

Many travellers don't yet want to give up disposable toiletries: how should hoteliers react?

Submitted by Whitney Wang on Thu, 18/07/2019 - 04:22

Saying goodbye to disposable items is not news in the hospitality industry. As a Chinese person travelling to the United States and many European countries, I have long since noticed that there are very few hotels providing toothbrushes or slippers anymore. Travelers have become used to bringing their own toiletries.

But in my native China the use of disposable toiletries is still standard practice in hotels everywhere. And when many of us travel abroad we are surprised to not find these available in our rooms – and mildly inconvenienced as we hadn't packed many of these items in our bag.

Given that China now has more outbound tourists than any other country – and the number of nights abroad and the average spend per trip are increasing rapidly too – the Chinese traveller's preference for disposable toiletries poses a serious challenge for hoteliers. And for the environment too!

The good news is that change is happening.

As of July 1, new trash management regulations came into effect in Shanghai that are very progressive. This regulation also bans hotels from automatically offering in the room six disposable necessities such as toothbrushes, combs, razors, bath scrubs, emery boards, and one-time use shoe polish.

A small measure? Not really, small actions make big differences. According to Meadin Tourism Institute, this new regulation would impact more than 13,000 hotels in Shanghai that together host millions of guests per year.

But understandably Hoteliers in China do have some concerns about the inconvenience that this is bringing to travelers and increasing operational costs for hotels. Firstly, because the front desk needs to explain this new regulation to customers – many of whom come from regions of China unaffected by the new law – to make sure customers understand there won't be these six disposable necessities in their room.

Meanwhile, the hotel then has to respect the needs of guests and provide these necessities on request – which they are allowed to do, provided the guest requests them at the reception. This has increased labor costs.

How should Western hotel chains react to this challenge? They could take some lessons from the Shanghai hotels going through this problem for the first time: communication is key – and guests need to be told in advance, possibly even within the booking flow.

At Hotelbeds have been working with our hotel partners around the world for many years to help them make their products 'China ready'. Doing so is about so much more than just food or language, as this issue around disposables demonstrate.

We at Hotelbeds take environmental protection issues very seriously and encourage our colleagues in offices all around the world to do so too. In China last year we joined a local beach cleanup program organized by HandsOn Shanghai, a non-profit organization.

Together we picked up 137.6 kilos of trash at beach, a great deal of which turned out sadly to be disposable items.

This has made us more determined than ever to resolve this issue and we feel that as a distributor we can influence this by helping our partners to understand and set expectations in the booking process. Whilst we recognize that different markets evolve at different speeds, we are convinced that together we can bin disposables!

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