

Safety and serenity boosts spending

The Malvern Hotel and Spa has responded proactively to the Covid-19 pandemic, accelerating long-term strategy for added value and focusing on customer service.

During the months that the UK was in national lockdown, the Malvern Hotel, a luxury spa venue in Worcestershire, did not rest on its laurels. Instead, it took the opportunity to prepare for guests' return, refreshing decoration around the entire building and completely revamping its relaxation room. This same spirit of proactivity underpins its response to welcoming guests back to the hotel.

Safety first

"We decided that the best way to get people to come and relax at the spa would be to ensure that they felt completely Covid-secure. I think I can say that we have done everything we can think of to achieve that," says Huw Watson, shareholder at the Malvern.

"We have taken all of the standard precautions – enhanced cleaning procedures, social distancing and PPE for staff – but also some additional measures. Instead of just taking people's temperature, for example, we have a detection monitor at the entrance that can tell the difference between somebody who's run or cycled to the hotel and somebody who has a fever. That's proved very popular with guests and staff alike."



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There are also air cleansing units in the all the rooms, which use UV light and ozone purification, among other technologies, to filter the air. These measures represent a significant investment for the Malvern, which Huw estimates at about £25,000. But it's not just the technology that makes guests feel safer. It's the procedures in place, the presence of the cleaning staff, who clean high-frequency touchpoints every 15 minutes, and the social distancing rules.

Elevating customer experience

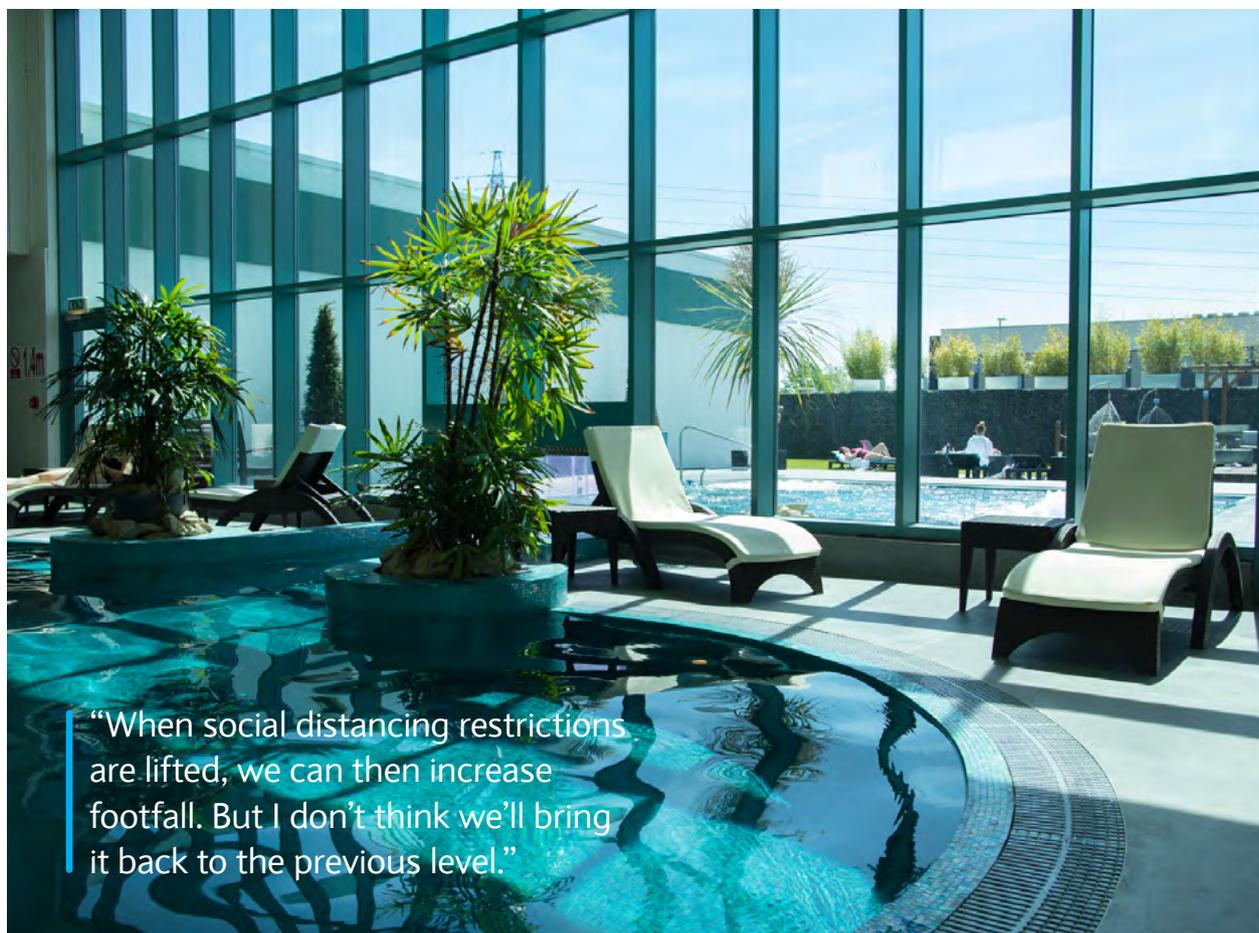
Every visitor, whether hotel guests, spa-day clients or members, must check in for treatments and even to book sun loungers by the pool. For members, the new rules have sometimes chafed, but for most guests, booking in ahead of time is making for a better and more relaxing experience.

“The spa-day guests and hotel guests do prefer it,” says Huw. “And if there are fewer people around the pool, there's more saleability for treatments, which gives people a better experience.”

The restrictions have, of course, had an impact on guest numbers. The hotel is currently operating at just over 50% of normal capacity in terms of footfall. But Huw estimates that they're still generating 80% of their previous revenue. The increase has been down to a long-term plan quickly implemented in the wake of the pandemic – having fewer guests paying more for a better experience.

Next steps

“When social distancing restrictions are lifted, we can then increase footfall,” says Huw. “But I don't think we'll bring it back to the previous level. I think our ability to very quickly introduce what was going to be a long-term, incremental strategy has made a big difference in the short term and will make a very significant difference in the coming years.”



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The other strategy that the Malvern plans to continue is its investment in technology. The next focus will be on access control and how guests pay for services at the hotel, including food and beverage offerings. The hotel hopes to move to a more streamlined check-in process that happens via guests' phones, which they can also use to access their room. They'll be able to book and pay for treatments and food and drink in the same manner.

For now, Huw believes the industry needs to be confident in its pricing. The pandemic has accelerated people's commitment to wellness, and they are willing to pay more for a better experience. Social distancing restrictions have forced venues to relinquish their focus on footfall and, for the Malvern, that has come with the positive realisation that space can add serenity to a spa trip – and boost spending.

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