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How Hilton Garden Inn Is Going Beyond the Guest Room

Today's travel brands are thinking about the experiences they're offering customers in a much broader, more expansive way than they have in the past. In the case of hotels, many brands are going beyond simply providing travelers with a place to sleep. Instead, they're looking to expand their offerings into other facets of the travel journey to accommodate the needs of modern travelers and become all-encompassing experience platforms.

Hilton Garden Inn recently updated its hospitality experience to reach beyond the guest room, make travelers' stays more meaningful, and reduce traveler friction. SkiftX spoke with John Greenleaf, global head of Hilton Garden Inn, to learn more about the company's approach to its updated hospitality experience, why they made these enhancements, and how this fits into the way today's travel brands are shifting their focus to play an even bigger role in travelers' experiences.

SkiftX: How is Hilton Garden Inn's updated experience addressing the evolving needs of travelers today?

John Greenleaf: Traveler needs have evolved in so many different ways, but we focused on three key areas in our refresh: product design, food and beverage, and guest service.

We've customized our experience to address the different needs of travelers in various parts of the world by introducing six new prototypes with different rooms, décor, and food and beverage menus depending on the the location.

We've also completely revamped our already award-winning food and beverage menus, placing a focus specifically on on-trend menu choices, local items, small plates, premium varietal wines, national and local craft beers and handcrafted cocktails. Over the next two years we're also updating our 24-hour retail space, to be named "The Shop," that will offer travelers fresh food, gourmet coffee, and regionally-specific merchandise.

Additionally, we've enhanced our Team Member culture globally to offer a more guest-centric experience, and we have updated Hilton Garden Inn's "We'll Make It Right" philosophy. No matter what the issue, a member of our team can help make sure that you are satisfied with your stay.

SkiftX: Why do you think hotels have put more focus on offerings beyond the guest room in recent years?

Greenleaf: It goes back to the changing needs of travelers and increased time constraints, both for leisure and business travelers. Our goal is to offer a welcoming, functional, and

flexible environment that can be used for any number of purposes, whether that means sitting down for a cocktail, getting work done, holding a meeting, or eating a made-to-order breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a late-night snack.

SkiftX: Can you talk more about the enhanced focus on local in the food and beverage experience you're offering?

Greenleaf: We've put a focus on local to give people an opportunity to have a tailored, unique, and authentic experience that puts a smile on their face. We've developed individualized menu items for all 50 states in the U.S. We've also required that a certain percentage of items offered in our retail space come from local markets.

SkiftX: How do you balance in-person guest interactions as technology plays a larger role in how we travel?

Greenleaf: We're focused on employing technology to advance the guest experience we offer versus replacing guest interactions. We make sure our Team Members are well-versed in the technology, but never miss an opportunity for a personal interaction.

SkiftX: Can you tell us about the research conducted behind the update?

Greenleaf: An enormous amount of research went into all aspects of the brand refresh, including the prototype designs, the food and beverage and retail offerings, the restaurant service models, and our advertising. We looked at our guest scores and internal guest surveys very closely as well, and worked closely with our owners to obtain their perspectives.

SkiftX: What has the response been so far?

Greenleaf: We've had very positive responses from our guests, owners and Team Members. We're fairly early in the process as far as guest feedback goes, but we recently opened a property in Louisville Saint Matthews, our first new prototype, and the scores are already through the roof.

The owners are also thrilled. We worked very hard to reduce cost and increase revenue through food and beverage and retail, and we've made it less expensive to build the hotels. We also worked hard to increase the efficiency of our Team Members' time, and we're seeing strong results there as well.

SkiftX: What does the future hold for Hilton Garden Inn?

Greenleaf: As a brand, we're taking an increasingly flexible approach to what we offer, and will continue to make adjustments as the market changes and as customer expectations change. We're also focusing on accelerating the brand's growth. We believe that as we increase flexibility and adapt to changing needs — while maintaining our core attributes — we'll become increasingly attractive to different owners around the world. We're opening properties in eight different countries in Africa over the next few years. We'll take what we learn from the product there and apply it to other places.

This content was created collaboratively by Hilton Garden Inn and Skift's branded content studio, SkiftX.