, as individuals, and society as a whole value. The use of these guest experience applications saves a lot of paper. And plastic too. But, as I was saying, hotels were already involved with these projects. **As frequent travelers, we love the convenience of checking into a hotel using an app on our phones. After countless trips, everything happens very quickly, and it's a pleasant experience.** Upon arriving at a hotel, one wants to relax immediately without having to wait. In that regard, the guest experience has been improving for some time now.

### 2 What steps will be taken in the future to improve the guest experience?

From a travelers' perspective, and as mentioned before, the hotel industry **goal should be to allow us to use our phones for more and more things. During our travels, it is something we see periodically.** Hotels rely on technology to make many of their services available to their customers. To reduce waiting times in that way. When you arrive - especially when you're tired - and everything goes smoothly, it's wonderful. Particularly in processes such as check-in and check-out. With simple instructions and steps, some apps that allow you to check in, check out, and even enter your room. Throughout the world, we've seen how a simple scan of a QR code can provide information about hotels in a variety of ways. From the variety of services offered at the hotel to gym and breakfast schedules. In my opinion, the hotel industry has made great strides. Our tour of South America during the time of the interview allows us to observe the changes there too. We anticipate more changes to come.

# Improve your guests' experience

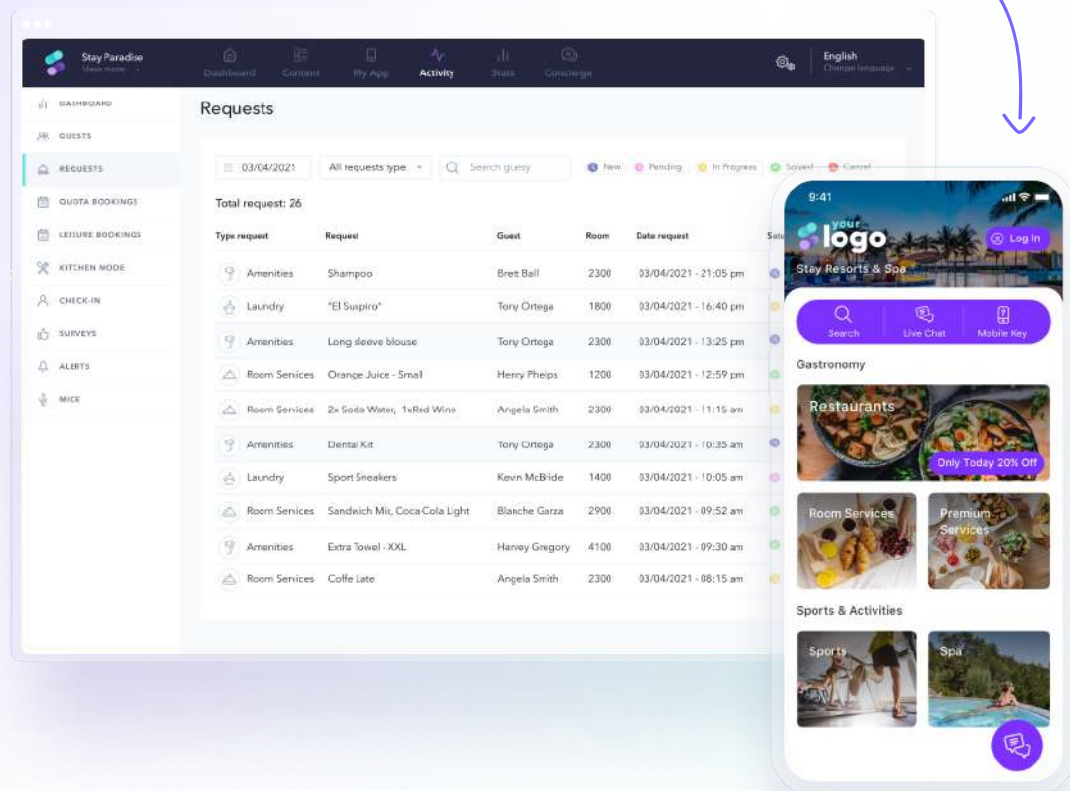
There are three points on which hotel experts agree:

- 1 Digitizing your hotel means optimizing it
- 2 Freeing up staff from mechanical tasks improves the guest experience
- 3 The sector is already reliant on mobile devices on a daily basis

**STAY helps you to implement all these initiatives**

Everything you need  
to manage your hotel

Everything your guests need  
during their stay



[Book a demo](#)



Guest experience made easy



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