

Choice Hotels' Comfort Suites and Cambria Suites brands benefit from going 100% smoke-free and joining the FreshStay.com network

2009-04-08

With businesses and consumers cutting back on travel and concerns about the economy growing every day, every hotel guest - and every dollar he or she spends - counts that much more.

With more than 3,700 locations across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Canada and elsewhere around the world, FreshStay.com makes sure that wherever your travels take you, you are never too far from a clean, refreshing, smoke-free hotel room. As a network of 100% smoke-free hotels with an integrated booking process, FreshStay has rapidly grown to become the most comprehensive on-line directory of smoke-free lodging properties in the world with the help of companies such as Choice Hotels International.

Choice Hotels operates two 100-percent non-smoking brands: Comfort Suites and Cambria Suites. Combined, these two brands offer more than 450 locations throughout the U.S. and other countries where Frequent Breathers can stay and be assured of healthy travel and happy stays.

'Since Comfort Suites went smoke-free in May 2007, guests have largely reacted positively,' says Mike Varner, Project Director, Brand Planning for Comfort Inn, Comfort Suites and Sleep Inn. 'They like the confidence of knowing that their rooms will be free from smoke no matter which Comfort Suites hotel they visit, or which room they are assigned.'

Choice Hotels conducted research that strongly indicated their guests' desire for a smoke-free environment. The volumes of secondary research also make it clear that guests are concerned about and actively involved in their own good health.

That's not to say it was an easy decision to go smoke-free. Not only was there a physical cost in going smoke-free - including among other investments a deep cleaning and repainting of all rooms and replacing of smoke damaged furniture and linens where needed - but there was some concern that some guests would be unhappy with the new smoke-free policy.

'The (Comfort Suites') franchisees decided as a group to designate the entire brand smoke-free. There were definitely some doubts, and there were some bumps in the road, but overall it went pretty well,' says Donald Klain, Vice President of Operations for Tharaldson Property Management, which operates 222 hotels in 29 states. 'At the time, we were looking for a way to separate the Comfort Suites brand from some of the others in the Choice Hotels portfolio, and the only other brands that had gone 100% non-smoking were Westin and Marriott.

'We looked at all the data and felt that a smoke-free environment was becoming the trend. Three years later, this trend has gone beyond hotels, and most cities are now going smoke-free,' Klain adds.

FreshStay.com has been proud to list worthy hotels like the Comfort Suites and Cambria Suites properties in the most comprehensive on-line directory of smoke-free lodging properties in the world.

'Choice Hotels saw the trend and importance of healthy and socially responsible travel early on and has helped push the industry forward,' says Dave Janicke, CBO/Chief Breathing Officer for FreshStay.com. 'We're glad Choice Hotels had the foresight to go smoke-free before it was a trend. By working together, we've been able to connect healthier travelers with the hotels and rooms where they desire to stay.'

Cambria Suites

All 13 of Choice's current family of Cambria Suites hotels are smoke-free, and there are nine more planned to open in the coming year. As an upscale brand, the decision to open all the new facilities as smoke-free was an obvious one.

'Today's guests live healthy lifestyles and Cambria Suites delivers on that with a smoke-free environment as well as other features such as a state-of-the-art fitness center, healthy and organic items on the menu, and a soothing, stylish environment,' says Cathy Poinsett, Senior Director, Cambria Suites brand management. 'The Cambria Suites brand was designed for our guests' well being, therefore Cambria Suites has always been smoke-free. Our 100% smoke-free policy is just one of Cambria Suites' many features that support a healthy lifestyle.'

The greatest benefit from implementing a non-smoking policy has been in customer loyalty and higher guest satisfaction. According to surveys from JD Power and elsewhere, hotel guests do not want to stay in rooms that smell like cigarettes - even smokers prefer nonsmoking guestrooms.

'Our guests genuinely appreciate the clean and healthy environment that Cambria Suites delivers. We have some of the highest guest satisfaction scores in the industry including a 9.5 out of 10 for product and 9.4 out of 10 for likelihood to recommend,' Poinsett adds. 'Also, guest reviews rank Cambria Suites in the top three of all hotels in each destination in which it operates.'

More Benefits

Keeping to the business standard that it's easier (and three to five times more cost effective) to keep current customers than find new ones, both the Comfort Suites and Cambria Suites brands, go out of their way to ensure a positive guest experience.

'Before we went smoke-free, there were times when the number of non-smokers outnumbered the amount of non-smoking rooms we had,' says Klain. 'So if they ended up in a smoking room, it could cause complaints. Going smoke-free across the board, we don't ever have to worry about that now. Even the smokers we get appreciate the fresh, clean guestrooms they get no matter where they are staying.'

Choice Hotels' Varner adds that another benefit of going smoke-free is its ease on operations.

By going smoke-free, hotel owners can reduce costs associated with smoking-related cleaning, maintenance and potentially insurance liability. The elimination of separate smoking and non-smoking rooms also simplify bookings and registrations.

'Non-smoking properties save money in operating costs,' Varner says. 'Smoking in rooms can increase the wear-and-tear on furnishings as well as require greater time for daily housekeeping.'

But the dollars still aren't as important as happy guests.

'Going smoke-free was an important strategic decision for the Comfort Suites brand,' says Varner. 'It has resulted in consistently better scores for room condition in our guest surveys. We have found room condition is one of the most important components of guest loyalty, so this is very important to us.'

And from the growth in smoke-free hotels, and the growth in bookings at FreshStay.com, it's clear that this is a trend that is not going to change.

'Wellness in general and a smoke-free environment in particular are long-term sustaining trends that will only grow as consumers continue to become more and more educated on and take responsibility for their own health. Cambria Suites is dedicated to delivering on those trends,' says Poinsett. 'FreshStay helps Cambria Suites connect with millions of travelers who are looking for a healthy hotel experience.'

About Pineapple Hospitality

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