



LODGING LEADERS



SPRING BREAKS FOR HOMEBODIES: Staycations are a growing trend amid the coronavirus pandemic. Episode 312 of Lodging Leaders podcast explores the origin and evolution of the staycation and how hotels can capitalize on people's desire to get away from it all, even if it's just for one or two nights.

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312 | Spring Breaks for Homebodies: Staycations are a growing trend amid the coronavirus pandemic



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Ashley Ewing Parrott: The beautiful thing about a staycation is not only introducing your neighbor, if you will, to use your property, but partnerships with area businesses will truly be key to a successful and fulfilling guest experience over the next six to 12 months and throughout the future. Most hotels are still experiencing significantly lower demand, slower occupancy and the need for reduced labor models. So I would suggest that full-service and select-service hotels really embrace the idea of pushing that guest out into the neighborhood to really explore and have that kind of adventure.

Jon Albano: This is the Lodging Leaders podcast with Jon Albano and Judy Maxwell, session number 312.

Announcer: Welcome to the Lodging Leaders podcast, where top-performing hoteliers and hospitality industry experts share powerful insights and actionable advice to help you grow your portfolio. And now your host, Jon Albano.

Jon Albano: Hey, Lodging Leaders. Thank you so much for tuning in today. You can find the expanded multimedia report for this episode at lodgingleaders.com/312.

Spring Breaks for Homebodies: Staycations are a growing trend amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Twelve years ago, Merriam-Webster added the word 'staycation' to its online dictionary. In doing so, **the publisher** said it traced the word to a 2005 article in the Huntsville Times in Alabama.

The publisher noted that modern society might mistakenly think because the word is relatively new the concept of a staycation is also novel. But Merriam-Webster also found the word in a 1944 full-page ad selling beer in The Cincinnati Enquirer.

Though many in the hospitality industry might have different opinions on when staycation became a component of travel, there's no doubt the concept has evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Episode 312 of Lodging Leaders podcast explores the evolution of the staycation amid the coronavirus crisis and what hotels can do to attract people seeking a quick getaway in their own neighborhoods or nearby communities. We feature **Suzie Hall** of **The Cornerstone Collective** in Boise, Idaho, and **Ashley Ewing Parrott** of **AEP Consulting** in Memphis, Tennessee, hospitality designers and program planners who share how design and programming can generate new business and revenue over shorter lengths of stay.

(Promo) I want to take a quick break here to tell you about a new podcast we're launching this month. Next Gen in Lodging is a program featuring emerging leaders in the hospitality industry. Co-hosts are **Davonne Reaves**, **Omari Head** and **Chris Henry**, co-founders of Next Gen in Lodging, an organization formed to support mid-career hospitality professionals. The team of 30-somethings will deliver content that informs, edifies and inspires industry newcomers as well as up-and-comers.

Henry, co-founder and CEO of Majestic Hospitality Group, a hotel-consulting venture in Los Angeles, said part of the podcast's mission is to give millennials working in the hospitality industry an opportunity to be heard.

Chris Henry: I don't know if you saw the note that I put out on my LinkedIn recently, but there was a great comment that came in from somebody that really addressed why Next Gen in Lodging is important is that these voices of the younger hoteliers has been either ignored or suppressed for too long. And we want to get the thoughts, the ideas and new perspectives on how do we adapt and survive as a hospitality industry.

We can't work in a vacuum anymore. And the playbook, the rule book, whatever you want to call it, it didn't work in the last recession; it didn't work in this recession. So we need to figure out how do we retool our precious industry so that it can continue to thrive and grow.

Jon Albano: Be sure to tune in on Thursday, March 18, when Next Gen in Lodging launches its inaugural program on Long Live Lodging's multimedia platform. **(End Promo)**

Jon Albano: Months before the phrase 'spring break 2021' entered most people's minds, Emory University in Atlanta in October **announced** it would not include the traditional vacation in this year's school calendar. The university is not alone in making the decision. Many public and private schools from elementary through secondary have cut back on seasonal breaks as the coronavirus pandemic forces schools to go remote or offer a hybrid teaching format.

Instead of the traditional weeklong family or group trip, many travelers might opt for short stays close to home or staycations.

Merriam-Webster says the term “**staycation**” was coined during World War II when Americans were urged to holiday at home and save gasoline. The publisher also noted the concept of staycation has evolved over the decades. The coronavirus pandemic has certainly given the staycation a new angle. Rather than spend a break at home, many Americans are escaping quarantine and road tripping to nearby destinations.

Hotel owners and operators would be wise to integrate design and programming to appeal to 2021 staycationers. Suzie Hall is founder of The Cornerstone Collective and a 30-year veteran of hospitality design and procurement. She restructured the company last year to make it more collaborative among industry providers and specialists, a sort of plug-and-play business model that can rally a team of experts to get a hotel built, renovated or designed.

Hall has seen investors and developers go back to their drawing boards over the past 12 months to rethink hotel layout and design with the pandemic in mind.

Suzie Hall: One of my words throughout this pandemic from design and innovation is flexibility. Knowing that the world isn't always going to be as it is today, and then improvising with flexibility. And what I mean by that is offering a variety of options for different travelers, the different age groups, the different types of travelers.

If it's a staycation type of property where people are just driving to a destination not too far away, bringing in a big name entertainer and offering different performance times so folks can gather in small groups. And that's where that flexibility, especially with FF&E and understanding all the different areas of a property that can be utilized for such events. And offering these with as much safety as possible.

Make it fun to split into groups of a certain size, offering physically distanced outdoor games, indoor arcades, bringing in outside gaming, making sure they're physically distanced. Giving

travelers an app on their phone that highlights things like live music, when volleyball is taking place, if there's surfing close by, swimming, sunning and all the possible activities you think about with spring break and just ensuring that the guests have all of the information and the options so that they have choices for their stay and their staycation.

Jon Albano: When the pandemic struck the U.S. lodging industry in March 2020, Hall was working on hotel reconstruction projects. The dramatic shift in how hotels were being used altered Hall's design sensibilities and the renovations' schematics.

Suzie Hall: Most of our response has been in the FF&E layouts, especially in public spaces. We're in the midst of designing five hotel renovations for branded hotels and the owner asked us to re-layout the FF&E so that they were more appropriate for social and physical distancing. So we've been doing a lot of that.

We've also been encouraging our owners to really look at the outdoor spaces and take advantage where possible of outdoor spaces, opening up doors and windows so there's that connectivity to the outdoors because, you know, from a health perspective and even a psychological perspective and biophilia having that connectivity is so, so important.

And we've seen a lot of properties really rethink their outdoor spaces and, by taking a look at it, realizing they have more opportunity to put more seating out there, more tables, smaller groupings of seating than just the big, you know, sofas and settees and lounge chairs that we know we've seen in the past. And so that flexibility again is really important. Putting a focus on outdoor spaces has been very primary for us.

Jon Albano: Though many resort destinations are known for being all-inclusive, Hall believes the pandemic has permanently altered how hotels go about designing food-and-beverage experiences and other forms of programming and amenities.

Suzie Hall: I think the spirit of collaboration that has emerged during this pandemic is just a beautiful thing in our communities. And people are being very open to collaborating and creating new opportunities and maximizing the use of outdoor and semi-enclosed spaces, even interior spaces, offering classes up to a certain size, whether it's yoga, fitness, dance, movement, croquet, live music, tours through a property, language lessons, wine tastings, book readings, outdoor games. The list is limitless. And by collaborating with other local restaurants and service companies, I really think the sky's the limit. And I do think travelers will respond to that.

There are some other innovative solutions to take advantage of larger spaces, meeting spaces at these hotels. And a couple of them that we have designed are bringing in modular bowling alleys into large meeting rooms. And they can be installed for a certain period of time and then removed. There's no permanent impact on the structure, but it just adds a revenue generation for the property. It adds some family fun. And typically it's two lanes in an enclosed space and they can be distanced apart in large meeting rooms.

And then another solution are outdoor dining domes. So they look like clear igloos, and that's a way to really maximize outdoor space and it really adds an attraction just for the experience of a family being able to go and dine on a rooftop or dine outside under the stars.

Jon Albano: While Hall's business expanded its partnerships during the past 12 months of the pandemic, Ashley Ewing Parrott started her own consulting company to advise independent and branded property owners on how to maximize their hotel's potential through design and programming.

Ewing Parrott was director of brand strategy, boutique and lifestyle hotels for Vision Hospitality Group in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She focused mostly on developing and opening The Edwin Hotel, Vision Hospitality's first luxury independent boutique hotel. She also helped launch the company's new boutique brand called Kinley, which is opened in Cincinnati and is soon to open in Chattanooga. And she oversaw the development of The Grady, a luxury boutique in downtown Lexington, Kentucky.

The hotels are members of Marriott International's soft brands. More importantly, they're each distinctively designed to attract guests from far away as well as provide their local communities unique dining and entertainment options, including staycations.

Ashley Ewing Parrott: Staycations present both a tremendous opportunity and also a challenge to hotels because you have to assume a level of familiarity with your property on behalf of the guest.

So if the guest is from the local market, they're going to be fairly familiar with your property, with your offerings, et cetera, whether they visited you or not. Then you can always target that hour- or two-hour drive market that would technically be considered a staycation as well.

The challenge for staycations, especially during the pandemic is ensuring the safety of your guests and building confidence around that safety, which can be achieved through both design and programming and service.

From a design perspective specifically, I've seen on the best end of projects upholstered intentional partitions and beautifully designed, informational signage.

And on the worst end, I've seen haphazard clear shower curtains being used to block guests from front-desk associates.

So I think implementing different elements of design in order to ensure and build guest confidence around safety and cleanliness is important. But also as we're looking at how can we rearrange spaces to make sure that guests feel comfortable, creating more distance in lobby seating, creating more distance between restaurant tables, all the kind of basics that most hoteliers with any experience have already embraced.

That said, it's also about how can we market ourselves to those spring breakers specifically, or to our neighbors, if you will, to encourage them to really get that kind of break.

We've all spent so much time cooped up in our homes with our immediate family. And I know everyone, at least I'm speaking for myself and most of my friends and family, itching to get out, itching for a change of scenery, and hotels present a unique experience in that we can really create a home from home. It's a beautiful change of pace from the monotony of what we've all gotten so used to in 2020.

And so for hotels specifically, we have an opportunity to really lean into marketing the best of what you get at home, all the comforts and increase your comforts of home with all of the unexpected and kind of luxuries of hotel stays. And whether that's from services like VIP

turndown, that's handled in a very COVID-safe way or private dining experiences, programming like virtual fitness classes and even socially distant mixers and things for small groups. I think there are opportunities to embrace programming in a new way.

For design specifically, I would say the post-pandemic guest is looking for a bit more personal space. They're looking for flexibility in the usage of their guestroom. They really want to tailor their hotel experience to their preferences. So making the finishes, the furnishings and things, we want to make sure that those are durable and beautiful, but still cleanable; really encouraging through design a sense of comfort and cleanliness.

Jon Albano: When Ewing Parrott managed the boutique hotel projects for Vision Hospitality, she led a survey of community residents asking them what they wanted in a neighboring hotel. The results helped Vision Hospitality design a property that the community would embrace, use and recommend.

Ashley Ewing Parrott: The beautiful thing about a staycation is not only introducing your neighbor to use your property, but partnerships with area businesses will truly be key to a successful and fulfilling guest experience over the next six to 12 months and throughout the future. Most hotels are still experiencing significantly lower demands, slower occupancy and the need for reduced labor models. So I would suggest that full-service and select-service hotels really embrace the idea of pushing that guest out into the neighborhood to really explore and have that kind of adventure.

Many full-service hotels currently are on limited restaurant hours, have discontinued in-room dining. They've limited the number of guests allowed. They may have even closed fitness pools or spas, and that definitely and undoubtedly impacts the guest satisfaction and the guest journey. So if we aren't able to supplement that journey with something else on property we need to encourage the guests to go out and explore and find those new experiences. And it's our job to facilitate a lot of that.

As hoteliers, we have to be ambassadors for our local community and now more than ever, and not only the hospitality industry has been affected, but also small businesses all across the country.

And these days, we really have to be willing to share our guests with our neighbors because it will benefit everyone in the end as far as the economic recovery.

Jon Albano: Vision Hospitality opened Kinley Downtown Cincinnati in October. The 94-room hotel is an adaptive reuse of a landmark building. It integrates art by local muralists and artists, which has attracted local business.

The Edwin Hotel in downtown Chattanooga also is an art-focused hotel that offers walking tours throughout the property for guests and locals. Ewing Parrott said using local creatives and artisans to build a brand will help hotels become embedded in community culture. Another way is to meet a community need.

Ashley Ewing Parrott: I'm super excited to see that one come to life and find success. One of the main reasons they found success is, as a hotel without meeting space, they formed an early partnership with a coworking space in order to offer meeting space to guests when needed.

I'm sure as the pandemic kind of starts to disappear from focus in the next hopefully six to 12 months, their plan is to really engage the community in Cincinnati-specific events around,

whether it's the design school or the sports teams or the culinary community, and really kind of rally the neighborhood with a gathering place in their lobby or in their spaces.

Jon Albano: Ewing Parrott also helped Vision Hospitality prepare to open Kinley Chattanooga Southside this month. The hotel will adapt its programming from the same neighborhood-focused the playbook.

Ashley Ewing Parrott: This was really a testament to providing a hotel to the Southside community. That was what the community wanted. At the time when we started development, I was a resident of the Southside neighborhood. So I felt it was incredibly necessary to speak to the community, to talk to the local businesses and to provide within the footprint of the hotel what the area needed and none of the things it didn't, essentially.

Jon Albano: As a result, Kinley in Chattanooga is a full-service hotel with a three-meal-a-day restaurant and a morning coffee bar that transitions into a cocktail lounge with small plates in the afternoon.

In the back of the hotel is a speakeasy that's accessible via a hidden bookcase door inside and a back-alley entrance outside.

Ashley Ewing Parrott: They wanted to blur the line between community and hotel and really just kind of encourage our guests to get out and explore all the beautiful things and exciting and entertaining things that Southside had to offer.

Jon Albano: Many hotels loath to rent rooms to local residents because of their sometimes blatant disregard for traveling guests' comfort and privacy as well as the hotel's property.

Ewing Parrott said, while that can be a challenge, hotels can spurn bad actors and attract good customers by managing their rates.

Ashley Ewing Parrott: I do think there is a subset of staycation guests that feel they can come to a hotel and do all of the ridiculous things they would never do in their own home. Treat it poorly, be rough on rooms, be tough on associates, be impolite, et cetera, et cetera. I know that, having been in sales for years for hotels, I know that when you are suffering in the way of low occupancy, any revenue manager's first instinct is to drop rates. That said, I am a firm believer in there is a direct correlation between what a guest is willing to pay and how they are going to treat the associates, treat the property, the additional revenue that they may generate in sort of beverage outlets or retail or things of that nature. So my suggestion for how to avoid that is instead of tanking rate in response to decreased occupancy and demand: Hold strong. Know the value of your property. Know the value of what you're offering. I'm not saying increase rates for locals by any means, but remain consistent in your value proposition because that will dissuade some of it.

Jon Albano: Thank you so much for tuning in today. This is Episode 312, and you can find the expanded multimedia report for this episode at lodgingleaders.com/312.

Thanks to [Suzie Hall](#) of [The Cornerstone Collective](#) and [Ashley Ewing Parrott](#) of [AEP Consulting](#).

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Thank you so much for tuning in today. I look forward to seeing you next week. Take care and long live lodging.

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