



SLEEP CONCIERGE – A STUDY OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED TO GUESTS IN HOTELS FOR SOUND SLEEP

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Abstract

It is a medically proven and widely known fact that all human beings require a good quality sleep to recuperate the body from the everyday stress. Poor sleep, even for few days can cause loss of concentration, lack of energy, lack of productivity and poses various health risks. However, many travelers find it difficult to slumber into a peaceful sleep even in the most luxurious of hotels with all the amenities. Many hotels worldwide are now stepping towards creating a full-fledged sleep concierge which can guide the guests and provide needful assistance by various means such as special pillow / mattress menus, blackout curtains, specially designed beds, herbal teas and even lullabies. The concept is fast moving from research to practice and more and more means of promoting sleep quality are being added on to amenities provided by hotels for a comfortable stay of the guest. Four Seasons hotels, J W Marriott and Starwood are few names of luxury hotels that are already offering special services for sleep quality enhancement in their selected properties. Many other national and international hotels are also taking on the cue and developing a complete S.O.P. and menu for sleep concierge taking help from the medical experts and finding natural therapies for difficulty in sleep. Also, few hotels are providing counseling sessions of guests with sleep experts who can help them in having a good night sleep. True to the definition of 'Home away from home', hotels are now thriving to provide a sound sleep to its guests. In this study, data has been collected and analyzed as to what all measures are being taken by the hotels in providing a comfortable sleep to the guest. It also reflects the importance and training being provided to the employees to evaluate the awareness amongst them about the importance of sound sleep of guests. The primary data is collected through the questionnaires filled by employees of various

high end hotels of North India. Likert scale is used to scale responses and graphical representation is used to analyze the data. The research also compares the nascent stage at which the concept of Sleep concierge is at present in India as compared to the rest of the world.

Key words: Aromatic essential oils, Bedtime snack, Blackout curtains, Pillow menu, Sleep concierge, Sleep hygiene, Types of mattresses.

Introduction

In hotels or resorts, a concierge assists guests by performing various tasks such as making restaurant reservations, booking hotels, arranging for spa services, recommending night life hot spots, booking transportation (like taxi, limousines, airplanes, boats, etc.), coordinating porter service (luggage assistance etc). A sleep concierge specifically deals with providing assistance to guests who have trouble falling into a peaceful sleep. Sound sleep is as important to human being as any other body function. The long term effects of sleep loss have been associated with a wide range of deleterious health consequences including an increased risk of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, depression, heart attack and stroke. There are many sleep related psychiatric disorders as well. (Colten and Altevogt, 2006). In general an uncomfortable night sleep makes one feel tired and irritable the next day. Factors that can cause sleep problems include:

- Physical disturbances (pain from ulcers, headache)
- Medical issues (Asthma)
- Psychiatric disorder (Anxiety, life stresses, depression)
- Environmental issues (light, temperature variations)
- Other factors that can interfere with sleep are Genetics, Night shift work, Medications, Aging etc ("Causes of Sleep Problems", 2017)

Keeping this in mind many hotels are now providing a variety of services related to a sound sleep. From sleep menus to breathing exercises, hotels are going all out to make sure that the guest gets a good night's rest. Sweet dreams are truly made of these (Aleem, 2015). Keeping all the factors affecting the sound sleep, the hotels now concentrate on pleasing the five senses of the guest so that he can have a peaceful night easily. This includes:

- Touch means a cool room, the right mattress firmness and cool fabrics
- Sight denotes a sufficiently dark room and relaxing colour scheme
- Hearing points to a quiet room and the use of masking noises
- Smell indicates the need for allergy-free rooms and the use of aromas
- Taste refers to the fact that fat-rich food, caffeine and alcohol interfere with sleep, while foods such as eggs and turkey (which contain tryptophan) may help induce sleep. (Net, 2017)

One of the leading hotels providing a full fledged sleep concierge with expert medical advise for sleep to its guest is Hotel Benjamin, New York. (Nytimes.com, 2015) Now the Benjamin features several pillows, including a plush cloud pillow, a music-playing lullaby pillow and a maternity pillow, which supports the bellies of pregnant guests. But the push for a good night's sleep does not end there. Services include a menu intended to help relax the body and digestive system for late-night arrivals, blackout curtains in the rooms and a new work-down call service from the front desk in which guests can be told to start wrapping things up and hitting the sack. A trained consultant is also available to guests for custom sleep consultations. (Huffington, 2016)

Objectives:

- To list the measures being taken by the hotels in providing comfortable sleep to the guest in the five star hotels in Northern India.
- To identify the emphasis given by hotels for training its employees towards the concept of sleep concierge.
- To compare the measures already being taken by hotels in Northern India with those of prominent hotels in other countries recognized for making an effort to create sleep concierge of their guests.

Methodology:

This study adopted a quantitative and qualitative research design. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed based on an extensive review of literature. The questionnaire consisted of details of name, organization and position of the employees filling the questionnaire. It consisted of 18 questions which were aimed at gathering information meeting the objectives of the research paper. Statistical analysis was done using Likert Scale and graphical representations.

This study was done through questionnaires filled by supervisory / management level employees of various high end hotels in North India. Random Sampling method was followed to get the questionnaire filled. The questionnaires were completed within 3 months. Altogether 50 questionnaires were distributed and 36 were collected, representing a response rate of 72%. A total of 36 usable questionnaires were obtained by simple random sampling in Jammu, New Delhi and NCR, Jaipur, Udaipur and Chandigarh.

Results and Discussion

The research represents qualitative and quantitative findings and the results are analyzed below:

1.

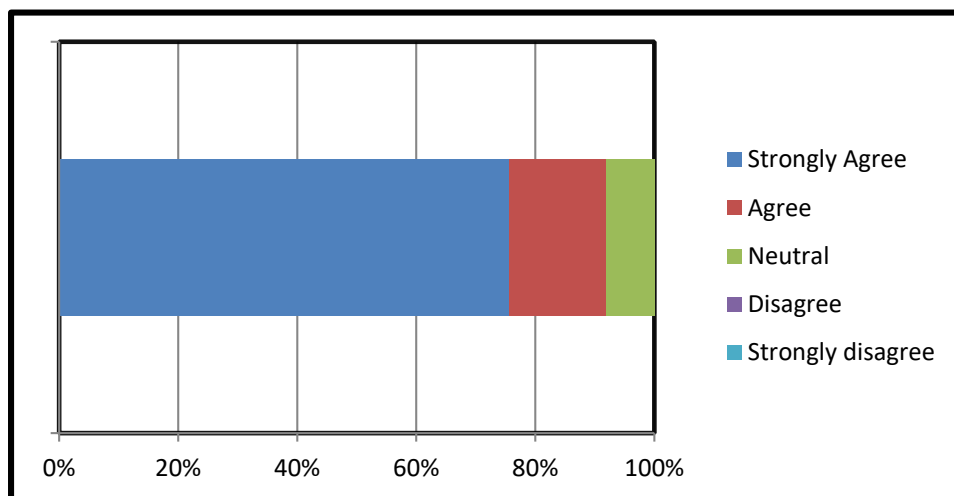


Figure 1: Importance of sound sleep for guests

77.8% hoteliers strongly agreed that guest comfort during sleep is extremely important while another 13.8% agreed to the fact. Another 8.4% hoteliers remained neutral. However, no one disagreed. Thus, this study clearly states that hoteliers agree that a sound sleep is very important for the guests.

It has been rightly said by the great Dalai Lama that “Sleep is the best meditation.” Sleep induces calmness and composure of the entire mind and body. If proper sleep is not taken it can lead to various health problems like depression, obesity, high blood pressure and even more. (Colten and Altevogt, 2006) This fact is also proven scientifically Therefore, many hotels are now realizing this importance of guest sleep as we can see in the graph above.

2.

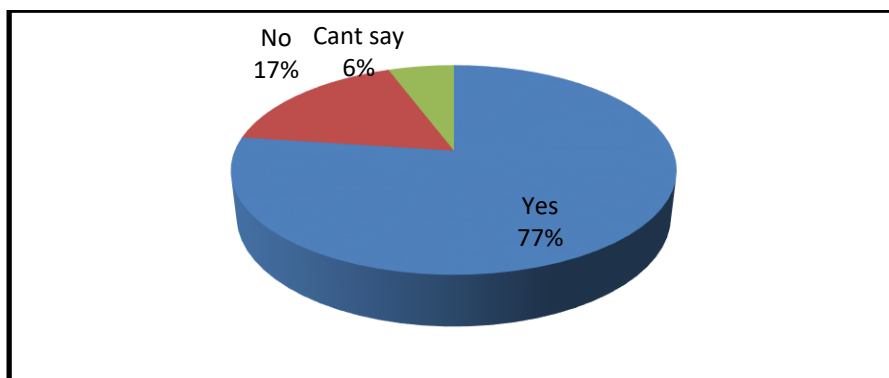


Figure 2: Complaints received from guest regarding disturbed sleep

77% of hoteliers agreed that they have received guest complaints regarding disturbed sleep in the hotel while 17% affirmatively reply that no such complaints have surfaced. At the same time

6% of the employees were unsure whether any such complaints have arisen in the past or not. This clearly indicates that disturbance in sleep is one of the major causes of guest complaints. No matter how superior a hotel is, it is important to realize that a guest who is tired after travelling needs a peaceful sleep. If it is not happening, the guest might end up grumpy in the morning and complaint of anything and everything being unsuitable. For a hotel, the worst scenario would be if the guest does not complain directly but instead gives an average or bad review online or by word of mouth. Fifty-five percent of travelers said they look for reviews that specifically address sleep quality in a Trip Advisor survey and a good night's rest impacts everyone. Although one can't cater to everyone's sleeping quirks, all hotels can work toward providing a restful stay. (Pokora, 2018)

This clearly shows that guest's special wants for a sound sleep need to be catered to specifically to make their experience a memorable one. Moreover, every individual has specific needs which are different from the other. Hence, is the requirement for sleep concierge services in the hotel.

3.

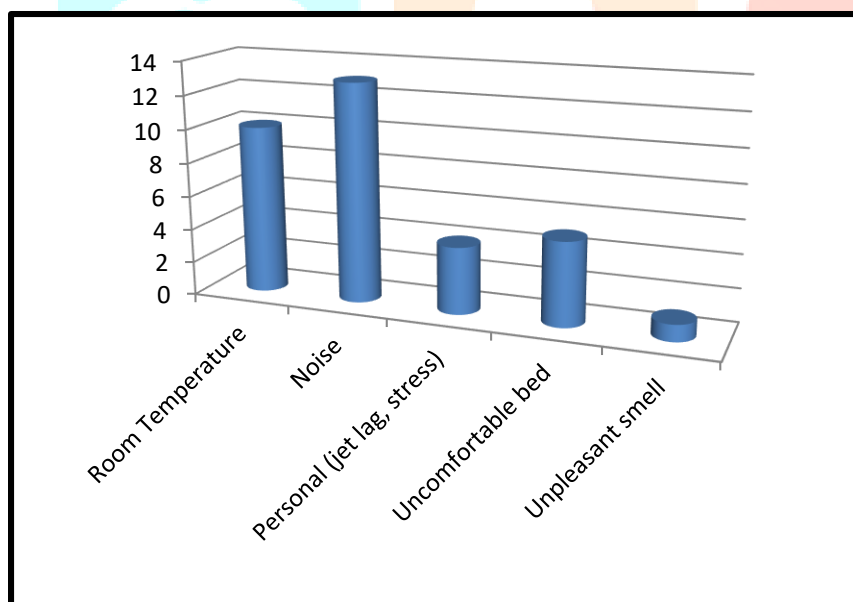


Figure 3: Major reasons for disturbed sleep of guests

Major reason for disturbed sleep for guests was noise. Two of the hotels specifically indicated that the noise is mostly from outdoor banquet halls. Room temperature was another area affecting comfortable sleep. 13.9% guests cited jet lag or stress as the reason to not be able to slumber in a peaceful sleep while another 16.7% cited uncomfortable bed as the reason. 5.5% complained of unpleasant odour in the room.

One of the most common problems that people encounter is when the neighbours in adjacent rooms are noisy or the room is near elevator or pantry. The noise could be from heavy snoring, guest in neighbouring room who are up till late night, loud music or T.V. or returning

from a night out and talking noisily. The other situation is when the guest room is above or next to the hotel's bar or banquet hall. The noise from these places too can be a problem (Hodson, 2018). Thus, noise is the major cause of disturbed sleep in hotels. Apart from it appropriate room temperature also disturbs sound sleep of the guests to a large extent.

Not surprisingly, the complaints about room temperature vary widely from guest to guest but the most reported ones involve room temperature at check-in and ability to adjust heating/cooling settings. At 3:00 P.M. on a hot, humid summer day, nobody wants to step into their room for the first time to find the air-conditioning turned off and the room stuffy and warm. This is not only uncomfortable for the guest, but it gives the impression that hotel management is too cheap to keep the room cool between guests or can't be bothered to properly prepare it for incoming guests. Furthermore, guests want the ability to control their heating and cooling settings. ("Hotel Guests' Most Common Complaints", 2018)

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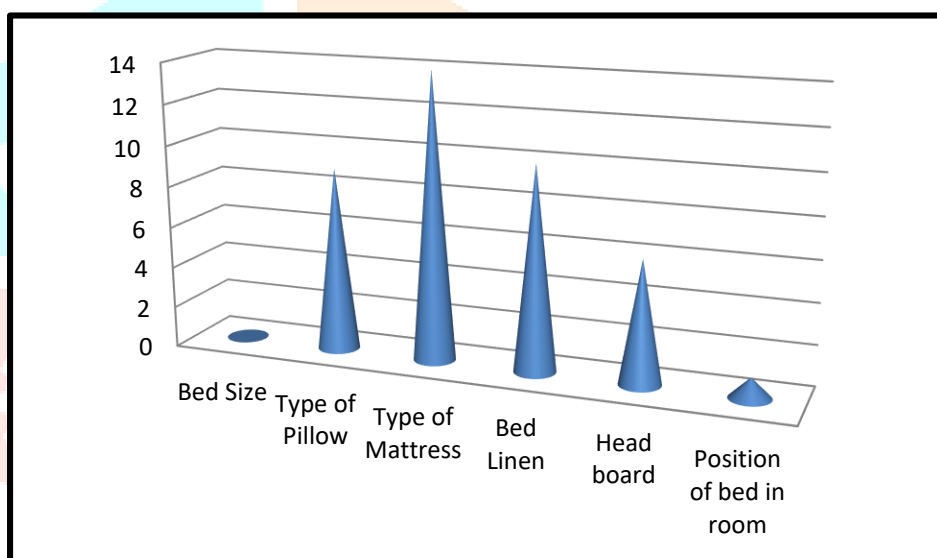


Figure 4: Causes for an uncomfortable bed

35 % hoteliers expressed that an uncomfortable mattress the cause of uncomfortable bed. 25 % cited bed linen and 22% cited type of pillow as the next major reasons for an uncomfortable feeling on bed for the guest. 15 % of hoteliers cited that the design and make of bed headboards influence the comfort of guest on bed. While 3% cited that some guests complained regarding position of bed in room as cause of a disturbed sleep. However, none of the hoteliers reported that bed size was found uncomfortable by the guest. The research shows that a major reason for uncomfortable bed was unsuitable mattress.

Despite the mattress being one major cause of disturbed sleep for guest, only 54.5% hotels offer a choice of mattress while in 40.9% hotels the guest does not have a choice of mattress. 4.6% hotels registered no response for the availability of choice of mattress. The hotels invest a lot of money as capital investment in placing mattresses in the rooms. There is a huge variety of mattresses that are renowned internationally and also boast of being most comfortable. Some hotels also enable purchase of the mattresses in their hotel beds (Springer, 2018). Despite the capital investment and care from hotels, if the guest is not comfortable in the bed due to mattress (may be too soft or too hard), the hotel must work upon ways to offer solution in the form of an alternate mattress to suit individual guest requirement better.

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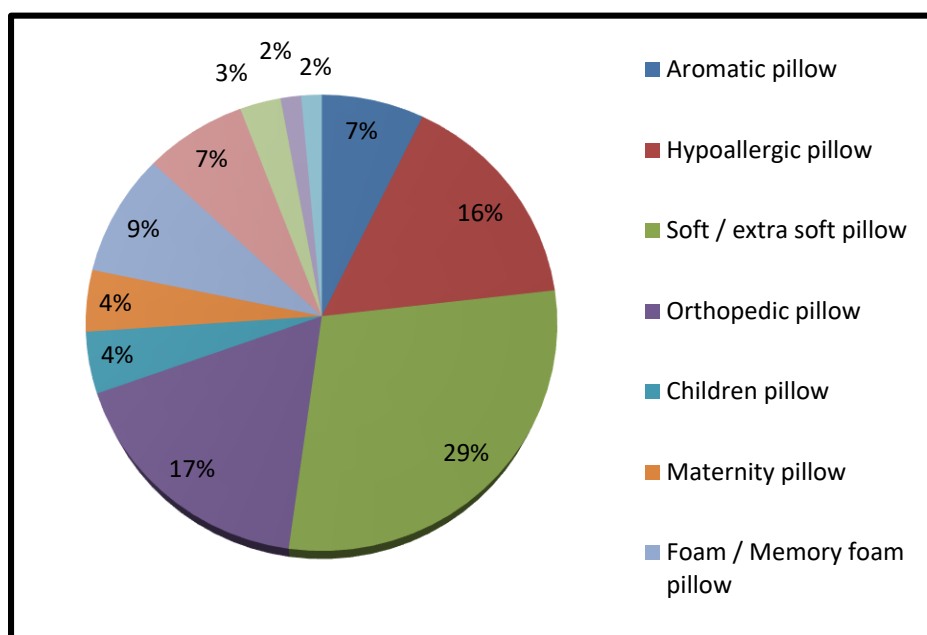


Figure 5: Variety of pillows available in Pillow menus

95.45% hotels participating in the study are providing a pillow menu to the guest while 4.55% hotels do not have a pillow menu. The variety of pillows included in the pillow menu is vast comprising of Soft / Extra soft pillows, Orthopedic pillows and Hypo allergic pillows most often. Others included are children pillow, maternity pillow, aromatic pillow, foam pillow, cotton pillow, dual zone pillow and feather touch cotton pillow. The list is quite big but if compared with other high end hotels in country or internationally, many variety of pillows such as down pillow, water pillow, snore no-more, magnetic therapy, lullaby pillow, buckwheat pillow are missing from the list altogether. Though all major common variety of pillows expected are available, the greater options are unavailable. Hotels can work on improving the pillow menus to those comparable with elite Indian and International hotels. (Stancu, 2017)

6. 50 % hotels provide slumber kits to the guests. The contents of slumber kit are as follows:

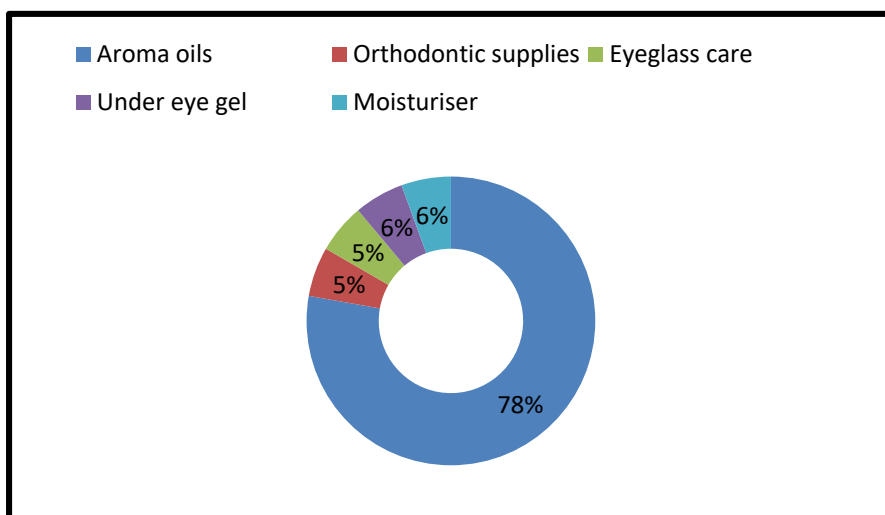


Figure 6: Contents of slumber kit

Aroma oils are the most prominent feature of slumber kit. This is in the form of spray, diffuser or pillow mist. Most common aromas include Lemon grass, Lavender and Jasmine. Other aromas available are Mandarin, Elemis spray (tea tree) and Neroli (a Himalayan herb). 63.9% hotels provide a choice of aroma in the room while 30.5% do not provide a choice. Another 5.6% are not sure about whether there is a choice available or not. 5 to 6% of the hotels surveyed also provided orthodontic supplies, eyeglass care, under-eye gel and moisturizer in their slumber kits. Also, 80.6% hotels do not provide bed time snack / drink / food to the guest at turndown service. 13.9% hotels provide chocolates, 5.6% provide tisanes while 2.8% keep nuts.

This research shows that the number of hotels providing slumber kit is just 50%. This indicates that though hotel agrees that peaceful sleep is an important part of guest stay, provision of slumber kits has taken a backseat. Among those who provide slumber kits, maximum hotels have provision of aroma oils / fragrances as the best solution to sleep difficulties. However, compared to the hotels internationally, slumber kits include music (channel or head phones) that enhances sleep (nature sounds, lullaby or any ambient music), eye / sleep mask to omit blue light from electronics, ear plugs to omit unnecessary sounds, pajamas for comfort and even special melatonin chocolates to help guest slumber in a sound sleep. (How some hotels are trying to help their guests sleep better, 2014). Thus hotels need to enhance their slumber kits to match the international standards and thrive to add more relevant content in them.

7. 91.6% hotels have black out curtains in the guest rooms while 8.4% hotels lack total blackout curtains to prevent outside light. Blackout curtains are essential to block out light from outside the room to come inside the guest room. Most hotels already have these curtains as their room furnishing and this is an important part of having a peaceful sleep.

8.

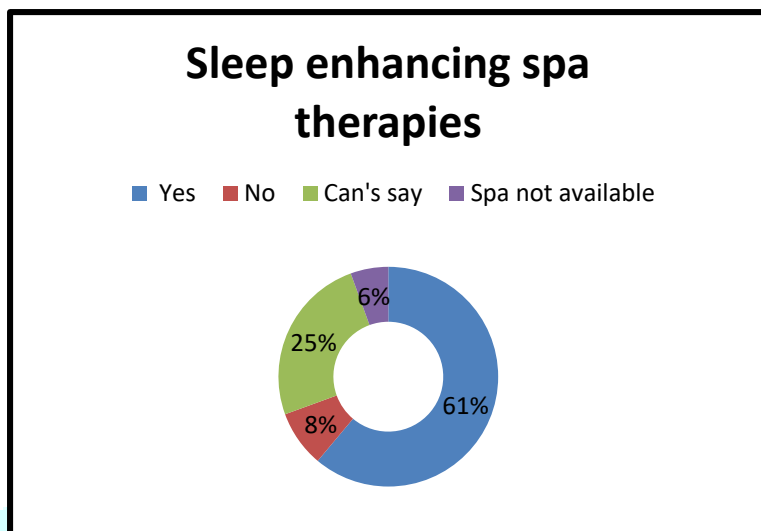


Figure 7: Availability of sleep enhancing spa therapies

61% hotels have relaxing spa therapies to enable sound sleep while 8% do not have any such special provisions. 25% hotel employees were not sure if the service was available in spa while 6% hotels did not have spa facility at all. The importance of massage to relax the body is a proven fact. (Top 10 Health Benefits of Foot Massage and Reflexology - Renaissance College, 2018) Foot massage or body massage helps to improve blood circulation and relaxes the muscles. This in turn helps a guest to have a peaceful sleep. Hence, it is important to have sleep enhancing massage in the spa menus of hotels.

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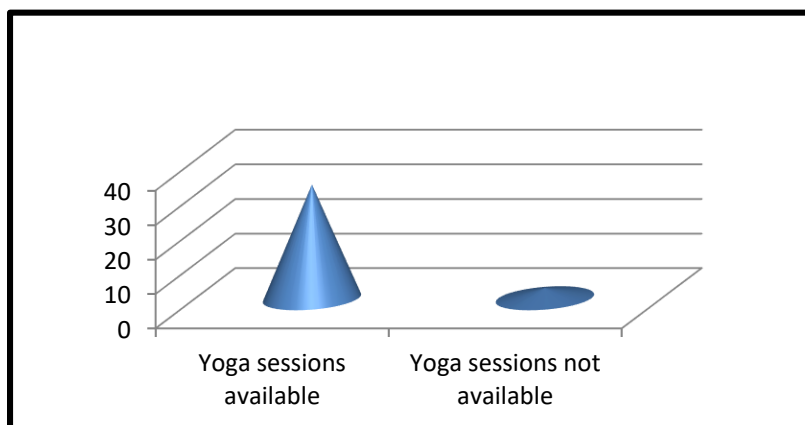


Figure8: Availability of Yoga sessions for guests

91.7% of hotels provide yoga sessions for physical and mental relaxation of guests which help them in having a calm sleep. (Khalsa, 2004). Thus, a majority of hotels have accepted and provide a facility of yoga sessions as a good option to guest for maintain physical, mental and spiritual health. This also helps to reduce stress, promotes meditation and in turn help guest to have a peaceful sleep.

10.

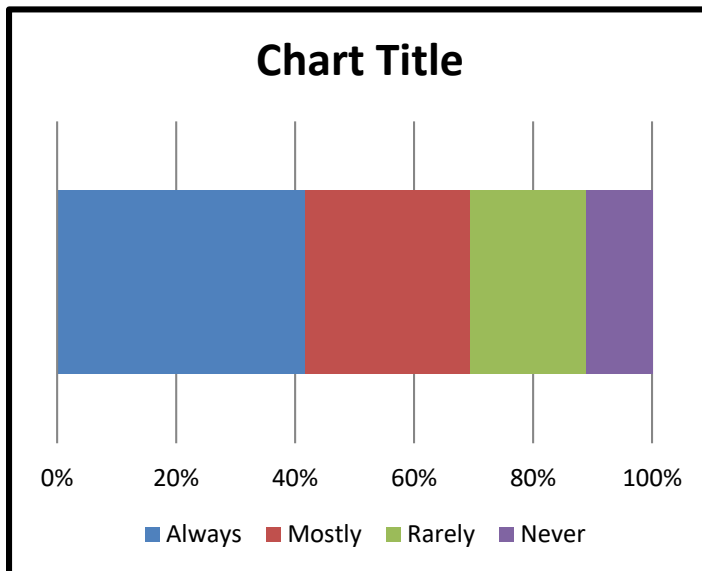


Figure 9: Guests are made aware of pillow menu, slumber kit and sleep enhancers at the time of check-in

41.7% of the hotels claim that they always make the guest aware about the various sleep enhancement facilities provided by them during his check- in while 27.8% and 19.4% mostly and rarely respectively inform the guest about these services. However, 11.1% hotels do not imperatively inform the guest of various sleep enhancement facilities available in hotel. This clearly indicates that hoteliers do understand the significance of making the guests aware about the services and amenities being provided for them to make their sleep comfortable. This helps the guest to ask for specific requirements such as may be a special pillow, drink or aroma and can make their stay a comfortable one.

11. 52.8% hotels provide inputs and discuss sleep enhancement techniques with rooms division employees regularly to inculcate in them the importance of sleep of guests to them while another 33.3% have had the discussion some times in training. 13.9% hotels have never covered the topic during any rooms division employee trainings. The study shows that even today there is a lack of importance given to the training of employees in the field of Sleep enhancement for guests. Unless and until employees are trained and are aware of the facilities of sleep enhancement available in

hotel, the guest will not benefit. Hence, Sleep enhancement should be included as a compulsory part of employee training.

12.

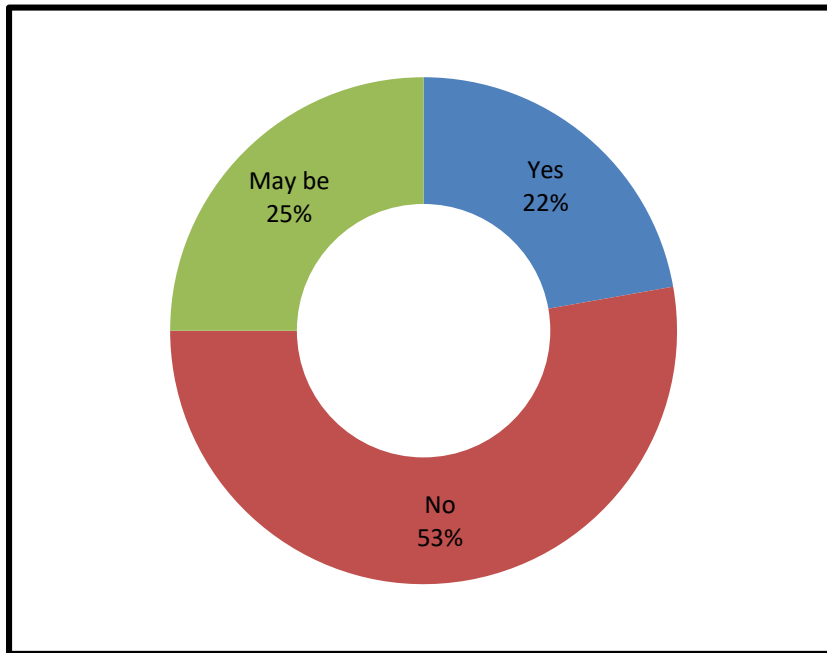


Figure 10: If the hotels are working upon setting a sleep concierge service

Majority (53%) of the hoteliers said that they are not thinking about opening any sleep concierge services for guest while only 22% of the hotels are working upon providing these services to guest as they understand its importance. 25% employees were not sure if this was being worked upon or not.

This is therefore apparent that majority of hoteliers strongly agreed that guest comfort during sleep is extremely important. Though most hotels have made an effort to include and slumber kits and enhance guest comfort by various means such as Yoga sessions, Aroma therapy etc still surprisingly most of them are not working on providing a full fledged sleep concierge services to the guest. This is an area that still awaits hoteliers due attention.

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