

Wednesday, July 29, 2009

Hotel service improves despite cost cuts

By Gary Stoller, USA TODAY

Hotels are doing a better job satisfying customers during the recession, despite cutting staff, service and amenities, an annual survey shows.

J.D. Power and Associates' latest survey of guests, out Tuesday, shows their satisfaction with four of six types of hotels increased in the last year: upscale, midscale full service, midscale limited service and economy/budget.

Guest satisfaction with luxury hotels remained stable and decreased slightly at extended-stay properties.

The survey came from online responses from more than 66,000 guests who stayed in a hotel June 2008-May 2009.

The responses came as hotels cut costs because fewer people are traveling in the down economy. Occupancy at U.S. hotels through June was down 11% from the first six months of last year, according to Smith Travel Research numbers.

Microtel Inns & Suites ranked as the top economy/budget hotel for guest satisfaction in the J.D. Power survey for an eighth-consecutive year.

Other repeat winners: Embassy Suites, for the third year in a row in the upscale category, and Drury Inn & Suites, for the fourth-consecutive year among midscale limited-service properties.

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts ranked No. 1 in guest satisfaction among luxury hotels and received the highest score of any hotel in any category.

"While the current economic situation has caused us to make some changes to our operations, we have made a promise to never compromise our highly personalized, always-consistent service," says Jim FitzGibbon, Four Seasons' president of worldwide hotel operations.

Hilton Garden Inn ranked first among midscale full-service hotels. Staybridge Suites ranked highest among extended-stay properties.

John Tschohl, president of the Service Quality Institute, which provides customer-service training for companies, says he doesn't dispute that guest satisfaction is improving in a weak economy and applauds hotels ranked at the top of the J.D. Power survey.

"It doesn't mean they're perfect or they can't do a whole lot better," Tschohl says. "But these chains are doing a good job of focusing on customer service."

Jeff Weinstein, editor in chief of Hotels magazine, says some hotels have improved service in a bid to create guest loyalty in a bad economy.

TOP 3 HOTELS IN GUEST SATISFACTION, BY CATEGORY

Luxury

- 1 Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts
- 2 The Ritz-Carlton
- 3 Fairmont Hotels & Resorts

Upscale

- 1 Embassy Suites Hotels
- 2 Wyndham Hotels & Resorts
- 3 Omni Hotels

Midscale full service

- 1 Hilton Garden Inn
- 2 Hyatt Place
- 3 Courtyard

Midscale limited service

- 1 Drury Inn & Suites
- 2 SpringHill Suites
- 3 Hampton Inn/Suites

Economy/budget

- 1 Microtel Inns & Suites
- 2 Red Roof Inn
- 3 Days Inn

Extended stay

- 1 Staybridge Suites
- 2 Homewood Suites
- 3 Residence Inn