

SPECIAL ORDER

These days, breakfasts and in-room dining are all about elevating the experience with an extra-personal touch

BY SARAH B. HOOD

WE know breakfast is the most important meal of the day — especially for hotel guests. Although many guests would rather “grab and go” than linger over a leisurely meal, most do expect to be offered something enjoyable first thing in the morning. In the U.S., the American Hotel & Lodging Association finds that 62 per cent of hotels now offer complimentary breakfast.

Room-service expectations are also changing. Guests want healthy options, local colour and the ability to customize their order — whether that means sauces on the side, gluten-free pasta or a vegan dessert.



*Honey Salt's
assorted pastries*

A QUESTION OF CHOICE

The days of standardization have passed; today's guests want to tailor every experience to their own particular liking. It's no surprise that consumer research from McCain Foodservice reveals that three-quarters of hotel guests prefer a breakfast buffet to à la carte service.

"For guests who stay at a hotel for multiple days, the breakfast buffet can get monotonous," says Greg Boyer, director of Marketing for McCain Foodservice. "Altering the menu each day is a great way to bust breakfast boredom — but it's important it doesn't burden the kitchen."

Boyer points to McCain's Twisted Potatoes and Shredded Hash Browns as cost-effective and flexible options that allow hoteliers to create a variety of offerings. For example, Twisted Potatoes can be tossed with cheese, fresh peppers, ham and sausage, while the Hash Browns can be topped with melted cheese, green onions and bacon.

Guests are also increasingly embracing the zero-waste movement and supporting the reduction of single-use plastics. To this end, Parmalat's new Astro Fresh Yogourt Dispenser is a guest-pleaser that reduces food and packaging waste. The bag-in-box refrigerated system uses six-kg bags (about 35 servings), so product stays fresh. Paired with fruits and cereals, it allows guests to create custom yogurt parfaits and it eliminates the chance of guests picking up extras to eat later.



JW MARRIOTT PARQ VANCOUVER & THE DOUGLAS, VANCOUVER

Vancouver is one of the first Canadian locations to feel the influence of U.S. trends — avocado toast is a prime example. Marion Harper Treskin, general manager of the recently opened JW Marriott Parq Vancouver and the Douglas, an Autograph Collection hotel, says avocado toast has become a

signature item for both in-room dining and the main breakfast dining room, Honey Salt.

For business guests, Harper Treskin says, fresh, healthy options are a must. "For a lot of people, it's hard to ensure they're getting choices that are nutrient-packed." This is leading to "a huge trend in juices and smoothies" as a breakfast replacement. "We're so lucky to have all the options from the Okanagan — the fresh fruits and berries."

Specific options for international travellers have also been introduced, such as an Asian breakfast menu that includes congee (a thick rice soup). "And, on our room-service [menu], we have a Japanese breakfast [featuring] salmon, miso and rice in a bento box."

In addition to being perceived as healthy choices, Pacific fish and seafood also tie into the desire to connect with ingredients. Smoked salmon on a bagel and Dungeness-crab Eggs Benedict are virtuous indulgences that spotlight local fare.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL MILNE (BREAKFAST GALETTE)

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BEST WESTERN PLUS SAWRIDGE SUITES, FORT MCMURRAY, ALTA.

“Years ago, a guest would have been happy with a standard continental breakfast. That isn’t the case at all,” says Paul Jones, general manager of Fort McMurray, Alta.’s Best Western Plus Sawridge Suites. “Now they want the options they can get in the grocery store — gluten-free options, almond and soy milks; they want to know what’s heart-smart.”

And, it’s not enough just to have it available, he points out; guests want to see their choices. “Best Western has a great breakfast program and they have the signage,” he says. “So instead of wasting it by pouring it out into the pitchers every day, we have tent cards on the buffet line so they can see what we have for gluten-free, cereal or milk.

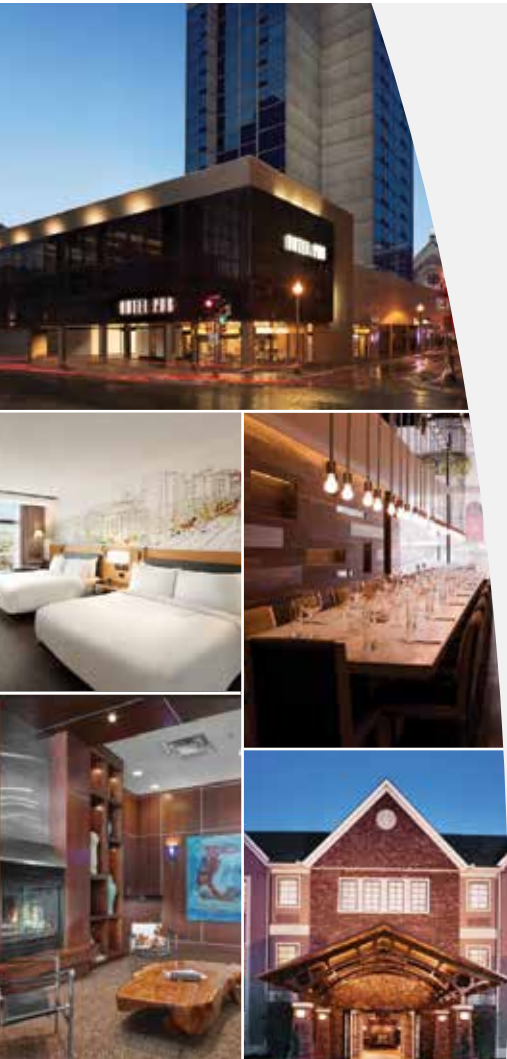
A choice of breads is also a selling point. “Everybody does bagels — we do bagels from scratch,” says Jones, because “if you offer them a positive breakfast experience, they’re back in

your dining room for dinner.”

In-room dining has also moved up in the world. “The guest doesn’t want someone showing up with a simple plate with a cover on it; they want that experience to be elevated. Everything right down to the plate presentation is just as important as it would be in the dining room,” he says. “[Guests] want to feel as though you’ve elevated that dining experience and customized it just for them.”

This means an extra level of training for staff who take room-service orders, so they can be as knowledgeable about the menu and all the options as any server in the main dining room.

They also need to know about the beverage selection, which should not only include standard major brands, but also a few local offerings. “They want to know about the craft beers,” Jones says, which goes back to elevating the dining experience. It’s all about the elevated experience and personalizing it to the individual guest.”



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HOTEL X TORONTO

Hotel X Toronto, which had its soft launch this spring, opted to outsource its foodservice operations to Toronto-based hospitality and entertainment group ByPeterandPauls.com, including the operation of its restaurants, event catering, room service and the Peregrine SkyBar.

“We are seeing comfort food [being popular with guests] because room service or in-room dining is

about comfort, privacy, intimacy and not getting out of bed if you don’t want to — but there’s a health twist to it,” says Yannis Paravalos, vice-president of Operations for the Hotel Division of ByPeterandPauls.com. For example, the hotel offers a classic club sandwich, but on gluten-free toast.

“Also, obviously everybody has graduated from room service to in-room dining, with multiple courses rather than getting your whole order

at once. We will be offering two courses and even the dessert, if the client prefers that,” he says.

Paravalos notes the menus are customized to account for dietary restrictions and food preferences. “The chefs are always willing to cook something specifically for the client. For example, risotto, which traditionally has butter, we will make it with olive oil. Giving [guests] what they want makes them feel special.”

“The whole concept of Hotel X Toronto is putting emphasis on wellness,” explains the hotel’s director of Sales & Marketing, Celso Thompson. “One of the things that we are pushing for is answering the request for protein shakes with normal whey or vegan protein. In our sports centre, there’s also going to be a juice bar.”

To cater to guests on the go, the hotel offers Nespresso Café. “As the bar rises higher on breakfasts and room service, there’s no telling yet how high it will go.” ♦

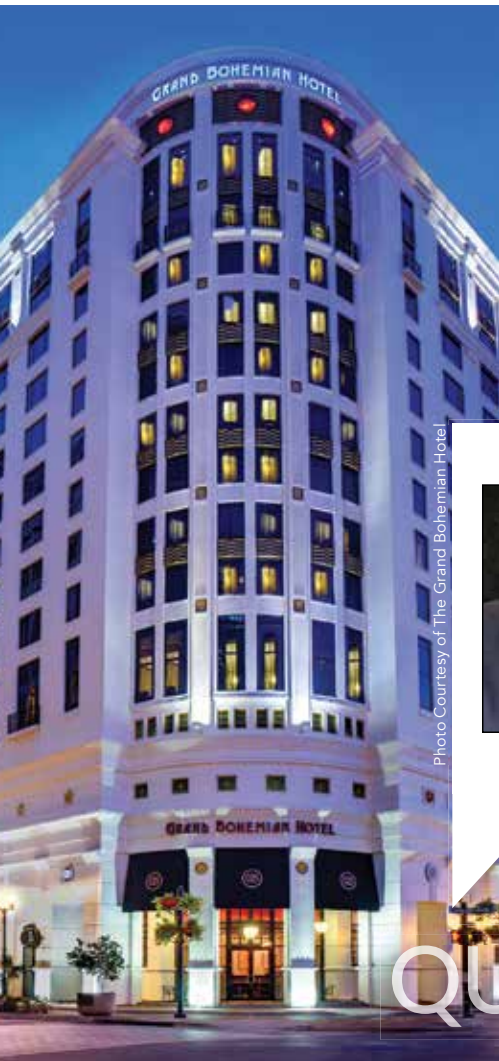


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