



HotelRunner

Hospitality Industry in 2026

Next-Gen Guest Experience with AI in Action

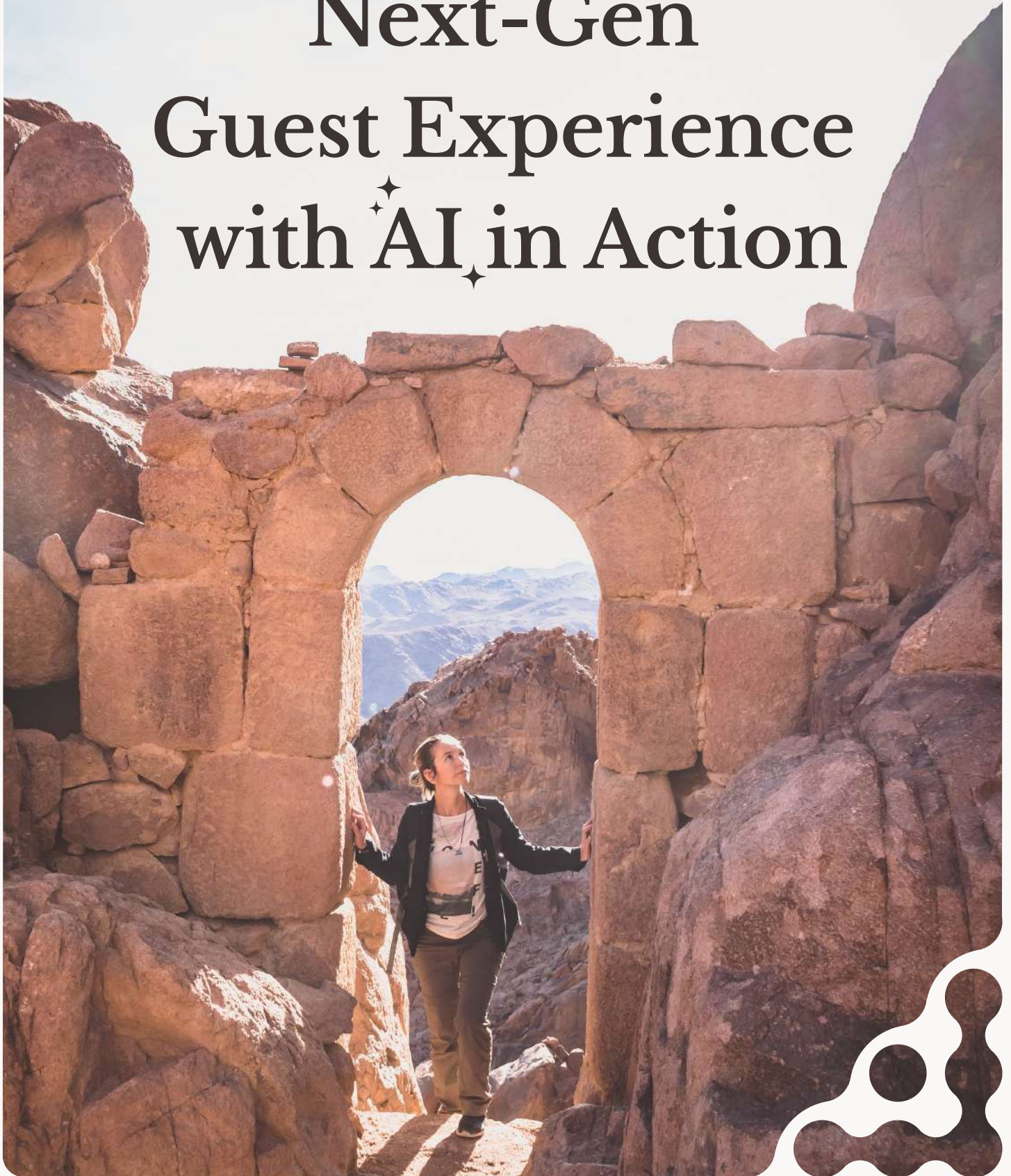


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Introduction

Over the past few years, AI has moved far beyond its status as an industry buzzword to become an essential part of daily life. No longer a distant promise, it now sits at the center of global innovation, fundamentally transforming business operations by redefining the future of every industry it touches, and the hospitality industry is no exception.

The hospitality industry is moving forward with AI at its core, and the pace of innovation means those who don't adopt will be left behind. This does not mean that letting AI take full control or replacing the human touch; it simply is a tool used to augment capabilities, filling gaps, and enhancing where human resources alone may fall short.

We explored how guest expectations are evolving over the coming year, especially with AI as a defining factor, and how the hospitality trends of 2026 will be shaped in response. To provide deeper insight, we conducted a survey of HotelRunner users, 145 hospitality professionals across 5 property types, gathering their predictions and perspectives on the trends set to define the industry.

The momentum of AI addressing the specific shortcomings of hoteliers, while also meeting the new generation of guest needs, is reshaping how experiences are created, delivered, and remembered. Guest expectations are ever evolving, influencing and redefining the hospitality trends as they shift. The gap between what guests expect and what hoteliers can provide is shrinking with seamless systems powered by AI.



Guest Expectations and Behaviour in 2026

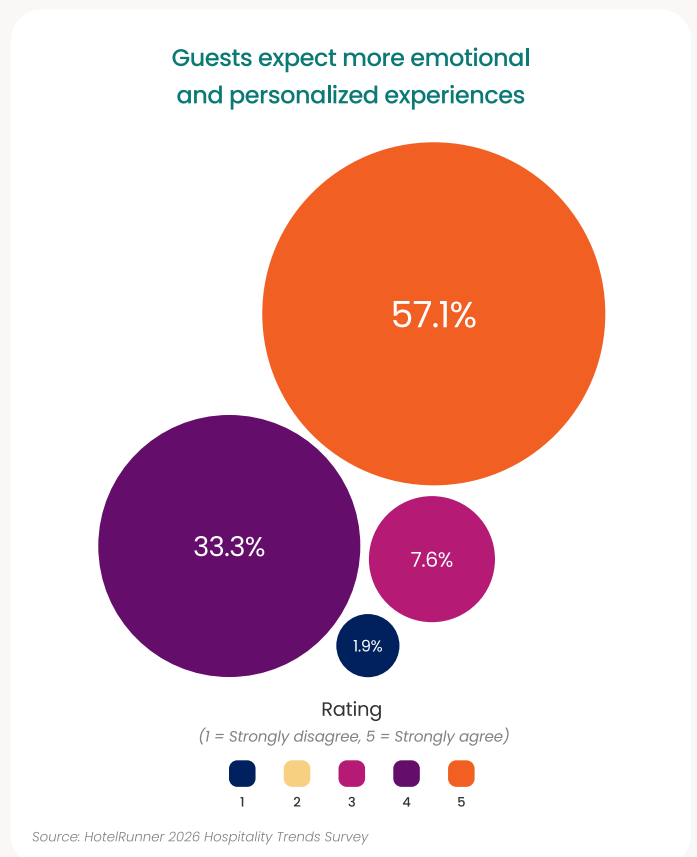
57.1%
of hoteliers strongly agree that guests are expecting more emotional experiences¹

The hospitality industry is on a path shaped by guest expectations. This unwavering commitment to exceptional service is a key force driving the industry's expansion, with the global market projected to reach \$5.8 billion by 2027². In 2026, guest behavior is undergoing one of its most profound transformations yet, taking the world of hospitality by a whirlwind.

Given the continuous evolution of guest expectations and behaviors, hoteliers must recalibrate their strategies to keep pace with the shifting dynamics of the modern travel landscape. According to recent research, the following guest expectations and behaviours are going to determine 2026 hospitality trends:

Emotionally fulfilling travel experiences

Travel is not just about the destination; it is about the journey. In 2026, shifting guest behaviors show a clear turn toward inner journeys, with travelers seeking emotional fulfillment that will nourish their minds and souls on their trips. Their itineraries now extend far beyond sightseeing and rest, shifting toward personal passions, enriching activities, and opportunities to connect. 57.1% of hoteliers surveyed strongly agree that guests are expecting more emotional experiences.



¹HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

²Global Newswire Hospitality Global Market Report 2023



This desire for meaning and feeling is driving demand for memorable experiences that help guests reconnect with themselves and the people they care about most. According to research done by Hilton 48% of team members reported a rise in multigenerational travel, with families of three or more generations coming together to strengthen bonds and share deeply meaningful moments during their trips³.

This need for emotional fulfillment affects their choice of accommodation as well, making guests opt for places with strong, authentic branding and a reputation for remarkable guest service.

³ Hilton Generation Permutations: The Expanded (and Playful) Family Vacation

⁴ Allianz Summer 2025 Vacation Confidence Index

Micro-getaways

Economic fluctuations and hybrid/remote work are changing travel habits, prompting people to take shorter vacations and splurge on small luxuries. According to Allianz's Summer 2025 Vacation Confidence Index, 72% of Americans express a strong desire to take a vacation, yet 51% report that financial constraints prevent them from doing so⁴. So rather than long luxurious vacations, travelers opt for trips of four days or less.

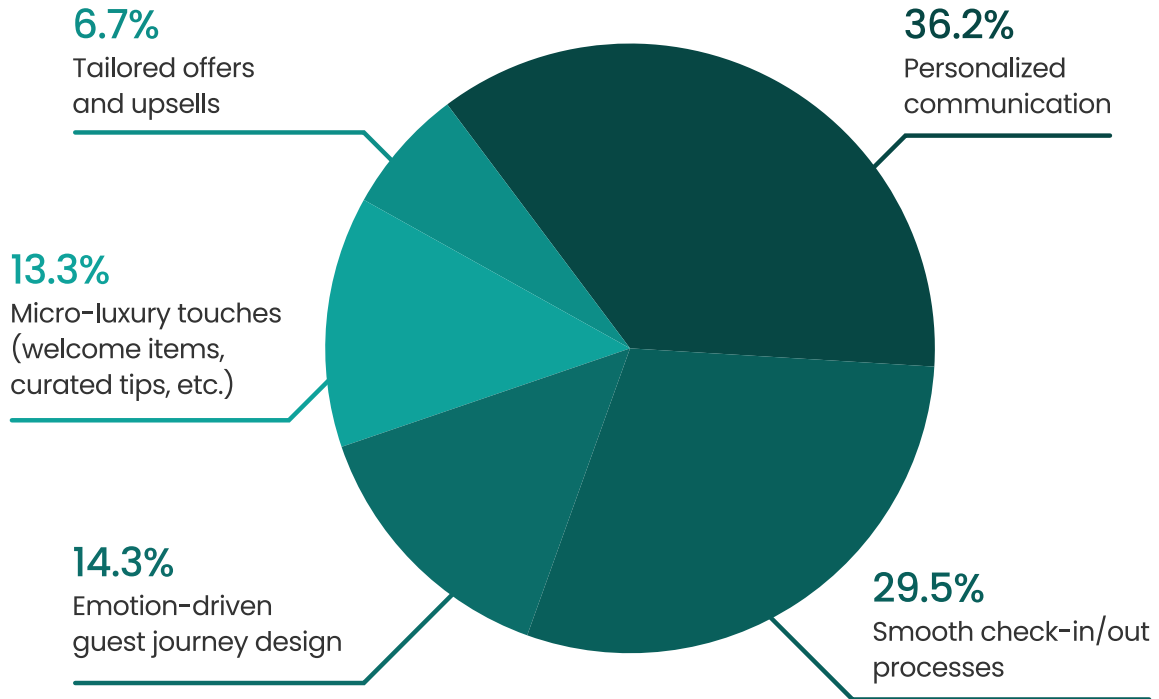
These micro-getaways deliver a sense of luxury, joy, and indulgence in a condensed timeframe, allowing travelers to recharge and create meaningful memories without committing to extended travel. These trips frequently take place on weekdays for hybrid or remote workers, or are bleisure trips, creating a growing need for accommodations that offer quiet, productive spaces for work.

Hyper-personalized experiences

Guests have rising expectations for experiences that feel uniquely tailored to them. Hyper-personalization is now woven into everyday life. From the content in their social media feeds to the music they listen to, nearly every daily experience is designed around their individual preferences.

So guests expect their stay to be personalized for their taste and preferences, their needs anticipated, and to be provided with thoughtful, individualized touches at every stage of their journey, especially if it isn't their first stay at that property.

Which guest experience element has become most important recently?



Source: HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

36.2% of hoteliers believe that personalized communication has become the most important guest expectation in recent years⁵. This shift reflects a broader desire for relevance and convenience: travelers gravitate toward properties that remember them and offer experiences that align with their interests.



⁵ HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

⁶ Hilton's 2026 Trends Report Hushpitality: Seeking Sweet Silence

AI-powered travel planning and assistance

In recent years, travelers have welcomed a new solution to travel planning. For many, travel planning is a hassle as they search the web trying to find the best accommodation, cheapest tickets, and create a fun and engaging itinerary, all of which is time-consuming and tiring.

The time spent on this process has been significantly shortened and made easier with the development of AI assistance in this area. According to recent data, 61% of travelers report finding AI tools valuable when planning their itineraries⁶.

Beyond simplifying the logistics, AI offers something travelers increasingly crave: **Personalization.**

Instead of generic recommendations, AI can interpret individual preferences, past behavior, and real-time data to suggest unique, meaningful experiences tailored to each traveler. This is going one step further with agentic AI, according to Skift and McKinsey's Remapping Travel with Agentic AI, it is the ideal way for complex, multistep travel workflows or for handling high volumes of repetitive yet personalized tasks⁷. As a result, travel planning stops being a stressor and becomes an easy step in the trip.



Data security

Data is one of the foremost decision-making points for companies across industries, with each of them in a race to get the most accurate and actionable insights. At the same time, modern travelers are becoming increasingly conscious of the information they share, afraid that their data will be misused. With their private information at risk of leaking, they are far more intentional about what they disclose both online and during their stay. This heightened awareness directly impacts the hospitality industry, where transparency around data collection, usage, and protection has become a critical guest expectation. As a result of this, guests are now increasingly preferring accommodations that will not only keep their data secure but also be transparent about how they utilize this data.

⁷ Skift New Report: Remapping Travel With Agentic AI

The Theme of 2026: Next-Gen Guest Experience with AI in Action

Improving guest experience is the number one priority for properties that want to differentiate themselves from the never-ending competition and create loyal guests. When a property places guest experience at the heart of its operations, it naturally becomes the preferred choice for discerning travelers. Therefore, properties that prioritize guest-centric innovation will set themselves apart by delivering experiences that are not only seamless and efficient but also emotionally resonant and memorable.

The ever-evolving and progressing guest expectations result in the constant need to follow and adapt to best suit the desires of travelers. Setting a standard is no longer a concept when that standard is in constant transformation. At the heart of this transformation must lie artificial intelligence, which, with its projected contribution of

\$15 trillion

to the global economy by 2030, is poised to redefine the operational and strategic frameworks of businesses across all sectors, including hospitality⁸.

⁸ EHL Insights Report Hospitality Outlook 2025



With the world moving at the pace of AI, one cannot catch up with expectations and create next-gen guest experiences without seamlessly integrating AI into their workflow.

This does not mean leaving AI to take the reins, but rather leveraging its capabilities to enhance and amplify what hoteliers already have. What hoteliers have is their irreplaceable human touch, empathy, intuition, and years of experience that no artificial intelligence can replicate.

Embracing AI strategically will not only meet the demands of the next-gen guests but also exceed them, transforming ordinary visits into unforgettable experiences and helping hoteliers position themselves at the forefront, standing alongside innovators of the hospitality industry.

Hospitality Trends of 2026

Key factors

- ▶ Storytelling
- ▶ Meaningful connections
- ▶ Sanctuary over extravagance

Digital storytelling

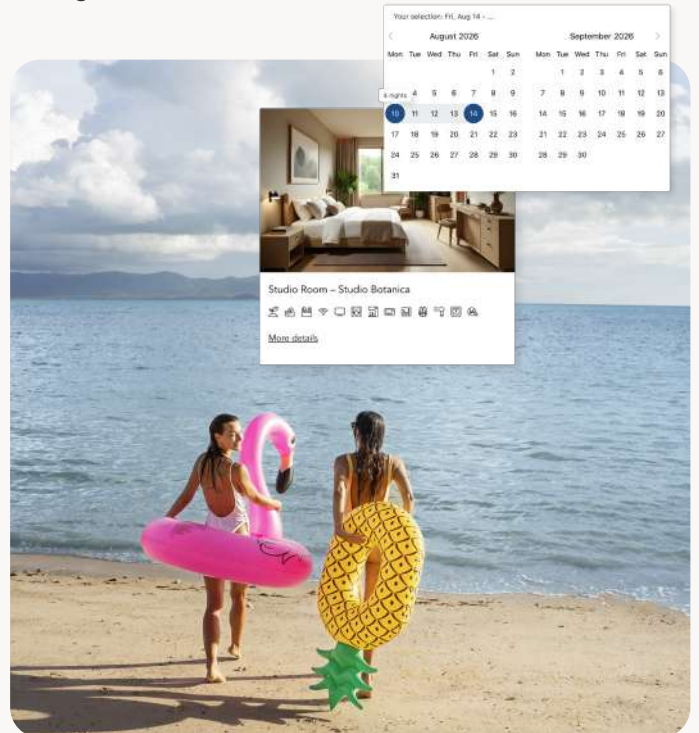
The hospitality industry is becoming more competitive every year, making it essential for every property to go beyond simply having a unique brand identity. According to Forbes, the key factors of 2026 will be storytelling, meaningful connections, and an emphasis on 'sanctuary over extravagance'⁹. So the real question is: What story does that brand tell, and what emotions does it evoke? Hotels are no longer just places to stay; they are storytellers.

Guests expect story-driven stays to create memorable moments, which can only be made possible by weaving narrative into design, service, communication, and digital presence with properties creating emotionally resonant moments that linger long after check-out.

⁹ Forbes Deep Luxury Is The Travel Trend That Will Set The Tone For 2026

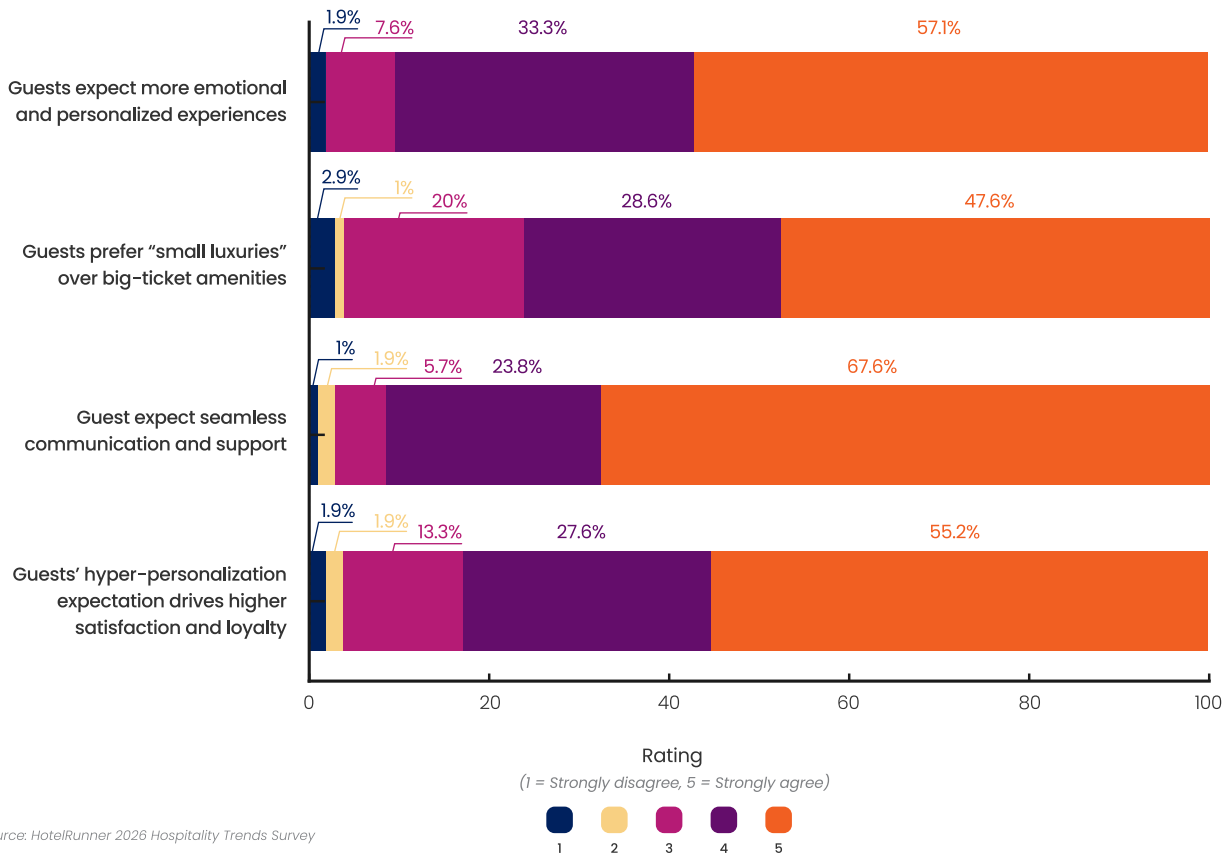
¹⁰ HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

HotelRunner helps create a narrative with its suite of products, including **Booking Engine, Website, and Guest Relationship Management**, unifying digital touchpoints so every interaction reinforces the brand story and deepens the emotional connection with guests.



Investing in digital marketing/storytelling is the second most important investment point of 2026, following right after the room or facility upgrades, which means that hoteliers plan to emotionally connect to their future guests in their own unique way to rise above the competition¹⁰. To create and enhance their narratives, hoteliers get the needed help from AI, pushing their creativity to create immersive experiences.

How would you rate the following statements regarding guest expectations in 2026?



Curated luxury experiences for shorter stays

There is a notable shift in traveler behavior as many guests now gravitate toward micro-getaways rather than extended vacations. Economic fluctuations and evolving work conditions play a significant role in this transition, yet the desire for meaningful, restorative escapes remains stronger than ever. Travelers are seeking short stays that offer curated indulgences and small, memorable luxuries without the time or cost commitment of long trips. In fact, 47.6% of hoteliers report that guests increasingly prefer small luxuries over big-ticket amenities, underscoring a growing demand for high-impact, experience-rich short stays¹¹. The most important point being that these

small luxuries are personalized for guests, making this stay stand out among the many short vacations they take. AI plays a critical role in enabling this hyper-personalization, with 55.2% of hoteliers agreeing that it drives higher satisfaction and loyalty¹². This service can range from offering premium amenities to personalized recommendations with AI, enabling hoteliers to anticipate and uniquely tailor to every visitor.

Data-driven upselling

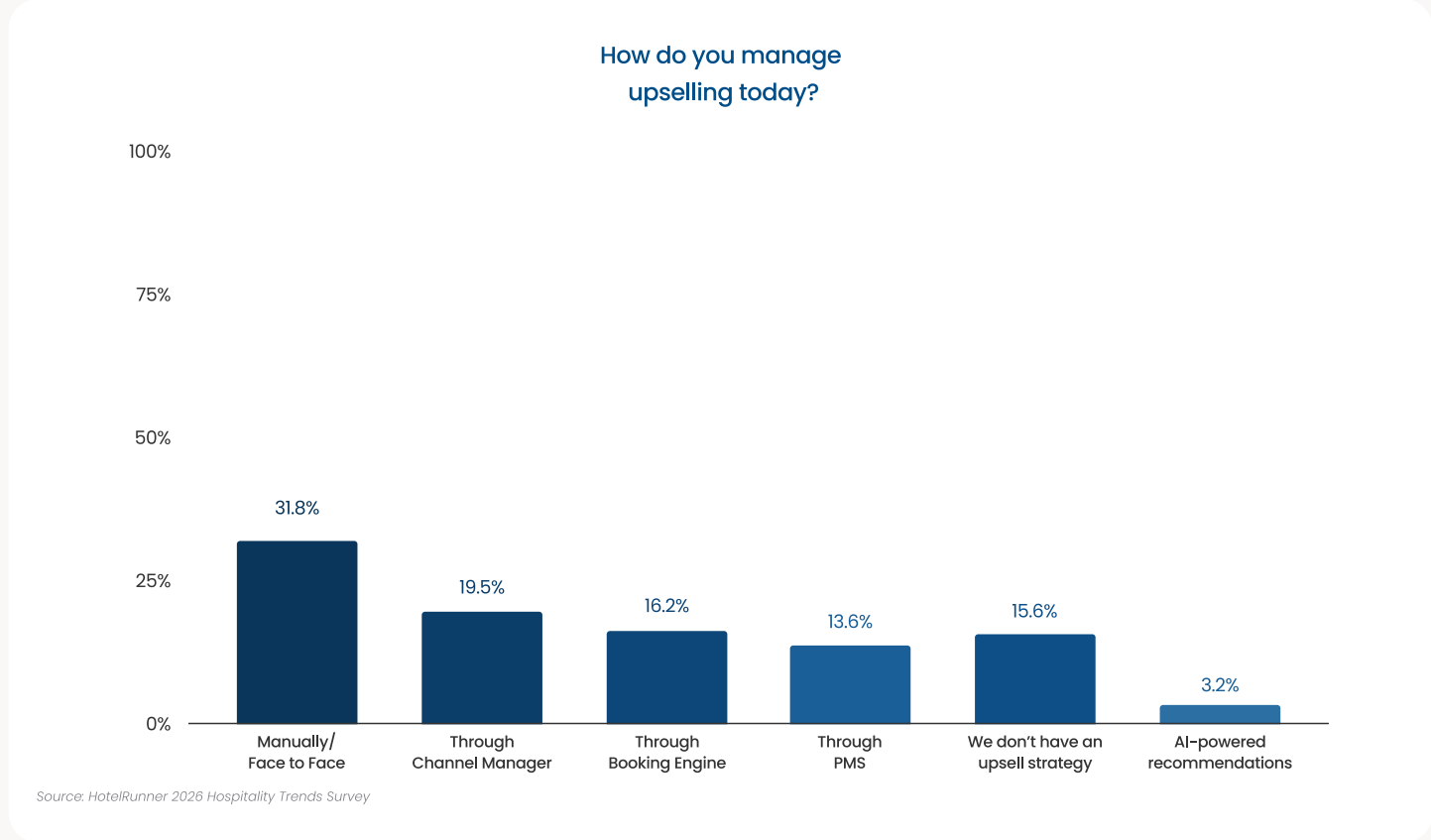
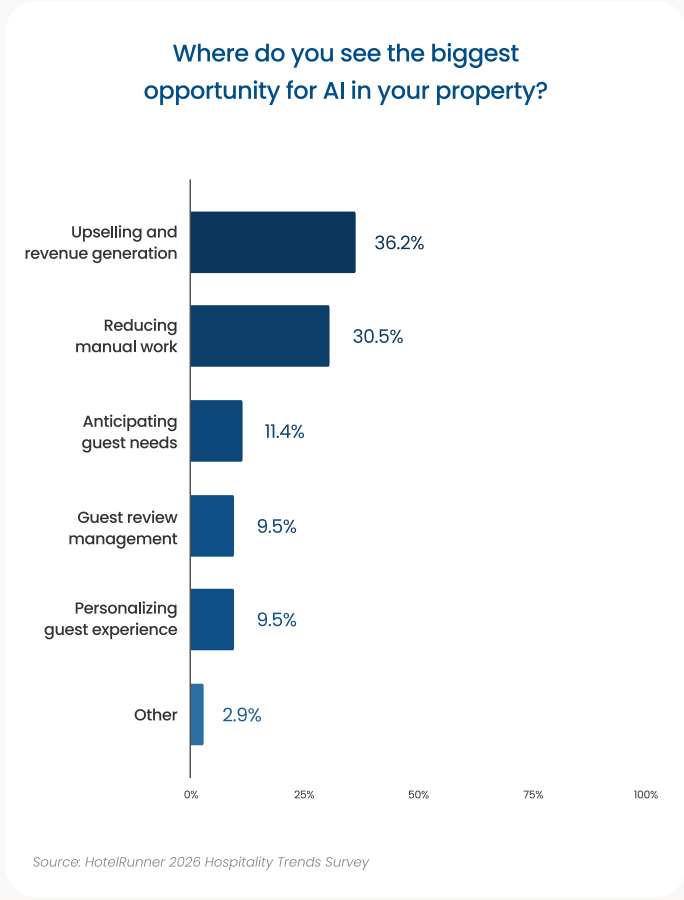
Today, AI is creating a full-circle impact across the travel experience, influencing every touchpoint. While travelers use AI to plan personalized, seamless getaways, hoteliers leverage it for guest

¹¹ HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

¹² HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

sentiment analysis, reputation management, dynamic pricing, and tailored recommendations. One of the most underutilized applications, however, is data-driven upselling, which will be a trend growing significantly in 2026. Despite 36.2% of hoteliers identifying upselling and revenue generation as the biggest opportunity for AI, only 3.2% currently use AI-powered recommendations to upsell, relying primarily on manual or in-person methods¹³.

Hyper-personalization is a guest expectation we see time and time again in which can only be made possible by anticipating preferences and behavior, offering personalized upgrades, add-ons, and experiences at the right time. Data-driven upselling creates tailored choices for travelers while enhancing hoteliers' revenue.



¹³ HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

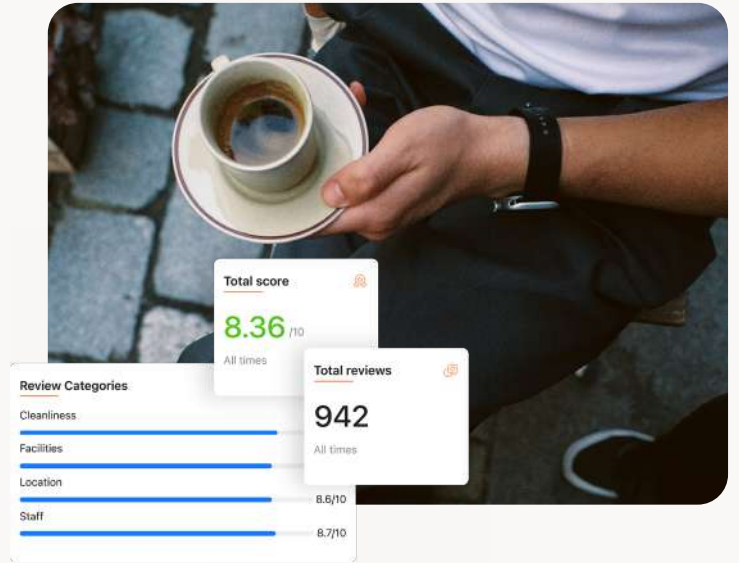
AI-powered operations & guest satisfaction increase

Hotel operations take significant time, organization, and manpower, and especially facing a shortage of skilled workers every year, streamlining these operations is quite a challenge. Many hoteliers found the answer in relying on AI for tasks ranging from reducing manual work to upselling.

27.3%

of hoteliers who use AI rely on it to manage two or more operational tasks, highlighting its growing role as a multifunctional support tool¹⁴.

Advanced AI solutions are set to transform every aspect of hotel management, with guest satisfaction emerging as the natural result. In 2026, this transformation will accelerate as more properties analyze real-time data signals, automating routine tasks and proactively responding to guest needs, resulting in smoother operations, faster service, and higher satisfaction. With this shift, more and more hoteliers turn towards products like **HotelRunner Review Center** to leverage AI and reduce operational workload that comes with answering reviews while delivering more satisfying guest experiences.



Privacy-first hospitality

Security within an accommodation is a baseline expectation, so essential that it is rarely discussed, yet always assumed. For guests, this expectation extends to their data as well. With travelers growing conscious about how their data is used, cybersecurity is making its way to the top of hoteliers' list of priorities. Therefore, not only should your property be cybersecure, but the tech vendors you choose to work with should be mindful of this topic.

One of the priorities of HotelRunner is to ensure the **highest standards of data security and compliance through GDPR-compliant infrastructure, ISO 27001-certified information security practices, PCI DSS adherence, AWS-based hosting, and secure HTTPS/SSL-protected websites and booking engines**. Accommodations that are seen as professional, modern, and reliable have plenty of things in common, including secure systems and transparent data policies.

Is your property ready for 2026?

Let's talk!

¹⁴ HotelRunner 2026 Hospitality Trends Survey

Founders' Note

The hospitality industry is entering an era where intelligence, autonomy, and real-time signals are transforming how businesses operate. Traditional systems relying on static rules and fragmented data are giving way to adaptive, agentic AI capable of making autonomous decisions that maximize revenue, optimize operations, and enhance guest experiences.

In this new era, the guest experience is elevated through AI and real-time data. Hotels can anticipate preferences and behavior, offering personalized upgrades, add-ons, and experiences at the right moment. Data-driven upselling not only enhances revenue but also provides guests with tailored, meaningful choices throughout their stay.

AI-powered operations further transform the guest journey. By analyzing real-time data signals, hotels can automate routine tasks, optimize staffing, and proactively respond to guest needs, resulting in smoother operations, faster service, and higher guest satisfaction. Autonomous supply allows AI agents to manage inventory, pricing, and distribution across channels dynamically. By continuously processing multi-dimensional signals such as demand trends, competitor activity, occupancy, and guest feedback, these agents create predictive and prescriptive business rules that respond instantly to market shifts.

The combination of autonomous finance, autonomous supply, and agentic AI establishes a new standard for operational efficiency and commercial intelligence. Businesses move from managing fragmented data manually to overseeing a self-optimizing ecosystem that maximizes revenue, reduces labor overhead, and delivers superior guest experiences.

As the industry moves through 2026, the focus is on building a connected, intelligent hospitality ecosystem. By embracing autonomy, leveraging real-time intelligence, and empowering AI-driven decision making, the sector can unlock unprecedented value and thrive together.



Ali Beklen & Arden Agopyan

Founders & Managing Partners of HotelRunner

Conclusion

Adapting to rising traveler expectations has always been what hospitality is about. This brings us to 2026, where the next generation of guest experience will be defined by the thoughtful integration of artificial intelligence. AI is no longer a buzzword; rather, it is making an undeniable impact on everyday life and business operations, pushing businesses to either evolve with it or risk falling behind.

Embracing this strategic advantage and combining it with the years' worth of industry experience and the authentic human element will set hoteliers apart from the competition in 2026.



HotelRunner is a global travel and hospitality technology platform building the digital and financial infrastructure of the travel industry. Its integrated solutions in operations, sales, connectivity, and revenue management help thousands of accommodations and travel agencies grow profitably and operate with data-driven precision. Through AI, automation, and embedded finance, HotelRunner is redefining how travel businesses connect, transact, and scale worldwide.

HotelRunner is a Visa Preferred Strategic Partner, Booking.com Premier Connectivity Partner and Best Overall Performing Partner, Expedia Group Preferred Connectivity Partner, Airbnb Preferred Software Partner, Agoda Strategic Partner, Oracle, Hotelbeds, trivago, and Google Hotel Ads strategic partner.



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Is your property ready for 2026?

Let's talk!



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