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THE MAGAZINE FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVES / SEPTEMBER 2025

**PLUS**

The 2025  
Hospitality  
Market Report

## BEACON OF LUXURY

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world-class hospitality on Nova  
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# A SHIFTING MARKET

It has been an eventful year for Canada's tourism sector, fuelled in great part by President Donald Trump. While many feared that the tariffs and the myriad challenges they created would spark reduced travel in Canada, the opposite has held true.

According to new data from the London, U.K.-based World Travel & Tourism Council, (WTCC), Canada's travel and tourism sector is forecast to contribute almost \$183 billion to the economy in 2025, up from \$169 billion in 2024, setting a new record.

The research also shows the sector is set to support 1.8 million jobs this year, an increase from the 1.7 million jobs in 2024.

Though the picture shows a rosy outlook, WTTC does warn that global dynamics are shifting, and, more than ever, Canada will need to remain proactive to retain momentum as international travel patterns continue to shift and evolve.

Post-pandemic, Canada's tourism economy has benefitted from a stable and growing domestic market, and the hotel industry has benefitted with growing rates and strong occupancy. Domestic visitor spending is projected to reach nearly \$104 billion in 2025, up from \$95.7 billion in 2024, representing more than double the year-on-year growth last year (8.3 per cent).

International visitor spending is continuing to recover, and is forecast to hit \$34 billion, just 2.9-per-cent below 2019 levels. According to Julia Simpson, WTTC president & CEO, "Canada's travel and tourism sector continues to be a bright spot in the global economy. With record economic contribution, job creation, and a strong domestic base, the country is proving just how resilient and adaptable its sector can be." But, she warns, Canada needs to remain vigilant because "travel patterns are shifting, and inbound growth from key markets remains delicate," adding "this is the time to invest in smart marketing, frictionless access, and visitor experience to protect that momentum."

With so much discussion focused on the historical importance of the American tourist, it's important to note that 71 per cent of Canada's inbound arrivals in 2024 came from the U.S., and 52 per cent outbound travel by Canadians went the same direction. Of course, we know how dramatically these travel patterns shifted this past year, with more Canadians travelling to other destinations as a way to protest American tariffs.

But the shifts are not so clear cut. According to data from Statistics Canada, flight arrivals from the U.S. to Canada were down in February and April this year, with a slight increase in March. Land arrivals were down in all three months, and more than 10-per-cent below in March and April. This downward trend indicates a concerning pattern of decline from Canada's top market.

The WTTC forecasts show that by 2035, Canada's travel and tourism sector is projected to contribute \$233.5 billion to the national economy, representing 6.3 per cent of GDP, and supporting more than 2.1 million jobs. Additionally, international visitor spending is expected to reach \$40 billion while domestic spending is forecast to surge to more than \$132 billion – all of which reinforces Canada's long-term opportunity to continue to shine, but, only, as the WTCC states, if the sector continues to invest in sustainable growth and global competitiveness. ♦



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PHOTO BY MARGARET MULLIGAN

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# CHECKING IN

THE LATEST INDUSTRY NEWS FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVES FROM CANADA AND AROUND THE WORLD



## OPPORTUNITY AWAITS

Choice Hotels acquires remaining stake in Canadian operations

Choice Hotels International Inc. has acquired the remaining 50 per cent stake in Choice Hotels Canada from joint-venture partner InnVest Hotels, thereby transitioning from a master franchising model to a fully direct franchising model in Canada.

With a legacy dating back to 1955, Choice Hotels Canada has played a pivotal role in the company's international growth. The acquisition marks a significant milestone in Choice's 70-year history in Canada and positions the company for accelerated growth.

"This milestone reflects our confidence in the Canadian market and the exceptional capabilities and legacy of success of our local team," says Patrick Pacious, president & CEO of Choice Hotels International. "By consolidating operations in Canada and expanding Choice Hotels Canada's owner success system from the current eight hotel brands to our full portfolio of 22 brands, we're opening doors to remarkable opportunities for our franchisees and guests, while paving the way for accelerated growth across Canada."

The transaction, completed in July 2025, was valued at approximately \$112 million and was funded through available cash and the company's existing credit facility. Management

expects the total Choice Hotels Canada business to generate approximately \$23 million of free revenue and \$18 million in EBITDA for full-year 2025.

As of Jun. 30, 2025, Choice Hotels' Canadian portfolio included 350 hotels and 30,000 rooms, with more than 2,500 rooms in the pipeline – including its first Cambria Hotel, four Radisson hotels, and more than 20 Comfort, Quality, and Ascend Collection hotels.

Canada is a highly attractive hospitality market, with projected average annual growth expected to exceed five per cent through 2030, reaching more than \$50 billion. With a strong foundation of more than nine million existing Choice customers and a robust network of franchisees, Choice Hotels aims to expand its market share across all 22 brands.

Brian Leon, CEO of Choice Hotels Canada and an 18-year company veteran, will continue to lead the Canadian operations. InnVest Hotels, the largest franchisee of Choice Hotels in Canada will remain a key partner, owning and operating 50 Comfort hotels nationwide.

"This is an exciting moment for Choice Hotels Canada and our franchisees," says Leon. "With the full backing of Choice Hotels International, we are well-positioned to deliver even greater value to our franchisees and guests as we write the next chapter of our success story."

This investment accelerates Choice Hotels' continued growth outside of the U.S. In Q2 2025, the company grew its net international rooms portfolio by five per cent to more than 140,000 rooms since Jun. 30, 2024, driven by a 15-per-cent increase in openings. Major developments year-to-date include strengthening the company's presence in Brazil by extending a master franchise agreement for more than 10,000 rooms with Atlantica Hospitality International by 20 years, nearly tripling the room count in France through a direct franchise agreement with Zenitude Hotel-Residences, and signing strategic agreements with SSAW Hotels & Resorts in China, including a distribution agreement which is expected to add more than 9,500 rooms in 2025 and a master franchising agreement, which is expected to add approximately 10,000 rooms over the next five years. ♦

# MAKING A SPLASH

BASIN Glacial Waters, Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise's thermal bathing destination, is set to open on Sept. 15, 2025.

The indoor-outdoor facility will revolutionize wellness in the Canadian Rockies with its contemporary interpretation of a traditional bathhouse, embedded within the landscape of Banff National Park's high alpine.

A concept two decades in the making and realized by AD100 Matteo Thun, BASIN Glacial Waters is inspired by the healing benefits of natural springs, thermal waters and long-established wellness practices of Nordic sauna culture. Resting at an elevation of 1,600m (5,200 ft.), with an uninterrupted vista of Canada's Lake Louise and the Victoria Glacier – the facility's mineral-rich, natural water source – BASIN features minimalistic grandeur with organic textures and a strong sensibility towards conscious sourcing and sustainability.

Elements of water, from crushed ice to steam mists, are the basis. Guests can be immersed into self-guided circuits flowing between varying heat and humidity states of the traditional Finnish and bio saunas, Aufguss sauna, steam rooms, hot-stone massage room, and silent salt relax room. Additionally, the space features a series of diverse temperature pools, including the Reflexology Pool, Infinity Pool and Kneipp Walk for standing contrast bathing. Two wet treatment rooms further enhance the thermotherapy cycle, one of which modelled on a traditional Hammam for full-body exfoliation.

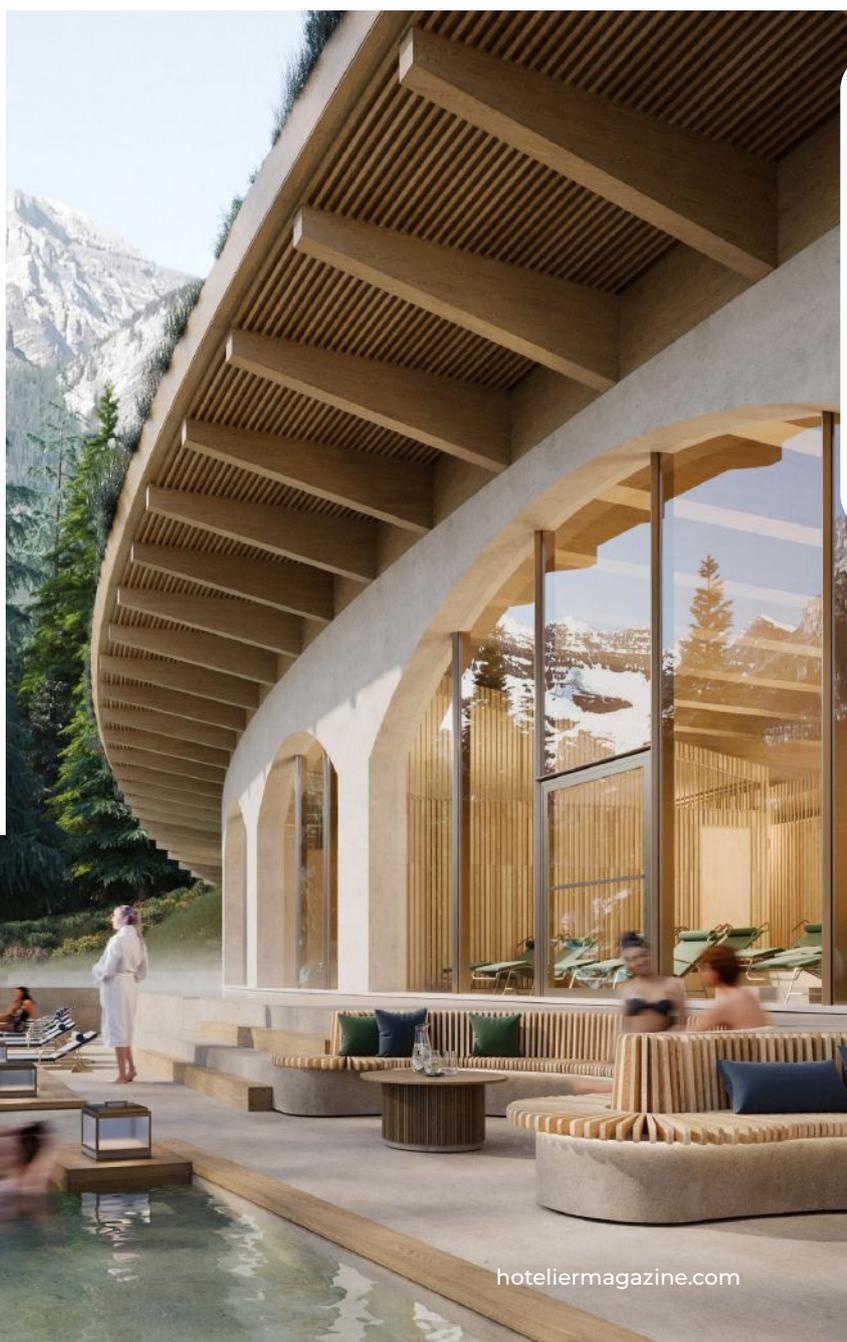
"The introduction of BASIN Glacial Waters marks a new chapter for Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, the cornerstone of a re-imagined resort experience," says general manager Tracy Lowe. "Set to become a sought-after wellness destination in its own right, its debut signifies the completion of a transformative investment of \$130M across the property, including the renovation of guestrooms and suites, and a re-design of the hotel's Fairmont Spa."



## RO RE

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# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Gray Collection has appointed Félix Laurence to the role of regional director of Sales. In hotel management, Laurence most recently held the position of director of Sales and Marketing at the Humaniti Montreal complex. He began his career at the Fairmont Hotel in Montreal, quickly moving into a regional role during the opening of the Fairmont Hotel in Toronto, and later served as director of Luxury and Entertainment at the W Montreal and W Toronto. His career path demonstrates his ability to execute creative commercial strategies and targeted initiatives in demanding environments. In his new role, Laurence will be responsible for business development across all key markets. He will lead sales efforts in close collaboration with the marketing and revenue teams to maximize the positioning of Gray Collection properties – including Hotel Gray, The Metcalfe Hotel, Auberge du Vieux-Port, and Le Petit Hôtel.



# COASTAL LIVING

Four Seasons and ALAIN, an Abu Dhabi-based asset-management company, have unveiled a new standalone beachfront residential offering in the U.A.E. Four Seasons Private Residences Abu Dhabi at Saadiyat Beach is set to welcome homeowners in 2029.

Designed as an exclusive, gated beachfront community, the residences will offer a collection of ultra-luxury villas, beach mansions, a variety of suites and penthouse.

“Building on the excitement and demand for Four Seasons residences in the region, this exceptional project presents a distinct coastal living experience, while perfectly complementing our urban offerings in the U.A.E.,” says Bart Carnahan, Global Business Development, Portfolio Management and Residential, Four Seasons.

The residences will comprise 56 luxury villas, including limited beach mansions, and 60 suites, including

# MENU TO MARGIN



Tarun Bhatia has been appointed to the role of director of Food & Beverage at The St. Regis Toronto.

With more than two decades of global luxury hospitality

experience, Bhatia joins The St. Regis Toronto with a distinguished career leading food-and-beverage operations at some of the world’s most iconic hotel brands, including Aman Resorts India, JW Marriott New Delhi, The Ritz-Carlton Toronto, Fairmont Chateau Whistler, and most recently, Rosewood Hotel Georgia in Vancouver.

“I’m thrilled to join The St. Regis Toronto,” says Bhatia. “I look forward to leading our team of exquisite hosts in delivering elevated, bespoke dining experiences that reflect the timeless elegance and refined service synonymous with the St. Regis brand.”

In his most recent role as assistant director of F&B at Rosewood Hotel Georgia, Bhatia led the successful renovation and re-conceptualization of the hotel’s F&B program, including the launch of Georgia Bar and re-launch of the celebrated rooftop patio, Reflections.

Previously, at Fairmont Chateau Whistler, Bhatia directed the most iconic event spaces, and offsite catering operations in the mountains. His leadership at The Ritz-Carlton Toronto included managing TOCA, banqueting operations and driving service excellence across multiple outlets.

penthouse and royal residences. Residents will enjoy private access to amenities such as direct beach access, resident’s lounge, pools, tennis and paddle courts, spa and fitness facilities including a yoga and meditation studio, children’s play areas, cinema, golf simulator and more. Outside of the residences, local attractions are a short drive away.

In addition to the thoughtfully designed amenities, residents will enjoy a service-rich lifestyle marked by Four Seasons legendary care. Led by a residences general manager, a Four Seasons residential team will be dedicated to caring for residents and their most important assets, their home. From concierge, housekeeping, culinary and wellness services to ongoing property management, Four Seasons teams become an extension of the home to deliver a seamless lifestyle experience.

# AI IN THE WORKPLACE

AI is shaping how hotels operate

BY CAYLEY DOW



**Artificial intelligence (AI)** is no longer reserved for tech giants — it's already shaping how hotels operate. From guest chatbots to back-office analytics, AI is transforming service delivery, employee productivity, and hiring. Yet, as with any disruptive tools, its rise in the workplace brings a mix of good, bad, and uncertain outcomes.

## THE GOOD: ENHANCING SERVICE AND EFFICIENCY

AI can help hotels create better guest experiences and support employees in their roles. Studies show 85 per cent of employees say AI boosts productivity, and 40 per cent report major efficiency gains. In hotels, this can mean faster check-ins, predictive analytics to anticipate guest needs, and scheduling tools that give managers more time to coach their teams.

It can also help level the playing field. Research shows employees with just two months of experience can perform at the level of those with six months when supported by AI. For neurodivergent employees, AI tools can help them communicate ideas more clearly and confidently. Leaders can get the most value from AI by using it to handle routine tasks such as guest responses or scheduling, introducing AI-powered training to help new staff learn faster, and using AI analytics to better tailor guest experiences.

## THE BAD: POLICY GAPS AND COMPLIANCE RISKS

The risks are real. Nearly 60 per cent of employees say they use AI in ways that may violate company policies, because those policies aren't clear. Without clear guidance, employees may keep their AI use secret, which limits transparency and increases risk.

The solution is to make policies practical and

understandable. Leaders should specify what's allowed and what's not in everyday language and reinforce this with training that uses realistic guest scenarios to highlight safe versus unsafe practices. Importantly, IT and HR must work together. IT is key to safeguarding systems and HR is critical in ensuring staff are confident in applying AI responsibly on the job.

## THE UNCERTAIN: TRUST, BIAS, AND THE HUMAN TOUCH

Hospitality is built on trust and connection, yet this is where uncertainty lies. Staff may worry that using AI will make them look lazy or replaceable. While many CEOs predict AI will only replace a small percentage of roles in the next few years, entry-level jobs are most at risk which will hinder future leadership pipelines. The use of AI in hiring is also on the rise. Algorithms promise efficiency but often reinforce human bias, making it harder to improve diversity.

For hotels, the path forward is to normalize AI use and position it as a tool that strengthens, not replaces, the human side of service. Leaders can emphasize that AI frees up time to focus on authentic guest interactions. In hiring, algorithms should be used to manage large applicant pools but never to replace human decision-making. Instead of cutting entry-level roles, hotels can re-design them by shifting repetitive tasks to AI, leaving employees with more opportunities to create memorable guest experiences and to grow into future leaders. ♦



**Cayley Dow** is the founder of Thrivity Inc. ([thrivityhr.com](https://thrivityhr.com)), a human resources consulting and coaching firm that helps service-oriented businesses to thrive in the ever-evolving world of work.

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# HIRING ETHICALLY

Best practices to attract and retain top talent

BY STEPHEN RENARD

In the hospitality industry, the hiring process must reflect the same values businesses expect their employees to embody. That means integrity, professionalism, and clarity at every stage. For more than 55 years, Renard International has worked closely with global hospitality groups witnessing firsthand how ethical hiring not only protects a brand's reputation but directly impacts staff retention and guest satisfaction.

Hospitality is a people-driven business. The way you treat candidates during recruitment is often a reflection of how your company treats all their staff. Unethical practices such as vague salary ranges, overpromising job responsibilities, or failing to follow up after interviews sends a clear message: people are disposable. This breeds a culture of high turnover, low morale, and inconsistent service.

By contrast, ethical hiring reinforces company values from the start. Candidates who feel respected are more likely to join with a positive mindset and stay longer. A transparent recruitment process sets the tone for mutual trust, which is essential in fast-paced environments where teamwork and loyalty are key.

## 1. Be honest about job expectations

Clearly outline responsibilities, salary range, benefits, location, and reporting structure. Avoid “filler” language, such as “must be flexible,” without specifying what that flexibility entails.

## 2. Streamline the interview process

Keep the process concise and communicative. Long, silent gaps between interviews and decisions can lead top candidates to accept offers elsewhere. Provide updates

even when there's no news. Respectful communication stands out.

## 3. Avoid ghost jobs and talent fishing

Only post roles that are actively open. Creating pools of candidates for “future consideration” is tempting but unethical unless communicated transparently.

## 4. Prioritize diversity and inclusion

The best hospitality teams are culturally aware and multilingual, reflecting the diverse clientele they serve. Use unbiased language in job postings and diversify interview panels to reduce hiring bias.

## 5. Provide feedback when possible

While time-consuming, offering feedback to unsuccessful candidates — especially those who've reached final stages — can build goodwill and encourage them to apply again in the future.

## 6. Respect re-location and expat talent

For international hires, be upfront about re-location assistance, visa sponsorship, housing allowances, and cultural support. Clear guidance helps prevent miscommunication and improves retention rates for foreign workers. ♦



Stephen J. Renard is the president and CEO of Renard International Hospitality Search Consultants. He can be reached at [steve@renardinternational.com](mailto:steve@renardinternational.com).

# THE TALENT PROBLEM

The widening skills gap in the U.K. is jeopardizing the industry's capacity for sustained excellence

BY FRANCK ARNOLD



**A** number of factors have contributed to the talent problem in the U.K., including the exodus of talent that followed the COVID pandemic, which was exacerbated by Brexit. However, despite improvements in the landscape for hiring, there is a distinct lack of skilled and experienced professionals in the candidate pool. I believe that traditional hospitality education simply isn't equipping future leaders with the tools they need to thrive when faced with the sophisticated demands of our industry.

## IDENTIFYING THE ISSUE

At The Savoy, and most other hotels, we find that the talent in support functions such as HR, sales, marketing and finance is sufficient, but the guest-facing roles are lacking. These include areas such as housekeeping, food-and-beverage service, bars, restaurants and culinary roles. We've also noticed there are significant skills gaps when it comes to recruiting individuals for management roles, as many potential candidates lack the practical experience to confidently guide their teams and make informed decisions.

The impact of this is both immediate and tangible: the industry struggles to deliver the exceptional quality and quantity of service that luxury guests have come to expect. Not only does this inevitably harm the reputation of individual hospitality organizations, but in time, it will pose a direct threat to the

global competitiveness of London and U.K. hospitality as a whole, particularly within the luxury segment. This challenge is continually escalated by the growing number of luxury properties in the capital, as new establishments are competing for an already limited pool of adequately qualified talent.

## PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

One thing that has been contributing to the current skills deficit is that traditional hospitality education doesn't sufficiently prepare individuals for effective leadership because it fails to give them a comprehensive practical understanding of what work in the hospitality industry might truly entail.

At The Savoy, we're committed to cultivating an environment where aspiring leaders can gain valuable insights into each department. It can be challenging for leaders to empathize with their teams, make strategic decisions and achieve success without crucial practical understanding.

Emotional intelligence, adaptability and the ability to adjust to the wildly different guests and colleagues you'll come across in your career can only be developed in the workplace, where performance is paramount and real-time problem-solving is the norm. Modern hospitality education must therefore start to integrate real-life practical experience that extends beyond theoretical knowledge, in order for the students to understand the nuances of

human interaction and apply them when working. This is crucial for developing well-rounded leaders, as well as having a knock-on effect on the performance of the entire team.

## INTEGRATED LEARNING

Over the past year, I, along with other leading London luxury hospitality professionals, have been working with Regent's University London to create courses that are specifically designed to address this skills gap.

One example is the Luxury Hospitality Management undergraduate degree program, which launched in January. This course utilizes a constant apprenticeship model that integrates theory and practice throughout the degree.

We're launching a part-time Luxury Hospitality Management MA alongside the university later this year, designed specifically to help professionals who are already working in the industry achieve positions at senior management levels. This course is also open to individuals without degrees, which removes another barrier that has blocked talented people from realizing their full potential within the hospitality sector. ♦



*Franck Arnold is the managing director and regional vice-president of The Savoy.*

# CHARTING ITS COURSE

Fox Harb'r Resort celebrates 25 years of luxury, vision and expansion

BY AMY BOSTOCK

**AS** it celebrates its 25th anniversary, Fox Harb'r Resort stands as a beacon of luxury on Nova Scotia's Northumberland Shore, a destination where nature, hospitality and community converge. Guided by the founding vision of Canadian entrepreneur Ron Joyce (former Tim Hortons' owner) and stewarded by his son Steven Joyce and president Kevin Toth, the resort has grown from an ambitious coastal retreat into a nationally recognized luxury destination. With significant recent expansions, an evolving guest profile and an increased focus on community, sustainability and growth, Fox Harb'r is entering its next era full steam ahead.

The story of Fox Harb'r begins with Joyce, best known as the co-founder of Tim Hortons, who was born and raised in nearby Tatamagouche. "His ties to the region inspired a lifelong passion for its people and coastline," says Toth. "He envisioned a one-of-a-kind retreat on the picturesque Northumberland Shore – luxury without pretension."

That founding ethos still guides operations today. The resort, originally known for its private, golf-centered experience, has since evolved into a multi-faceted destination that includes fine dining, wellness, outdoor adventure, residential ownership and corporate retreat facilities. "We've gone from a golf-first destination to a place where every element – from accommodations to spa to cuisine – reflects excellence," says Toth.



*Kevin Toth, president,  
Fox Harb'r Resort*

Despite its evolution, the essence of Joyce's vision remains intact. "The foundation Ron laid — exceptional service, meticulous attention to detail, and a genuine sense of welcome — remains at the core of who we are," says Toth.

That foundation has only grown stronger under the stewardship of Steven Joyce, who was closely involved with the resort's development from the start. "Steven is deeply committed to honouring that legacy. His leadership has been instrumental in preserving the resort's values while guiding its thoughtful evolution," says Toth.



## F&B EXCELLENCE

Food and beverage is the second-largest revenue generator at Fox Harb'r and a defining element of the guest experience. "Dining is one of the top reasons guests choose Fox Harb'r, and often the highlight of their stay," says Kevin Toth, president, Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa.

Over the years, the resort's culinary offerings have evolved into a more diverse, dynamic program. "What began with traditional fine dining has expanded to include casual fare, event catering, and a deeper commitment to seasonal and local sourcing," says Toth.

The resort's 31-acre estate vineyard produces several varieties, including the sparkling "Rejoyce" — a tribute to the founder. Wine programming includes vineyard tours, curated pairings, and private tastings, all guided by renowned winemaker Gina Haverstock.

Today, the resort primarily attracts three types of guests: luxury vacationers, golf enthusiasts and group business travellers, including corporate retreats and destination weddings. "Over the past decade, we've grown well beyond our golf roots," Toth notes. "Guests may come for one aspect of the experience, but they often

leave having discovered so much more."

The resort's 25th anniversary this year is a reflection of continuity, community and commitment. "Reaching the 25-year mark is a meaningful milestone," says Toth. "It's a chance to reflect, honour those who shaped the resort, and recognize the loyalty of our guests, members, and team."

The celebration included a resort-wide event capped off with a fireworks display over the Northumberland Strait and a tribute to 16 staff members who have been with the resort since day-1. "It was a powerful reminder that the heart of Fox Harb'r has always been its people," says Toth.

## STANDOUT SUCCESS

When it comes to performance numbers, Toth says Fox Harb'r is outpacing national averages. Year-to-date, the resort is reporting 78 per cent seasonal occupancy and an ADR exceeding \$425 — well above Canada's mid-2025 average of 70 per cent occupancy and \$214 ADR.

"This performance reflects our unique positioning and a consistently elevated guest experience," he says. These strong metrics are especially noteworthy considering the resort's relatively remote location in rural Nova Scotia.

That location, however, is also one of its most compelling features. "Guests come here for the peace, space, and privacy only a destination like this can offer," says Toth. "While operating in a rural region presents challenges, particularly around staffing and logistics, it's also central to what makes us distinctive."

The resort reacted to these challenges in a number of ways. During the pandemic, as group business came to a halt, Fox Harb'r accelerated the construction of the Joyce Centre, which allowed it to open a brand-new conference facility just as clients were ready to return.

"We also made a deliberate decision not to lay off any team members. Instead, we re-assigned leadership roles to focus on professional development using online tools," says Toth. "During this time, we expanded employee housing, completed 16 new guest suites, and renovated another 48, leveraging the skills and expertise of our in-house team wherever possible."

Interestingly, he says, golf saw a notable uptick during the pandemic. "It remained one of the few permitted activities, and we responded by aggressively promoting



## SUSTAINABILITY

As Fox Harb'r grows, sustainability is embedded in both strategic planning and golf-course construction to real-estate sensitive site planning, local materials, and environmental stewardship," says Kevin Toth, president, Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa.

Internally, sustainability shows up in greenhouses that supply up to 30 per cent of the resort's produce. "It's part of a broader vision for Fox Harb'r remains a thriving, environmentally conscious destination for years to come."



## TY AT THE CORE

ty is not an afterthought — it's  
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estate development, we prioritize  
rials, and protection of our coastal  
resident, Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa.  
up in tangible ways. "Our on-site  
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roader philosophy that ensures Fox  
mentally responsible destination for

our golf experience in line with provincial guidelines. We introduced new ways for members and guests to learn, play, and safely enjoy the game throughout that period."

### ROOM TO GROW

Over the past year, Fox Harb'r has undertaken one of its most significant expansions to date. In May, the resort unveiled the first nine holes of its new Ocean Course, designed by acclaimed Canadian golf architects Doug Carrick and Tom McBroom.

"This is a bold first step in the full transformation of our golf program," says Toth. "By 2027, we'll offer two distinct 18-hole experiences: the coastal Ocean Course and the inland Vineyard Course. Together, they'll position Fox Harb'r among North America's top resort destinations."

Beyond golf, the resort introduced a re-imagined Spa & Wellness Centre, created in partnership with Core Essence. The facility features a full hydrotherapy circuit, aroma steam rooms, a salt lounge, cold plunge pools, and a high-performance fitness studio. "It's a major investment in how guests experience the resort," says Toth.

Residential real estate is also playing a growing role in the resort's business model. New villas, townhomes designed by architect Brian MacKay-Lyons, and custom homes offer fractional- and full-ownership options. "Real estate is an increasingly important part of our long-term strategy," says Toth. "It strengthens our sense of community and gives guests the option to make Fox Harb'r part of their lifestyle."

Like all hospitality businesses, Fox Harb'r has faced significant headwinds over the years — from the 2008 financial crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Each challenge forced us to be nimble and proactive," says Toth. "During the pandemic, we accelerated capital projects while operations were quiet, ensuring we emerged stronger."

The luxury segment itself has also evolved, with guest expectations shifting toward immersive, personalized experiences. "The definition of luxury has changed. Today's guests are looking for authenticity and connection," says Toth. "We've expanded our offerings to

meet that demand—without ever losing the Maritime-friendly human touch."

Fox Harb'r's impact goes beyond hospitality. The resort is a major economic engine for the region and one of the largest employers in this part of Nova Scotia, with career opportunities in hospitality, wellness, trades, and golf. It also supports local suppliers across multiple sectors.

"The ripple effect we create through employment and local procurement is significant," says Toth. "We also help raise the profile of Nova Scotia as a place to visit and invest in."

The resort's charitable commitments are equally robust. The Joyce Family Foundation has distributed more than \$50 million to universities and colleges across Atlantic Canada. One initiative particularly close to Toth's heart is the Fox Harb'r Student Bursary Program. "Since 2005, we've awarded more than \$295,000 in bursaries to student team members. It's a meaningful way to recognize and support the next generation."

Toth, a veteran of Canada's luxury hospitality industry, who has held leadership roles at Jasper Park Lodge, Fairmont Chateau Whistler, and The Prince of Wales Hotel, was drawn to Fox Harb'r by both the potential of the property and the passion of its founder.

"Ron Joyce had a clear and ambitious vision, and the chance to help bring that to life was compelling," says Toth. "There aren't many places with this level of potential, paired with such a strong sense of place."

As a leader, Toth emphasizes empowerment, accountability, and care. "Hospitality is all about people. When our team feels valued, that translates directly to our guests," he says. "We aim to create a culture of connection and attention to detail so each guest feels as though the resort was designed with them in mind."

With a sharpened focus on excellence and expansion, the next phase of growth for Fox Harb'r is already underway. "We're refining what we do best while elevating what's next," says Toth. This includes completing the Ocean and Vineyard golf courses, expanding residential offerings, and continuing to lead in wellness, dining and guest experience. ♦



# CANADA STRO

Finding a path for growth through  
turbulence and

BY NICOLE N  
SVP, CBRE HOTELS VALL

**W**ith considerable political uncertainty, both at home and abroad, 2025 began with concerns about how the macro economic outlook and the geopolitical environment would impact business and consumer confidence, travel demand, and ultimately the hotel industry.

Now that we are more than halfway through the year, a clearer picture has begun to emerge as to the actual challenges and opportunities that the Canadian hotel industry will face in 2025. While the outlook for the country remains, more or less unchanged, at 2.4 per cent RevPAR growth, individual market performance varies dramatically

in unexpected ways. Originally, the Conference Board of Canada was forecasting a three-per-cent decline in U.S. overnight visits and a 1.5-per-cent decline in overseas visits to Canada. Further, they were forecasting that an increase in domestic overnight visits would offset any declines in overnight U.S. and overseas visits, which would result in Canada seeing a net increase in total overnight visits and expenditures. Through the first quarter of the year, the most recent data available, Statistics Canada is reporting that domestic visits were up 2.2 per cent year-over-year while U.S. visits were up 1.2 per cent and overseas visits were down 12.4 per cent. These visits include all modes of transportation and purpose of visit.

One area where market performance has been a challenge so far in 2025 is in Canada's airport markets. As of June 2025, Statistics Canada has reported that transborder passenger volumes are down at the country's four major airports – Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Calgary between two and 10 per cent. These four airports represent more than 90 per cent of all trans-border traffic. June was noted as being the fifth straight month of consecutive declines at these airports, with the exception of Calgary, for this travel category. When we look at the hotel demand data for the same markets over the same period of time,

# CANADA GROWING

growth amid the  
crosswinds

NGUYEN,  
CONSULTATION & ADVISORY

the impact of the lower trans-border passenger volumes is evidenced by the demand declines recorded in these markets. Most airport markets across Canada are reporting decreases in the volume of pre-/post stay business. In the major airport markets, there is also a noted change in airline crew demand as the airlines have altered air-lift capacity based on consumer demand. CBRE's 2025 forecast anticipated RevPAR declines in the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver airport markets will be between one and nine per cent this year as the demand challenges and new supply hamper the ability to drive rate yield.

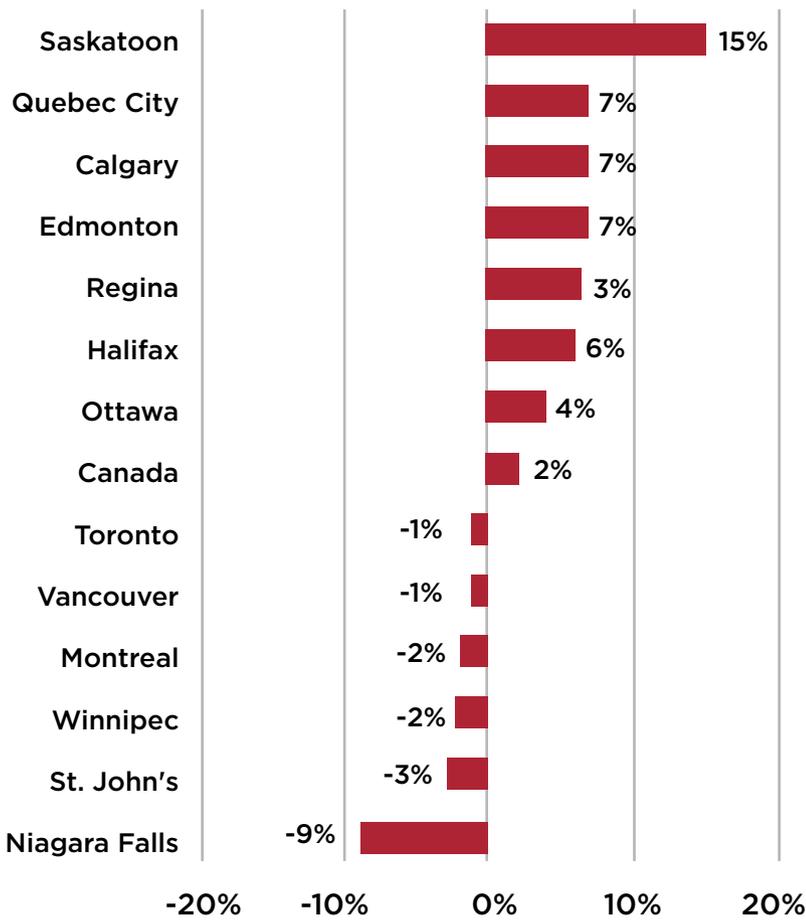
Another area facing significant

challenges in 2025 are major border-crossing markets including Niagara Falls, Ont., Fort Erie, Ont., Windsor, Ont., Surrey, B.C. and in rural Quebec (Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle). Based on the latest information from Statistics Canada, land border crossings are down by numbers not seen since the height of the COVID pandemic. Canadian's returning from the U.S. in July 2025 were down more than 36 per cent and U.S. arrivals to Canada were down just over seven per cent, marking the sixth-consecutive month of declines. These conditions are without a doubt having an impact on the leisure side of the market with Niagara Falls forecast to see a nine-per-cent decline in RevPAR in 2025 as the drop in visitors from the U.S. impacts both demand and ADR levels.

While there is much discussion of the impact that the decline in land border crossings is having on these leisure destinations, it's important to take note of the impacts that the declines in commercial traffic crossings is having not only on these markets but also in major transportation and logistics-oriented markets across the country. In markets such as Brampton, Mississauga and London, Ont., Langley, B.C. and suburban Montreal, the reduced commercial traffic is contributing to lower demand levels and softer performance metrics.

There are several areas across the country where there has been real opportunity to realize the upside in the current environment. As Canadians have pivoted away from travel to the

## 2025 RevPAR Growth over 2024



\* All projections are rounded.

It's against this backdrop that CBRE has prepared its 2025 Market Forecast.

U.S., there has been some uptick in international travel but many have taken the opportunity to support the local economy, travel closer to home and explore their own backyards.

This has resulted in strong demand growth in many of the picturesque and culturally unique destinations from coast to coast. Through July, markets such as Victoria and Vancouver Island, the B.C. interior (Kelowna, Kamloops, etc.), the Rocky Mountains, Northern and Central Ontario, Quebec City, Mont Tremblant and the Atlantic Canada provinces have seen significant demand growth. Operators in these markets noted an increase in interest from Canadians, which has been similar to 2021 and 2022 as the country

recovered from the COVID pandemic and travel re-started.

As we begin to look ahead to 2026, it's likely that some of the same challenges and opportunities will persist unless there is a material change in the macro economic or geopolitical environment. However, the recently elected Canadian Liberal Government has ambitious plans to grow the economy in a way that prioritizes Canadian companies and investment as well as make significant increases to our defence spending. While these are complex, multi-year plans, there are certainly opportunities that may arise for the hotel industry in the short term as periods of increased construction and development activity, as well as growth

in national infrastructure, has the ability to drive demand for hotel rooms across the country.

## 2025 MARKET FORECAST

As the original outlook for 2025 was being put together last September, there was a lot of uncertainty in the markets with the U.S. election underway, discourse in the Canadian political landscape and challenging consumer and business confidence indicators. The outlook for the hotel industry was for moderate growth with supply and demand generally in balance and a softening rate yield environment. The consensus was that any RevPAR growth realized in 2025 at a national level would be from ADR as occupancy was expected to remain at historic peaks.

While there has continued to be a heightened level of uncertainty, the forecast for national RevPAR remains relatively unchanged at about two per cent. On one side, there has been increased demand from domestic and overseas visitors who are choosing Canada over the U.S. for leisure travel, which has largely helped to buffer any declines in U.S. visitation. Demand is expected to be modestly positive and generally in line with supply growth in 2025. On the other side, in many markets, ADR growth has exceeded expectations and when demand is present, yield has been strong. This dynamic is helping to lend strength to the RevPAR growth forecast. There are, however, several markets where the trends deviate significantly from the national perspective.

## MAJOR MARKET OUTLOOKS

Canada's major markets account for approximately 40 per cent of all rooms across the country and have a significant influence on the national

performance for the industry year to year. In 2025, projected performance of Canada's major urban markets is split, with one half projected to see RevPAR growth, while the other half is projected to experience decline. Nationally, occupancy is expected to dip one point as supply and demand are slightly out of balance, however, the expectation is for ADR growth of 2.5 per cent, which is expected to help push RevPAR up by approximately two per cent overall to reach \$138.

### VANCOUVER

The headwinds the economy in British Columbia and Vancouver faced in 2024 are poised to continue through 2025. Economic growth is sluggish in 2025 with low job creation, slow population growth and some impacts from the U.S. tariffs, despite showing signs of resilience.

The tourism economy is a relative bright spot considering domestic tourism remains strong and growth in

international visitation is somewhat offsetting the dip in U.S. visitation. The city's hotel sector is being buoyed by several large events and conferences, including hosting the Invictus Games in February, the first-ever (to Vancouver) Web Summit Conference in May and a record AA conference in July. Despite all this, after experiencing exceptional ADR growth year-over-year recently, the metro Vancouver accommodation market is projected to experience its first contraction in rate since the pandemic. ADR is expected to be about \$1 below that achieved in 2024 based on mid-year pace. Rate looks to remain flat in the downtown market, set against mixed results in the suburban markets. Not to be matched in 2025 is the boost in both rate and occupancy the market achieved in December 2024 with the Taylor Swift concert nights.

While demand is projected to contract one per cent, this is somewhat offset by a modest contraction in market supply. Overall, RevPAR is

projected to decline by one per cent or \$3 in Metro Vancouver in 2025. The city remains tops in the country in overall RevPAR ranking.

### VANCOUVER

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	48%	74%	79%	79%	79%
ADR	\$167	\$237	\$268	\$288	\$287
RevPAR	\$80	\$175	\$211	\$228	\$225

Source: CBRE Hotels

### CALGARY

While the provincial economy is experiencing mixed results with growth in some sectors and challenges in others, Calgary is expected to outperform the national and provincial economies. The city is facing a slowdown in population growth which is affecting the unemployment rate, however, the recent investment into diversifying the economy is helping the city to weather the disruptions. Tourism is contributing



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to the growth — the Calgary Stampede is once again expected to attract more than one million visitors and the newly expanded BMO Centre is estimated to have hosted more than 400 events, including 47 first-time events to the city, in its first year.

The first four months of 2025 for the hotel sector in Calgary started in a rather unremarkable fashion. In fact, occupancy was off a couple of points and ADR was up modestly. There was strong improvement in May and then a complete turnaround occurred in June. The city played host to three substantial events/conferences (G7 Summit, Global Energy Show and Rotary International Convention) that propelled performance from flat to fantastic. The outlook is strong through to at least the end of the third quarter.

Buoyed by the month of June, strong performance is projected for the Calgary accommodation market in 2025. Despite a moderate volume of new supply, occupancy overall is projected to improve one point to 67 per cent and market ADR is projected to improve at a healthy pace downtown and in each of the submarkets. Following six per cent RevPAR growth in 2024, market RevPAR is projected to improve a further 7.5 per cent in 2025, the second-highest growth rate of all major markets.

### CALGARY

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	33%	58%	64%	66%	67%
ADR	\$119	\$157	\$175	\$180	\$192
RevPAR	\$40	\$91	\$112	\$119	\$128

Source: CBRE Hotels

### EDMONTON

Not unlike most of the country, the overall economic outlook for Edmonton is positive, however there remains some challenges related to global trade uncertainty. Energy production, housing construction and population growth are helping the city to alleviate any sector concerns.

Edmonton has always enjoyed a strong festival and events scene, which is in full swing in 2025; there are a number of notable concerts on the calendar, many of which bring visitors into the city from

other small markets in the province.

The Oilers playoff run in 2024 was the momentum shift Edmonton needed. Hotels throughout the city experienced a very strong boost in performance April through June which seemed to carry throughout the balance of the year. The good news is the hockey team repeated its performance in 2025 and the city's accommodation sector hasn't looked back.

The Edmonton accommodation market is continuing to improve, such that RevPAR in 2025 is projected to surpass previous best ever results (\$93 achieved in 2014). A modest amount of new supply for the city is being outpaced by demand growth. Market occupancy for the city overall is projected to improve two points to 62 per cent on the strength of the performance in the submarkets. While demand in the downtown market is expected to remain flat, ADR is projected to improve at a healthy pace. Overall, ADR for the Greater Edmonton market is projected to improve four per cent, helping to push RevPAR up seven per cent for the year, the third highest growth rate in the country.

### EDMONTON

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	35%	53%	58%	60%	62%
ADR	\$101	\$125	\$136	\$147	\$153
RevPAR	\$35	\$65	\$79	\$88	\$95

Source: CBRE Hotels

### REGINA

Saskatchewan is not expected to post the highest GDP growth in the country in 2025, however, the province is experiencing significant job growth with the strongest labour market in Canada and the lowest unemployment rate among provinces. Regina is contributing to the provincial economy with continued strong population growth and both private and public capital investment. From a tourism perspective, the city is having a strong year with record passenger volumes through the airport and a schedule to host more than 80 national and regional events throughout the year.

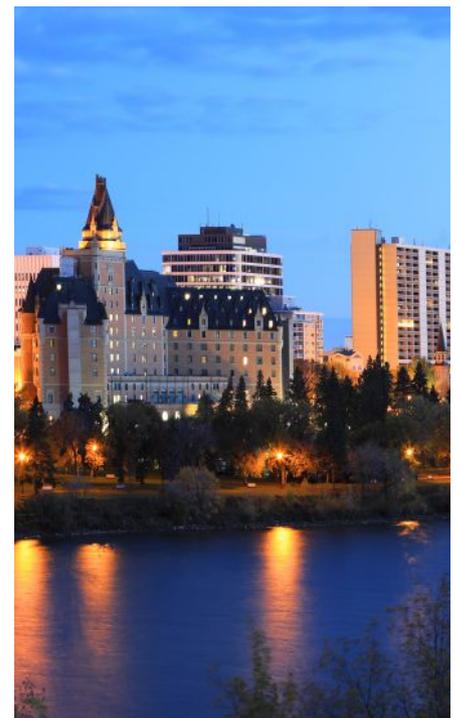
Early sentiments for 2025 were for the Regina accommodation market

to continue to move forward, but at a moderately steady pace. Instead, 2025 is looking to be a very healthy year for the city's accommodation sector with a projection for RevPAR to increase seven per cent to \$80. In large part, the RevPAR improvement is fuelled by demand growth, which is expected to outpace moderate supply growth and push occupancy up two points to 57 per cent. Market ADR is projected to improve three per cent. While performance remains below historic highs, the outlook is positive and there is no new market supply expected in the short to medium term.

### REGINA

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	35%	52%	54%	55%	57%
ADR	\$102	\$126	\$133	\$137	\$141
RevPAR	\$35	\$65	\$72	\$75	\$80

Source: CBRE Hotels



### SASKATOON

Saskatoon benefits from a diversified economy that includes agriculture, potash, oil and mining. This diversification helps mitigate the potential disruptions in any one sector and leaves the city relatively less exposed to industries targeted by U.S. tariffs. Saskatoon continues to experience

strong population growth as one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada, which is fuelling the housing market and construction activity.

There has been a notable increase in international visitation and spending in Saskatoon, including a nearly six-per-cent lift in airport passenger volumes year to date. The city is also attracting visitors through hosting several major events in 2025.

The story of the year for Canada's accommodation industry must be the performance of the Saskatoon market. RevPAR is projected to improve a robust 15 per cent in 2025, tops in the country and the only market with double-digit growth projected. This comes after healthy growth of nearly nine per cent in 2024. Both demand and rate are expected to improve at exceptional levels in 2025 given the pace shown in the first half of the year. These results are certainly supported by no new supply for the fourth year running. Occupancy at 68 per cent for Saskatoon hasn't been achieved since 2014, before market supply grew at an average of five per cent per year.

## SASKATOON

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	39%	57%	62%	64%	68%
ADR	\$110	\$129	\$142	\$150	\$163
RevPAR	\$43	\$73	\$89	\$96	\$111

Source: CBRE Hotels

## WINNIPEG

The tariffs, strained U.S.-Canada relations and the uncertainty the situation brings has led to a slowdown for the Winnipeg economy in 2025. As a transportation hub, the economy is being impacted right through the manufacturing and transportation and warehousing sectors. As has been experienced elsewhere in Canada, population growth has also slowed. Tourism is a bright spot as the city played host to Rendez-Vous Canada in May, a major tourism tradeshow that helped to improve year-to-date results for the accommodation sector.

As was expected, the Winnipeg market experienced a modest contraction in RevPAR in 2024 after

posting the city's best ever results for occupancy, ADR and RevPAR in 2023. The market's recent trend of year-over-year rate gain is holding strong in 2025; market ADR is projected to improve 4.5 per cent to reach \$179. On the other hand, demand is projected to continue to contract based on the mid year pace. This, combined with more than 2.5-per-cent growth in new accommodation supply, is contributing to a projected five point drop in occupancy to 68 per cent for the year. Overall, market RevPAR is projected to decline approximately two per cent or \$3 to \$122.

## WINNIPEG

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	40%	68%	77%	73%	68%
ADR	\$117	\$143	\$164	\$172	\$179
RevPAR	\$47	\$97	\$126	\$125	\$122

Source: CBRE Hotels

## TORONTO

Although the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has seen good economic and tourism recovery over the last couple of years, the current economic environment has softened with a less robust outlook for GDP, employment and housing activity in 2025. The GTA is expected to continue to be a strong tourism market although there has been a drop off in U.S. visitation due to the U.S.-Canada tensions.

Supply growth in the GTA in 2024 remained fairly muted at about one per cent with around 350 new rooms added. However, it's expected that supply growth will ramp back up in 2025, increasing two per cent with about 800 net new rooms entering the market, concentrated mostly in the suburban sub-markets of Toronto.

In 2025, demand growth in Greater Toronto is expected to be flat overall as contractions in the airport and west markets will be offset by growth in downtown and east/north. Since supply is expected to outpace demand, the market is forecast to see a two-point decrease in occupancy to 73 per cent.

In 2024, a strong start to the year and major events like TIFF and Taylor Swift concerts helped lift ADR by three

per cent to \$235, which drove five per cent RevPAR growth. While there is expected to be one-per-cent growth in the market ADR in 2025 to \$237, the impact of events like the re-location of the Collison conference and the lack of Taylor Swift concerts in November is expected to limit the growth. As a result, the market RevPAR is projected to contract by one per cent to \$173.

## TORONTO

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	44%	67%	74%	75%	73%
ADR	\$131	\$202	\$228	\$235	\$237
RevPAR	\$57	\$136	\$167	\$175	\$173

Source: CBRE Hotels

## NIAGARA FALLS

As one of Canada's most active land-border crossings and a major destination leisure market, the strained U.S.-Canada relations and the slow pace of recovery of overseas visitation over the last couple of years has impacted the performance of the market. According to recent data from Statistics Canada, U.S. visitors coming to Canada was down more than seven per cent in July while Canadian visitors retuning from the U.S. was down by more than 45 per cent (as of May 2025).

Niagara Falls experienced a seven-per-cent contraction in demand in 2024, which led to a three-point drop in occupancy to 64 per cent. Despite the occupancy decrease, market ADR increased by seven per cent and mitigated the impact of the occupancy contraction with RevPAR holding flat to 2023.

In 2025, the challenging demand conditions are forecast to result in a one-point drop in occupancy to 63 per cent. With the softer demand conditions and fewer U.S. and overseas visitors, whose purchasing power typically drives rate yield, it's expected that ADR will decline by seven per cent or \$15 to \$206. The combination of declines in both occupancy and ADR is forecast to result in a nine-per-cent drop in RevPAR to \$130, falling \$12 from recent peak levels.

## NIAGARA FALLS

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	33%	55%	69%	64%	63%
ADR	\$156	\$201	\$207	\$221	\$206
RevPAR	\$51	\$110	\$142	\$142	\$129

Source: CBRE Hotels

## OTTAWA

Following a three-per-cent increase in RevPAR in 2024 to \$139, in Ottawa, 2025 kicked off with significant disruption to its main sources of demand – government and government-related business. In late 2024, the federal government was prorogued with a leadership race for the Liberal Party beginning on February 26<sup>th</sup> following the resignation of Prime Minister Trudeau on January 6<sup>th</sup>. After electing a new leader, Prime Minister Carney, a federal election was called for April 28<sup>th</sup>. The Liberal Party won the election and formed a minority government. As a result of the leadership race and election, it's expected that the House of Commons will only sit for 73 days in 2025, compared to the 122 days in 2024.

Historically, Ottawa has seen a drop in occupancy during election years, as a result of the truncated parliamentary session, however, 2025 looks poised to buck this trend with four per cent demand growth forecast for the market as a result of increased leisure and meeting conference demand and significant growth in the Ottawa West submarket.

This demand growth is projected to outpace the two per cent supply growth leading to a two-point increase in occupancy to 71 per cent. Alongside the demand growth, the market is forecast to see a two-per-cent increase in ADR, again being driven by the suburban markets. It's projected that market RevPAR will increase \$6 or four per cent to \$145 in 2025.

## OTTAWA

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	41%	62%	69%	69%	71%
ADR	\$131	\$177	\$196	\$201	\$205
RevPAR	\$54	\$109	\$134	\$139	\$145

Source: CBRE Hotels

## MONTREAL

The economic fundamentals in Greater Montreal have been some of the strongest in the country in recent years with good GDP and population growth and housing starts. While the outlook for 2025 is more temperate, the indicators are still strong. Montreal typically sees a significant number of international visitors, not only from the U.S., but also from Europe (namely France) due to its linguistic and cultural ties, however, there is some softness in U.S. visitation this year.

In 2024, occupancy decreased to 69 per cent, a result of a one-per-cent increase in supply and a one-per-cent contraction in demand. This softening was primarily driven by softer leisure and meeting/conference demand, reflecting broader economic trends and shifts in travel patterns. Despite the occupancy decline, ADR saw a positive increase of four per cent or \$8 to \$235. This growth in ADR was sufficient to offset the decrease in occupancy, resulting in a two-per-cent increase in RevPAR to \$163 for the year.

In 2025, all of the Montreal sub-markets are expected to see supply growth with the metro area forecasted to see over 700 net new rooms, a growth of three per cent. This represents the largest number of net new rooms in the market since 2019. This supply growth, coupled with a projected three-per-cent decrease in demand, is expected to result in a decline in overall occupancy, falling four points to 65 per cent. The market is projected to see strong rate growth in 2025 with ADR increasing four per cent or \$9 to \$244 for the year. However, the strong ADR growth will not be enough to offset the decline in occupancy and as a result RevPAR in the Greater Montreal market is expected to decline by two per cent, decreasing \$4 to \$159 in 2025.

## MONTREAL

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	33%	63%	71%	69%	65%
ADR	\$152	\$206	\$227	\$235	\$244
RevPAR	\$50	\$130	\$160	\$163	\$159

Source: CBRE Hotels

## QUEBEC CITY

Quebec City features a diversified economy and is the seat of the provincial government. GDP growth in the region was strong in 2024 at 2.9 per cent and while it's expected to slow to 1.4 per cent in 2025, the market continues to attract significant volumes of domestic pleasure and overseas visitation, driving robust leisure demand. The city also sees consistent year-round demand from government and meeting conference business.

In 2024, Quebec City saw another year of good growth coming off a significant 2023. Demand growth in 2024 was just one per cent, pushing occupancy up to 69 per cent as there was no material change in supply. The market saw ADR growth of four per cent or \$8, resulting in RevPAR growing to \$159, a five-per-cent increase over 2023.

While the market saw a strong start to the year, particularly with meeting/conference activity, the U.S.-Canada tensions have benefitted Quebec City as more Canadians have chosen to travel within the country. Demand growth in the market is expected to increase by two per cent in 2025 and drive occupancy up another point to 70 per cent, a new peak for this market. Capitalizing on the interest, market ADR is forecast to grow by six per cent or \$13 to \$244. Overall, RevPAR in the market is expected to improve by seven per cent in 2025 as a result of the strong rate growth and solid occupancy, increasing \$11 to \$170 for the year.

## QUEBEC CITY

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	33%	57%	68%	69%	70%
ADR	\$164	\$215	\$223	\$232	\$244
RevPAR	\$55	\$124	\$152	\$159	\$170

Source: CBRE Hotels

## HALIFAX/DARTMOUTH

Halifax/Dartmouth is the economic centre of Eastern Canada with a diverse economy with a deep government services and private-sector business base. After a GDP increase of 1.8 per cent in 2024, Halifax/Dartmouth is forecast to see similar growth of 1.6 per cent in 2025. With more Canadian

travellers choosing to stay domestic, Halifax is expected to see some of the strongest demand growth of any market in the country.

The accommodation market in Halifax/Dartmouth saw four per cent supply growth in 2024 with about 275 net new rooms while demand growth was two per cent, bringing market occupancy down by about a point to finish at 70 per cent. In Halifax/Dartmouth, the ADR contracted by one per cent with the increased competition, contributing to an overall decrease of three per cent in RevPAR.

In 2025, the market is expected to see very strong demand growth of about five per cent, with an increased interest from leisure travellers. This demand growth is projected to outstrip the two per cent supply growth which will drive occupancy up to 71 per cent. Based on the strength of the ADR so far the market demand rate is expected to grow by four per cent, which will result in RevPAR growth of six per cent or \$9 to \$151.

## HALIFAX/DARTMOUTH

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	41%	67%	71%	70%	71%
ADR	\$116	\$180	\$206	\$205	\$213
RevPAR	\$47	\$120	\$147	\$142	\$151

Source: CBRE Hotels



## ST. JOHN'S

Economic activity in St. John's is driven by the regions focus on natural resources, specifically offshore oil and gas development. GDP growth for the 2025 is projected to be 1.6 per cent with flat employment growth. St. John's is the capital city of the province. As such, it provides a significant amount of the consumer and government services for residents with some of the travel from the rest of the province driving demand in the city. As a highly seasonal and less leisure driven market, domestic business makes up the bulk of the visitation to the province, with only a minor amount of U.S. and overseas visitation.

Through 2025, the St John's market has seen month-over-month contraction in occupied room night demand as the non-traditional demand, that buoyed the market in 2023, recedes. In 2024, the same conditions resulted in demand declining by 14 per cent and occupancy falling nine points to 64 per cent. Even with the contraction in demand, the market still achieved strong ADR growth of 11 per cent as contracted rate demand was replaced by higher yielding sources. Overall, RevPAR declined by three per cent to \$109 as the increase in ADR was not enough to offset the drop in occupancy.

Correction of the market has continued in 2025, and demand is anticipated to contract five per cent against a supply increase of four per cent, resulting in occupancy falling another six points to 58 per cent. This occupancy is slightly better than per-COVID levels. While St. John's is projected to see ADR increase six per cent or \$10 to \$181, the decline in occupancy is expected to be a drag on RevPAR, resulting in it dropping to \$106, a contraction of three per cent or \$3 relative to 2024.

## ST. JOHN'S

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	35%	60%	73%	64%	58%
ADR	\$105	\$143	\$154	\$171	\$181
RevPAR	\$37	\$85	\$112	\$109	\$106

Source: CBRE Hotels

\* All projections are rounded.

## NATIONAL MARKET OUTLOOK

The projections for the national accommodation market are a roll up of the projections completed for the various major markets as well as the provinces and territories across Canada considering the various economic, travel and supply and demand dynamics at play. While the national forecast provides a macro, directional indication of industry performance, there are numerous factors that will impact the recovery and performance of individual markets, such as supply, the sources/mix of guestroom demand and seasonality, which impact the performance results for 2025 and beyond.

National accommodation supply is projected to increase by one per cent in 2025. This will be the most supply growth seen since 2019 as new projects come to market following the improved market-operating conditions, financing environment and construction costs.

While demand conditions are expected to vary widely depending on the local market conditions, on a national level the one-per-cent growth projected will generally be in balance with the one per cent supply growth. As a result, national occupancy is expected to remain at 66 per cent, another year of peak performance.

In 2024, ADR growth was very strong at five per cent, improving to \$206. In 2025, the growth in ADR is expected to be more moderate as there are declines expected in some markets across the country. Overall, national ADR is forecasted to increase by three per cent or \$5 to \$211. In light of the stable occupancy, the two-per-cent increase in RevPAR is forecast to come from the growth in ADR. National RevPAR for 2025 is forecasted to increase to \$138, up \$3 over 2024. ♦

## NATIONAL

	2021 ACTUAL	2022 ACTUAL	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ACTUAL	2025 CBRE(F)
Occupancy	42%	61%	66%	66%	66%
ADR	\$135	\$178	\$197	\$206	\$211
RevPAR	\$56	\$108	\$129	\$135	\$138

Source: CBRE Hotels

## TRANSFORMATIVE ESCAPE

Set on a remote private island in the Maldives' Lhaviyani Atoll, Six Senses Kanuhura offers a transformative escape tailored to women seeking re-connection, renewal and empowerment. At the heart of the experience is the resort's Female Wellness Program designed to support women's physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The program is grounded in functional health science and holistic therapies in collaboration with Dr. Mindy Pelz, a leading women's health advocate. Guests will focus on five key pillars of wellbeing: nutrition, movement, sleep, stress and mindset and lifestyle. Women can expect expert-led education and one-on-one learning; a wellness screening and personal consultation with an integrated wellness practitioner; continuous glucose monitoring and a sleep tracker to gain insights into metabolic and hormonal health; personalized fitness and spa treatments, including a 60-minute holistic massage and sound healing session; access to biohacking tools, mindfulness meditation and hot/cold immersion therapies at Six Senses Spa; and nourishing meals to restore the microbiome and support hormonal balance.

# WANDER WOMEN

SOLO FEMALE TRAVEL IS A FAST-GROWING SEGMENT OF THE GLOBAL TOURISM MARKET

BY NICOLE DI TOMASSO

**M**ore women than ever are packing their bags, booking flights and setting off to explore the world – solo. Once seen as a niche or even risky choice, solo female travel is now a thriving and fast-growing segment of the global tourism market. According to a report published last year by Virtuoso and Globetrender entitled *Luxury Travel Trend Watch: 2025*, solo female travel, dubbed as “Wander Women”, has seen significant growth, with women making up 71 per cent of solo travellers.

According to the *2025 Solo Female Travel Survey* by Solo Female Travellers, the main reasons women travel solo are freedom and flexibility (87 per cent), escape from routine and responsibilities (83 per cent), relaxation and self-care (79 per cent) and to challenge themselves (74 per cent). This ranking holds for all age groups and has remained stable since 2020. However, Boomers and child free/single Gen X are particularly keen on solo travel.

European countries (54 per cent) are the best destination for a first solo trip, according to the survey. Overall the most desired solo destinations are Japan, Australia, Iceland, Italy, Greece and New Zealand. Favourite cities include London, Paris, Rome, Barcelona and Tokyo.

As this demographic continues to grow, hotels and travel providers are taking note. Across the world, businesses are re-imagining how they serve female guests travelling alone. From increased security measures to curated itineraries and flexible accommodations, the industry is evolving to deliver not only comfort and style, but also peace of mind and a sense of belonging.

## SAFETY FIRST

When it comes to solo travel, safety is often the top concern – particularly for women. According to the 2025 survey, 66 per cent of women worried about their personal safety. Seventeen per cent of respondents carried self-defence items when they travelled in 2024, from guns (predominantly U.S. domestic travel) and knives to key rings, pepper spray, alarms or whistles. Air tags are increasingly used as safety devices and a means for their loved ones to track them. Aware of this, hotels are doubling down on security and privacy features that enhance the solo experience.

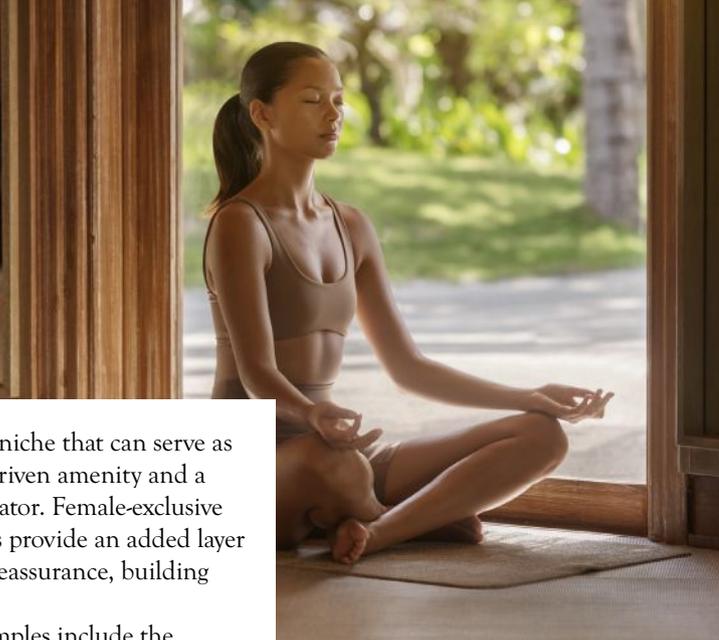
Many properties have already invested in enhanced lighting, 24/7 front-desk support and discreet check-in options. These seemingly small changes can significantly influence a solo traveller’s sense of safety and overall experience.

“In addition to 24/7 on-site security with surveillance and uniform staff, another control point is our guest-only floor access,” says Matt Black, director of Marketing & Revenue at Hotel X Toronto. “All of our elevators have a key card requirement, so only those with a key card can gain access to guestroom floors.”

Black continues, “Our nine-acre property is fenced, well-lit and monitored. Our front desk and concierge teams are trained to offer discreet assistance if a guest feels uncomfortable. And, we do wellness checks, even if a room is on do not disturb (DND). We have to go into the room every 72 hours. All of our staff have also completed human-trafficking training.”

One of the most notable developments is the growing trend of women-only floors or rooms. In Canada, this is an

Tibetan singing  
bowl meditation  
at Six Senses  
Kanuhura in the  
Maldives



underdeveloped niche that can serve as both a security-driven amenity and a market differentiator. Female-exclusive accommodations provide an added layer of comfort and reassurance, building brand loyalty.

Canadian examples include the Orchid Floor at Georgian Court Hotel in Vancouver, which has 18 rooms dedicated exclusively to female travellers. The bathrooms include a flat iron, curling iron and ladies-only emergency kits. Guests will also find a yoga mat, additional satin-padded and skirt hangers and more.

The Ivy, a boutique hotel in downtown Toronto, fits seamlessly within Verity, a private women's club. The Ivy's four elegantly designed rooms are inspired by European boutique hotels and feature king-size Hastens beds, Italian linens, heated floors, soaking tubs, outdoor terraces and in-room amenities.

"It's simply a matter of training employees to be mindful about safety, especially within larger corporations," says Denise O'Malley-Farrell, director of Operations at The Verity Group of Companies. "If a hotel is checking in a solo female traveller, avoid putting them beside a soccer team, a hockey team, or a wedding. As a female traveller who also works within the industry, there's several tips and tricks to be mindful of. Don't say the room number out loud and don't point to the room number. And, ask front-desk staff if you need assistance to your car."

## DESIGNED FOR THE JOURNEY

Beyond security, solo female travellers are seeking journeys that reflect their individuality, values and interests. Hotels and tour operators are rising to meet this demand with curated travel packages that blend wellness, adventure and cultural immersion.

Verity is located in restored 1850s chocolate factory and offers a diverse

array of facilities including meeting rooms, lounges, co-working areas and a library; full-service day spa and fitness facilities; indoor pool; and award-winning GEORGE Restaurant and speakeasy bar Secrette. The design creates a dual experience: a quiet, boutique hotel stay plus immersive access to a vibrant women-centered community and wellness haven – all under one roof.

O'Malley-Farrell says the hotel, the restaurant, the spa and the speakeasy are all open to the public as well, adding men are welcome to stay at the hotel, but the spa and fitness amenities are exclusively for women.

Hotel X Toronto offers several wellness options that cater to the female demographic. The Escape to Serenity add-on features a curated selection of amenities to enhance guests' wellness experience and provide the comforts of home, with a focus on pregnant women. Essentials include pregnancy pillows, sleep phones, a microgel duvet, a baby crib, a sewing kit, a tea kettle and more.

Additionally, the Experience Wellness add-on at Hotel X Toronto grants access to a selection of KALA wellness technologies, including a PEMF mat, a red-light face mask, and red-light panels, designed to help guests relax and re-charge. Female guests can also reserve a daycation experience at Guerlain Spa and indulge in a variety of spa services, including Wellness and High Tea, which includes a 30-minute back massage, use of the steam room and spa lounge, high tea service, access to 10XTO athletic club and rooftop pool (3 hours for \$175), or

Spa Escape and High Tea, a 60-minute tailor-made facial, RMT massage or relaxation massage, use of the steam room and spa lounge, high tea service, access to the 10XTO athletic club and rooftop pool (3 hours, \$250).

Black says the spa is debuting its new Contrast Zone this quarter, featuring a traditional sauna and cold plunge for guided contrast therapy experiences.

## COMMUNITY OVER CONVENTION

Despite the allure of solitude, solo female travellers are not necessarily seeking isolation. Many crave connection with people, places and purpose. This has led to the popularity of social travel experiences that balance independence with community.

Sharing dining tables, interest-based group tours and online platforms for solo female travellers are helping to foster a sense of belonging. Some hotels are even introducing social lounges or community programming where guests can casually meet others.

Social media and digital communities have also played a role in making solo travel more accessible and inspiring. Platforms such as Girls LOVE Travel and Solo Female Travellers have created virtual spaces where women can share tips, reviews, safety updates and encouragement. This peer-to-peer support has fuelled confidence and curiosity across generations and cultures.

Thirty-six per cent of female respondents travelled solo on a small group trip in the last year and 36 per cent said they would do so in the next 12 months, either mixed or women-only, according to the 2025 survey.

As the solo female travel segment continues to grow, the hospitality industry will need to keep innovating – not just in amenities, but in mindset. This isn't a passing trend, but a cultural shift in how women see themselves in the world: capable, curious and deserving of experiences that nourish the body, mind and spirit.

For hoteliers, tour operators and destinations, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. It requires listening to what women really want and creating spaces where they feel seen, safe and celebrated. ♦

# BLANKET STATEMENT

How bedding and linens have changed

BY ROBIN ROBERTS



**T**ravellers consider cost, location and amenities when booking a hotel, but cleanliness – which covers bedding and linens – is firmly at the top of the list, especially since COVID.

Crisp, white sheets are a given, but hotels that take it a few steps further by offering luxuriously soft, comfy bedding score higher on any review site. Extra points for sustainably

sourcing and washing all that bedding.

## MATERIAL WORLD

Linda S. Hagen, BHM, director, Brand Engagement & Auditing for Coast Hotels, remembers the bold colours and geometric patterns of bedspreads that were the standard in the 1970s, designed more for aesthetics than sleep quality.

“By the 1990s, there was growing emphasis on comfort and calming, [which favoured] neutral tones like champagne, cream and beige,” she says. “The 2000s ushered in the ‘luxury bedding’ era, with higher thread counts, softer textures, and upgraded mattresses, all focused on delivering better rest.”

She says guests now expect sustainability, wellness, and allergen-safe environments. “Guests are asking questions about how bedding is sourced, cleaned, and maintained.”

Joumana Ghandour, general manager at The Westin Edmonton, says each Marriott brand features its own signature bed, and for Westin, it’s the Heavenly Bed. When it launched in 1990, she says, it was a game-changer. “Suddenly, guests were sleeping better in a hotel than they did at home. The mattress itself is engineered with plush, high-tech fibers, motion control, and temperature regulation to accommodate a variety of sleep styles.”

As for bedding materials, Ghandour says the duvet and insert are a cotton-polyester blend. “The duvet inserts feature Hydrocool technology, wrapped in smooth cotton for enhanced breathability,” while the blanket is made of polyester.

“The sheets combine polyester and Lyocell, a sustainable fiber derived from eucalyptus and other botanicals,” says Ghandour. “It’s not only environmentally friendly but also exceptionally soft and cool to the touch. The ultimate compliment was that guests wanted to buy the Westin bedding for their homes.”

Westin’s pillows, she says, are filled with a breathable

fiber that mimics memory foam and includes an antimicrobial, dust-mite resistant barrier for hypoallergenic protection.

### SUPPLY SIDE

Rain Zhang, CEO and founder of Richmond, B.C.-based Willowst Enterprise Co. Ltd., says long-staple cotton, especially combed or ring-spun, remains the gold standard for luxury properties. “It’s valued for its softness, breathability, and durability,” says Zhang. “Willowst typically blends it with 18 per cent polyester or supplies it as 100 per cent cotton – both formats are preferred by high-end hotel brands.”

She says cotton-rich blends are also increasingly popular with three- and four-star properties because of the balance of guest comfort, easy laundering and cost efficiency.

For the boutique and wellness sectors, Zhang says Tencel and modal-infused fabrics are gaining traction for their silky texture and moisture-wicking properties. “However, their lifespan tends to be shorter than long-staple cotton or cotton-rich options.”

She notes that white sateen or percale woven constructions remain timeless for their clean, crisp aesthetic and universal appeal. Whatever a hotel’s choice, she says, “the best materials feel luxurious, launder well, and last longer – that’s the sweet spot.”

The company supplies and customizes linens for, Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, Fairmont, and Renaissance Hotels and Resorts, among others, including branding details such as embroidered logos and coloured stitching, thread count and fabric



**Rain Zhang, CEO and founder of Richmond, B.C.-based Willowst Enterprise Co. Ltd. breaks down three property-appropriate fabrics, including:**



Cotton-poly blends, which are ideal for economy-focused properties because they’re durable and affordable.



One-hundred per cent combed cotton offers mid-range pricing with a noticeably upgraded guest experience, often chosen by four-star hotels.



Tencel cotton blended or high thread count cotton commands a premium, which is ideal for boutique and five-star properties.

but a light environmental footprint is just as important to hoteliers.

“That’s why we’re intentional about the materials we use in our linens; they not only support our sustainability goals but also help guests feel good about their stay,” says Ghandour.

Zhang says bedding, as a high-consumption category, plays a pivotal role in ESG mandates for greener practices. Willowst offers recycled and organic fabric options where they can, prioritizes OEKO-TEX certified textiles and low-impact dyeing process, and designs durable, laundry-efficient products that reduce the need for replacement. “This all helps clients optimize inventory and reduce overstock, promoting re-use over waste.”

Hagen says sustainability isn’t just a trend, it’s a demand. Coast partners with suppliers who meet or exceed global standards for textile safety and environmental care. “Eden Textile provides Oeko-Tex-certified products designed for longevity in high-traffic environments, reducing replacement cycles and waste,” she says. And, “Ecolab supplies



EMILY KEENEY

about skin reactions.

“Knowing that their bedding is hypoallergenic and antimicrobial gives them peace of mind,” says Ghandour. “With the current Westin Heavenly Bed, we’ve even eliminated the need to defeather rooms, which was once a common request. It’s all about creating a safe, comfortable environment that feels just as good, or better, than at home.”

Zhang acknowledges that, since the pandemic, there’s been a heightened demand for bedding that melds health, hygiene and peace of mind. Willowest offers antimicrobial treatments such as silver-ion finishes that help inhibit bacterial growth without affecting softness or breathability, as well as hypoallergenic materials

such as down-alternative fills for pillows and duvets, and encasements with barrier technology for mattresses and pillows.

Hagen says their hypoallergenic bedding minimizes exposure to common irritants such as dust mites and mould. “Antimicrobial treatments, often silver-based, help inhibit the growth of bacteria and fungi, adding an extra layer of hygiene and extending the useful life of linens.”

**STRIKING A BALANCE**

Hagen says Coast takes into account guest feedback and expectations, operational performance, supply-chain stability and cost-benefit analysis to strike a balance between cost-efficiency and guest experience. “This

allows us to offer high-quality, scalable solutions that meet brand expectations and operational realities.”

She adds that, based on executive housekeeper input, Coast eliminated non-essential decorative bedding such as scarves and pillows, which guests remove because they believe they’re unnecessary or unsanitary. As a result, guests approve of the cleaner-looking rooms and fewer cluttered surfaces.

Additionally, Zhang says Willowest helps operators manage their budgets through volume bundling and planning programs; advising on mix-and-match strategies (e.g., luxury duvet covers paired with practical fitted sheets); and helping track laundry-related ROI and replacement cycles. “Cost is never just a number – it’s a strategy.” ♦

detergents and processes that clean effectively at lower temperatures, helping us reduce water and energy use.”

**REACTING TO ALLERGENS**

Ghandour says guests are increasingly sensitive to allergens or are concerned

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Milnor’s V-Series open-pocket cylinder Washer-Extractors range from 40-160 lb capacities.

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**MORE PRODUCTION. LESS CONSUMPTION.**

It's no longer science fiction, artificial intelligence (AI) has quietly moved from experimental pilot projects to centre-stage of modern hospitality. Around the world, hotels are discovering that AI is not only a powerful tool for delivering deeply personalized guest experiences, but also a game-changer for streamlining operations, reducing costs and anticipating guest needs before they've expressed them.

### PERSONALIZATION AT SCALE

Hospitality has always thrived on personal touch, but in a digital era where travellers compare their hotel stay to the responsiveness of their smartphone apps, meeting those expectations is a tall order. AI-powered tools are closing that gap, offering personalization at a scale that was once impossible while simultaneously freeing up hotel staff so that they can focus less on menial tasks and more time on guest-facing work in order to provide warm, personal experiences.

"AI should be an enabler, creating capacity for our people so they can focus on curating better experiences for guests," says Anthony Capuano, president & CEO of Marriott International.

Gone are the days when after-hours inquiries went unanswered until morning. Intelligent chatbots — integrated into hotel websites, apps

# FROM TO DEL

Smart tech is re-def  
experience and ho

BY ERIC

# DATA LIGHT

Defining the guest  
hotel operations

ALISTER

and even WhatsApp — are now fielding questions, confirming bookings and suggesting services in real time. Whether a guest wants to know if the pool is heated, book a late spa appointment or request extra pillows, AI can handle it instantly and politely, any time of day or night.

The real magic happens when AI taps into past booking history, loyalty profiles and even dining habits to make suggestions that feel intuitive.

### OPERATIONAL OPTIMIZATION

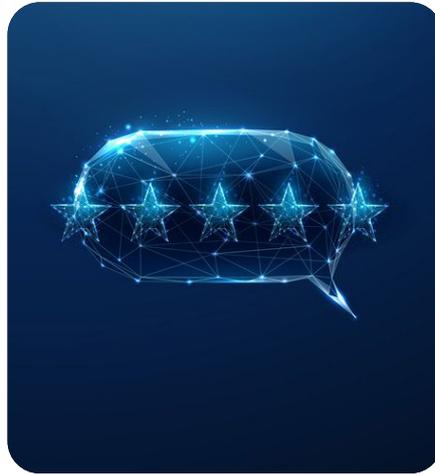
While AI dazzles on the front-end, its less glamorous — but equally transformative — role is in operational optimization. Behind the scenes, algorithms are working around the clock to keep occupancy high, maintenance timely and resource use efficient.

### DYNAMIC PRICING

Revenue management has long been an art form, but AI is making it more of a science. AI-driven dynamic pricing systems can analyze market demand, competitor rates, local events and historical patterns to adjust room prices in real time. This ensures hotels capture maximum revenue during peak demand and remain competitive when bookings slow.

### PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE

Few things sour a guest experience faster than a malfunctioning air-conditioner in midsummer or a lift that's suddenly out of order. AI-powered



predictive maintenance systems analyze sensor data to detect subtle performance changes in equipment before a failure occurs. By identifying these early warning signs, maintenance teams can intervene proactively, avoiding costly downtime and preserving the guest experience.

### **ENERGY MANAGEMENT**

With sustainability a growing priority for both travellers and operators, AI-driven energy management is delivering significant savings. These systems learn occupancy patterns and adjust lighting, heating and cooling accordingly, ensuring comfort when rooms are in use and efficiency when they're not. It's an eco-friendly win-win: reduced carbon footprint and lower utility bills.

### **FACIAL RECOGNITION**

AI-powered facial recognition allows guests to bypass paperwork and key cards entirely, and allowing them to head straight to their room within moments of arrival. Combined with mobile key technology, this not only speeds up the process but also appeals to guests who prefer minimal contact.

### **DIGITAL CONCIERGE SERVICES**

Once in-room, digital concierge systems — often voice activated — can handle a host of requests, from ordering extra towels to booking a table at a nearby restaurant. By integrating with local business directories and event listings, these AI concierges can offer personalized itinerary suggestions, helping guests discover hidden gems and plan their days without ever visiting the front desk.

Hotel Communication Network (HCN), the Ottawa-based maker of AI-powered hotel in-room tablets is taking the digital concierge a step further; the company recently unveiled the world's first AI concierge that looks and sounds like a real human. Unveiled at an exclusive demo held at the NACO Summit, HCN's first human-looking AI concierge demonstrated holding natural conversations with guests to provide commonly requested in-room services. The service will be made available to HCN partnered hotels through a subsidized model that helps make HCN's cutting-edge platform more accessible for hoteliers.

### **FEEDBACK TO FORESIGHT**

Hotels have always collected guest feedback, but AI is transforming this from a reactive process into a proactive strategy.

### **SENTIMENT ANALYSIS**

Advanced AI tools can analyze vast amounts of online reviews, survey responses, and social media mentions to detect patterns in guest sentiment. If multiple guests mention slow Wi-Fi in the same wing, for example, the system flags it instantly, enabling immediate corrective action.

### **BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS**

Beyond feedback, AI can monitor and interpret guest behaviour — how they use facilities, what amenities they book and even how often they return. This intelligence helps hoteliers adjust offerings, re-design spaces or introduce services that align with evolving guest preferences.

### **BARRIERS TO ENTRY**

For independent hotels and small chains, the thought of integrating AI can seem daunting. However, many of today's AI tools are cloud-based, subscription-driven and require minimal IT infrastructure. A property can start with a simple website chatbot or AI-driven pricing tool and scale up as benefits become clear.

What's important is to approach AI adoption with a clear objective — whether it's increasing direct bookings, improving operational efficiency or enhancing guest satisfaction — and to choose solutions that integrate smoothly with existing systems.

### **THE HUMAN TOUCH**

While AI is re-shaping hospitality, it's not replacing the heart of it: human connection. Instead, AI handles the repetitive, time-consuming tasks, freeing staff to focus on higher-value, guest-facing moments.

In the years ahead, the most successful hotels will be those that blend the precision and efficiency of AI with the warmth and creativity of human hospitality. The future of hotels isn't humans or machine, it's humans and machine, working together to deliver services that feel effortless, personal and unforgettable.

"We're using AI to enhance the guest stay, but it's not about replacing human connection," says Mark Weinstein, Chief Marketing Officer at Hilton. "The future is technology that augments hospitality, not removes the human touch." ♦



DECOR & DESIGN

The secret to contemporary banquet hall and hotel conference centre design is adaptability. Flexible spaces allow for customization — in style, in lighting, in acoustics — depending on the number of people expected to attend.

Lesley Wong, owner & lead designer of Markham, Ont.-based Lesley Wong Interiors Inc., says hotels need to design with flexibility in mind when it comes to banquet halls and conference rooms. “One key strategy is keeping the foundation of the space neutral yet sophisticated,” she explains. “That gives the venue the ability to support a wide variety of occasions — weddings, galas, business functions — without requiring significant setup changes or decor overhauls.”

Wong advises hotels to invest in durable, high-quality finishes that can withstand frequent turnover, as well as lighting systems that can shift the mood of the room instantly. It’s also critical to plan for storage options as linens, chairs, amplifiers and other audio-visual gear that needs to be swapped out for different events.

## CELEBRATE *in Style*

Hotel banquet hall and conference room designs set the stage for every event

BY JENNY FEBBRARO

With regard to storage, Wong says that modular furniture helps to re-jig a space quickly. “Stackable chairs, nesting tables, and lightweight staging all contribute to that efficiency,” says Wong. “Flexibility is everything. Modular furniture allows teams to quickly re-configure a space for different event formats – whether it’s a theater-style seminar in the morning, a cocktail hour in the afternoon, or a plated dinner at night.” She explains that the goal is to reduce the time and labour it takes to re-set a room, which not only helps the staff but also allows for more clients to rent the space throughout the day.

Furniture should also be easy to clean with materials that are light and easy to re-arrange. For colours and style, Wong says hotels need neutral colours that work with a variety of events, minimal patterns, and durable flooring. Carpet is not recommended as it’s a challenge to keep clean and, Wong explains, can add to an out-of-date look. “Modern banquet spaces

are moving away from overly ornate decor toward cleaner lines, softer textures, and more natural materials that feel timeless but elevated,” she explains.

Kathryn Gaysinsky of Richmond Hill, Ont.-based De Style Design notes that today’s banquet halls and conference centres should be updated with multiple lighting options, not just traditional, overhead lighting. “Lighting is a huge component of the design of this kind of space, especially LED lighting with various colour rendering controls or CRI index,” she says. “A space should be thought of in terms of tiers or areas.”

Gaysinsky explains that a formal wedding reception, for example, would have candle lit table settings and lower lighting with a spotlight on the food, brighter lights at the entry way, and overhead lights for daytime.

The initial investment might be significant, but that it pays off over time, says Gaysinsky. “You want to invest in the proper systems for lighting and tech controls,” she notes. “You should also think of the bathrooms as an extension of the space. Make sure vanities have proper lighting that illuminate the face properly. It should be soft and curated.”

Over the years, the biggest shift in banquet or conference



hall design is integrated technology. “We’re seeing the integration of high-performance AV infrastructure right into the design,” says Wong. “Planners expect plug-and-play capability for presentations, video streaming, and hybrid events.” Ceiling-mounted projectors, discreet built-in speakers, and acoustic treatments are now becoming standard for these spaces.

At the same time, the technology should be a seamless experience for guests. Gaysinsky says that different audio/visual people should be able to operate the system as well. “Tech should be easy to use, not something you have to figure out over a clunky screen. Have an iPad controller or laptop to see what is being viewed,” she explains. “And as for design, don’t put the AV closet around a corner where the projection can’t be seen.” Roller blinds should also be installed if the banquet hall has windows because an important consideration is glare from sunlight or other sources.

For large event spaces, Gaysinsky also recommends

multiple screens. “If you are doing a huge banquet or event, you need at least four coordinated screens,” she explains. “You don’t want people in faraway spots craning their neck or becoming disengaged because they are hard to see.”

In addition, Gaysinsky notes that the entire space requires an acoustic overview to check for noise absorption. “You need to assess whether echoing sounds from the microphone are being absorbed by the ceiling tiles,” she says. “There are also certain flooring products, such as luxury vinyl tiles, that come with an acoustic underlay would help minimize the click of high heels and unwanted noise.” For this reason, Gaysinsky recommends outsourcing this job to an audio expert.

Finally, Gaysinsky also says that elegance can be added with hidden screens. “The space should have a calming ambiance, even as a banquet hall,” she says. “Sometimes screens can be disguised as a picture with a nice frame – you wouldn’t immediately recognize it as a screen.”

Attention to these kinds of small details can lead to increased event rentals, say both designers, something that every hotel hopes for. ♦

# POP, SIP, *Savour*

Hotels turn pop-up events  
into lasting impressions

BY DEEPI HARISH



Once considered a novelty, pop-up events have become a powerful strategy in the hospitality playbook, offering hotels a fresh way to win over guests. As consumer appetites shift towards immersive experiences, hotels are tapping into the pop-up model to bring energy, exclusivity and innovation to their food-and-beverage programs. From seasonal tasting menus and chef collaborations to culturally themed takeovers, these short-term concepts do more than open the doors for partnerships.





TARA NEWELL



Bisha Hotel

“Pop-ups allow hotels to break out of the traditional mould and show up unexpectedly and creatively. They give us the freedom to be nimble and community-driven, in a way that feels fun, time-sensitive and buzzworthy,” says John Granger, CEO of The Drake Hotel.

This philosophy comes to life in The Drake’s approach to programming, where storytelling, culinary collaboration and community impact converge. “One of our most successful pop-ups was The Drake x Organic Ocean Wild Salmon Dinner. We brought together four acclaimed chefs for a five-course meal that celebrated Canada’s wild salmon and supported re-generative salmon programs,” says Granger. “It’s a great example of how a hotel can host a memorable event that blends hospitality and purpose.”

Other hotels are leaning into pop-ups not only to stand out but to deepen guest engagement in a saturated market. At the Bisha Hotel in Toronto, general manager Aaron Harrison sees these activations as a way to stay fresh and relevant. “For locals, pop-ups become must-visit, shareable city moments,” he says. “For travellers, they offer a surprising twist that turns a routine hotel stay into a memorable experience.” Harrison emphasizes the importance of aligning the pop-up with the guest experience. Whether catering to business travellers, weekenders or vacationing families, the activation should feel like a natural extension of their stay.

At the Fairmont Royal York, pop-ups enhance the guest experience by bringing the city’s culture inside the hotel. “It’s an unexpected amenity. Plus, it’s a way to experience the local scene without leaving the hotel,” says Edwin Frizzell, general manager of the hotel and regional VP, Accor Central Canada. One standout was a winter pop-up in the hotel’s Clockwork Courtyard: an immersive alpine-inspired



Bisha Hotel



Fairmont Royal York

experience featuring chalet-style decor, seasonal cocktails and locally sourced comfort cuisine. “What made it shine was the transformation of a familiar space into something enchanting,” says Frizzell. With a focus on sustainability, seasonal ingredients and Canadian touches, the activation resonated with both locals and travellers, driving high engagement across social media, press and repeat visits.

Social media has become a driver of pop-up success, helping hotels amplify their message. “It allows us to build anticipation, highlight visual storytelling elements of the dining experience, and tap into the power of user-generated content,” says Ashwin Mathur, hotel manager at Shangri-La Toronto. Influencer partnerships —especially with local food and lifestyle voices — also play a key role in sparking interest and visibility.

Frizzell agrees. “From the moment we ideate a pop-up, we’re already thinking about how it will live in the digital space — visually, narratively and emotionally.”

At the Bisha Hotel, activations are designed with content in mind. “It’s one of our main platforms for boosting engagement and driving both awareness and revenue,” says Harrison.

Granger echoes this sentiment. “Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow us to create cultural touchpoints that live far beyond the physical activation. It’s not just about visibility, it’s about storytelling and brand cohesion across every touchpoint.”

While pop-ups spotlight crave-worthy dishes or experiences, they also serve as an entry point for guests to discover everything a hotel has to offer. Though temporary by nature, these activations act as a long-term strategy to build brand loyalty and returning guests. For example, The Drake launched a gourmet hot dog pop-up this summer, timed to coincide with the debut of its broader seasonal menu. It’s

a strategic move to draw attention and encourage guests to engage with the hotel’s full dining offerings.

Behind the scenes, successful pop-ups start with a clear purpose. Mathur notes that whether the goal is to showcase in-house talent, test a

new concept or strengthen community ties, planning with intention is key. “Think beyond opening day,” he advises. “The best pop-ups create ripple effects, from social media buzz to long-term guest loyalty.”

Harrison emphasizes the importance of alignment with the guest experience. “At Bisha, we draw inspiration from our rooftop views, seasonal shifts and the energy of the local culture,” he says. “A great pop-up shouldn’t just be Instagrammable, it should feel meaningful, memorable and rooted in the spirit of the hotel and its surroundings.”

Echoing that sentiment, Frizzell draws attention to the importance of starting with a clear ‘why.’ Every detail, from concept to execution, should reflect a core message or guest insight. Cross-departmental collaboration is essential, and agility is a must. “You need to be ready to pivot based on feedback,” he says. Partnering with local chefs, artists and producers adds authenticity and deepens community connections. Ultimately, Frizzell believes a pop-up should be treated like a performance: it should spark emotion, create lasting memories and give guests something to talk about long after it’s gone. ♦



# THE BEST IS YET TO COME

After a challenging year, GM Garrett Turta and his team are focused on re-building for the future

BY ROSANNA CAIRA

**L**ike many hoteliers, Garrett Turta got his first taste of the hotel business when, as a teenager, he performed a bunch of odd jobs at his father's hotel. "I remember my dad asking what I wanted to do, and I said I liked working in the hotel. After highschool, I went to SAIT in Calgary for Hotel and Restaurant Administration, and the rest, as they say, is history."

By the time Turta struck out on his own, he landed at the front desk of Vancouver's Pan Pacific Hotel. "Seeing how a large hotel operated was exciting and sparked my interest in the industry. I also liked the interaction with guests from around the world," he says.

For the past two years, the native of Yorkton, Sask., has been at the helm of the fabled 397-room Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge in scenic Alberta. "What makes this hotel unique is its setting in over 700 acres in the heart of a National Park. It's not a traditional resort under one roof; we have several buildings and log cabins spread across the resort. The wildlife, golf course, and outdoor wellness experiences all add to its uniqueness."

It's been a challenging year for the hotelier and his hotel. "The biggest challenge was closing due to the Jasper wildfires last year. We evacuated 2,500 people in 90 minutes and the resort was shut down for 90 days. Now, we're re-building some of the structures we lost. We've had to operate in temporary locations, and some departments will continue to work this way for the next few years."

It's been a challenging time, but Turta couldn't be prouder of his team. "The team is committed to the future of the hotel, our guests, and this destination. With renovations underway, we're re-positioning the resort, and I can honestly say the best is still ahead."

The team's mission is deceptively simple, says the father of twin boys: "Make Special Happen." "We believe true luxury is time away, time together, and time well spent. We want every guest to feel the difference here, to feel like their experience was not just relaxing or beautiful, but truly meaningful. It's not about doing more, it's about creating the conditions that leave a lasting impression. It's about curating time, space, and togetherness."

With a team of more than 750 associates in the summer and 450 in the winter, Turta says "it takes a village," explaining most of his staff also live on property. "There's great work ahead to finalize renovations over the next year and elevate service even further. We continue working closely with our ownership, our brand, and Parks Canada on re-building the resort post-wildfires."

Beyond the physical renovations, one of the biggest projects on the horizon is the full-scale re-positioning of the resort. "We're re-imagining the entire guest experience — from service standards to programming, F&B, and how we tell the story of this place. It's about honouring the history and legacy of the lodge while evolving to meet the expectations of today's luxury traveller. ♦



## QUICK QUIPS

**How do you differentiate yourself from the rest of the pack?** "Know who you are in the market. Don't try to be something you're not. Instead, focus on being the best version of what you are, and success will follow."

**Service philosophy:** "Right the first time, every time. We strive for this daily and also constantly look for ways to improve. Our competition never rests and neither can we."

**Stress busters:** "Getting outside is essential: I run, bike, hike, or golf. Even just going for a drive helps."

# Checking In

HOSTED BY ROSANNA CAIRA

Check out the *Checking In* podcast to listen to conversations between editor and publisher Rosanna Cairra and hotel industry leaders speaking about the issues impacting the dynamic hotel industry.

## HOTELIER



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