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NEWS

“Bleisure” gains popularity with millennials

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By [Guest Contributor](#) on 9/5/2016

Vacation time just isn't what it used to be. Under the stress of an always-on culture, workers are increasingly leaving vacation days on the table. Millennials, in particular, are reluctant to take long stretches of time off because of “vacation shaming”—a growing trend in which co-workers (or sometimes bosses) make a person feel guilty about taking time off.

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The result? Millennials are taking shorter, more frequent trips—often mixing business with leisure. A recent report found that 60 percent of travelers have taken “bleisure” trips, with 30% adding two additional days to their trip; more than half bring family members with them.

Hotels are picking up on this trend. For example, the Ritz-Carlton, Tyson's Corner, in Washington, D.C., arranges tea parties and cupcake decorating competitions to help entertain children who are

traveling with a working parent. However, the frills aren't for everyone, especially when millennials are traveling on their own dime. Many stay in select service hotels, but still want to experience the local culture. What are they looking for?

More bang for their buck

Budget-conscious millennials like the idea of bleisure travel as a way to explore new places without breaking the bank—and especially since in many cases, an employer is footing the airfare for at least one traveler. Although research shows that vacation spending is up, millennials would rather put money toward experiences than paying for high-priced rooms. To appeal to this corner of the market, big hotel chains are rolling out more streamlined brands. Tru by Hilton is one such line that is pegged as a midscale brand targeting a “youthful mindset” that is looking for quality and value.

Road trips are also on the rise as gas prices remain low, and younger travelers, in particular, are finding road trips to be cost effective, while also easy and fun to document on social media channels. This is a boon for select-service hotels located near major roadways, which can claim lifelong customers by providing good service to a new generation of travelers without the luxury price tag. But luxury hotels also benefit: many road-trippers spring for a night or two in ‘destination’ properties at key milestones along the route.

Adventure

Millennial travelers are largely focused on creating authentic experiences. Whether it's seeking out local cuisine and beverages or finding ways to make a positive social impact on the areas to which they travel, they want to feel connected to the places they visit.

Socialization is a key part of the adventure, especially for younger millennials. Hotels can play into this in a number of ways—personal insights from staff can point visitors to hot spots or events in the area. Or, better yet, create an inviting atmosphere inside the hotel that encourages mingling.

“We recently added an outdoor grill area that has been very popular this summer as a relaxing gathering spot,” said Raquel Garcia, general manager of NVN-managed Towneplace Suites Indianapolis Keystone. “But when guests want to get out, we try to make it easy for them to find things to do. A local map in our lobby highlights activities happening around town like baseball games, local bands and running trails.”

Healthy alternatives

Getting outdoors is part of the adventure. With the U.S. National Park Service celebrating its 100th anniversary in late August, national parks have seen an uptick in travelers especially among millennials. Nearly half of millennials said they are interested in visiting a national park in the next year, according to an AAA survey, with most visitors staying in a hotel, motel or lodge during their stay.

Health and wellness is an important focus for travelers today. While Baby Boomers may have jumpstarted the wellness revolution, a recent report finds that millennials and Gen X travelers are placing greater importance on elements like outdoor adventures, fitness and yoga classes and environmentally friendly properties. Hotels that create a more meaningful experience for guests by offering healthy food options, fitness programs and other ways to connect to nature may find themselves at an advantage.

A “connected” break

As vacation becomes an increasingly rare luxury, many millennials are under pressure to be accessible to colleagues or clients, even while on a break. And for those who want to truly disconnect from work, they’re often still looking to remain connected to friends and family via social networks or to search for local events and restaurants. Wi-Fi has become a standard priority for Millennial and many other travelers. Major hotel brands are continuously testing different social media strategies and programs that can strengthen their relationships with tech-savvy guests. For example, Hilton has a Twitter handle dedicated to curating guest recommendations from around the world about activities to do and places to eat. Marriott has an “M Live” team that scans guests posts from around the world 24/7 so that they can immediately respond to issues or surprise someone who shares a photo at one of their properties with a free appetizer, for instance.

As millennials become an increasingly powerful force in the travel market, hotels can embrace the “bleisure” travelers, and earn loyalty for creative approaches.

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