

# 'Mind The Gap' Hospitality, Services And Deliverables In The Serviced Apartment Industry

**The Serviced Apartment Industry consists of an interesting mix of hotel operators, entrepreneurs and property people. This heady mix of leadership has created an arena that is passionate, fast paced, competitive and above all, never dull...**

Defining what is a 'serviced apartment', and what is the true deliverable of this accommodation solution remains at the table for discussion as the industry matures, this is an opportunity to further demystify our products and our services that we provide every day across all continents to our bookers, buyers and guests.

At the centre of our world, the hotel operators that have entered the serviced apartment segment are every day striving to bring hospitality to the forefront of the experience, but how can a serviced apartment provider really show 'true' hospitality to arriving assignees and guests in a world where the majority of arrivals are into buildings without a reception (or restaurant) facility? And how are serviced apartments operators defining their products and services in this competitive marketplace?

Deciphering the 'solid' deliverables in the industry, both now and for the future, helps us to understand exactly where are our 'gaps' are, and gives us the opportunity to understand what the individual operators, associations and organisations are doing to fill them.

The definition of hospitality, in its purest form, is 'the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers'.

As the majority of serviced apartment bookers and guests are fully aware, in a great number of cases, the arrival process into a serviced apartment for an assignee and their family is not always a warm and fuzzy one.

The reality is often a late arrival into an unnamed apartment block, entry is via a key-pad on the outside of the building and keys are collected from a safe in the lobby. On entering the apartment, the 'welcome' is provided by the ritual thumbing through of the information folder that is strategically placed on the coffee table, and the entertainment is flicking through (sometimes limited) TV channels that may,

or may not be, in their own language.

Although this model can seem a little bereft of personal service, let's be honest, there really is absolutely nothing wrong with this arrival at all. This 'light' touch experience keeps costs to a minimum, and your traveller immediately 'lives like a local'.

The industry associations would confirm that one of the biggest issues that an operator of serviced apartments or corporate housing companies face daily is key delivery. And if an operator can ensure that your traveller has been able to gain 'safe entry' into their apartment, then they have won half the battle. The other half is ensuring that they can get online, but that's a whole other story...

But where is the hospitality? And can operators that have this model in their business really say that they are in 'the hospitality' industry?

One view is that serviced apartment operators are trying to 'jump' on the bandwagon of hotels, who can quite easily offer hospitality via a welcome desk, 24hr check-in with a 'live' guest service associate (hopefully one that is warm and friendly), and as for entertainment, the provision of on demand movies in your room, a bar, and in most cases a restaurant, helps to secure the definition.

It is interesting how different serviced apartment operators define hospitality, especially when it is part of their brand name. Two large global operators have the word 'hospitality' in their name - one however, doesn't operate the corporate housing model and all of their products do have a front desk, which enables provision for a friendly welcome - The other operator, however, does boast three brands that do not have receptions or provide any other managed facilities on site, so how are they defining their brand 'hospitality' and their warm welcome?

An extended stay product, an aparthotel or residence (generally) has a front desk, and is also the nearest in our industry in reflecting the services of a fully loaded hotel. It looks to host guests that intend to stay from 5 to 30 days and they see themselves as the 'stepping stone' from a hotel to a full 'serviced apartment' product - this

model is also the first choice for a business traveller in a new location, especially one that doesn't want a totally independent experience and it also provides the transition model into a city before moving into a permanent accommodation.

These extended stay products are pretty easy to offer 'hospitality' and this is shown in the multitude of services provided by, for instance, the Staybridge brand which includes complimentary breakfast, access to 'The Pantry', a fully functional front-desk and social evening receptions.

Serviced apartments and corporate housing operators use many solutions to overcome the hospitality 'voids'. Roomspace, a European operator, offers a meet and greet service for every arrival included in their rate. This helps them to make their welcome 'stand out from the crowd'. This complimentary service added to a welcome beverage tray, a welcome call or email to the assignee 24 hours into their stay and 24 hour 'out of hour' emergency and guest services helps to fill this gap.

The one thing we know for sure, is that this conundrum, which is faced by virtually every serviced apartment operator on the planet, is at the top of the agenda. Many operators have found great ways to ensure a warm and friendly welcome and have placed hospitality at the core of their business.

Having spent a great deal of time travelling the world and experiencing the best (and worst) hospitality at every level, it is obvious that people make the difference, whether face to face or virtual.

Large and small organisations understand that behind every 'act of hospitality' is an associate that makes it happen. The key is in ensuring that operators or agent's teams, companies and individuals make a difference every day (and on every arrival) for all guests - this is critical. A major error to note is that it is very easy to set a high standard for the first arrival of a guest (i.e. VIP gifts on their first arrival) and then completely drop the ball on the second visit. Consistency is vital.

Creating the perfect serviced apartment experience has to include all of the service

elements that makes a guest feel like a million dollars, on every visit – for this, operators cannot just rely on their staff to ‘know’ what to do, they have to set standards, they have to ensure that they are adhered to, and they have to audit them – of course, recruiting the right staff in the first instance does win half the battle.

So what are the other potential GAP’s in your assignees stay? We’ve covered arrival, we’ve covered off hospitality and friendliness, the other main areas would be everything in working order, health & safety, security and cleanliness.

The Association of Serviced Apartment Providers (ASAP) has been working hard to deliver an excellent quality grading programme that is being mirrored globally by other serviced apartment organisations, and this process is being reviewed currently by the CHPA (Corporate Housing Providers Association) in America. To date, over 90% of the ASAP membership has been through their first inspection. This drive for more ‘consistency’ and service has been supported and celebrated by most of the booking agents connected with ASAP including SACO, Citybase and The Apartment Service, who all trust and rely on their supply chain to deliver

the best possible stays for their clients.

Duty of care, health and safety and ensuring that assignees are supported by robust issue resolution and ‘out of hours’ emergency support is paramount to every company. Checking that your agent or supplier of serviced apartments has this in place, creates a level of confidence that even if something does go wrong with a stay, your traveller is in safe hands.

The arrival and popularity of companies that occupy the space with Airbnb and 9flats is already creating a new disruption in the accommodation space. This fast adopted reality of being hosted in a boutique private apartment (or house share) at a very competitive rate seems attractive, but for the corporate and relocation buyer, this is creating a whole new level of challenge with a view to traveller tracking, safety and security and payment facilities and above all, there is limited consistency, standards, KPI’s or SLA’s to support this assignee experience.

It is amazing that the question ‘what is a serviced apartment?’ remains on the agenda of most groups, organisations and associations. Going back to the very first formal meeting of the ASAP (the Association of Serviced Apartment Providers), over 11 years ago, this

was the first question that the membership of 12 operators tried to answer, and it continues to be on the agenda for the thought leadership group of the serviced apartment summit in 2014. The last four editions of the GSAIR (Global Serviced Apartment Industry Report) has provided a definition in every edition, but still, the discussion continues. You may wonder what causes the confusion, and many have their opinions, mine is that the industry is still developing its personality and until the services have fully defined, and the larger brands have aligned the basics of product and services, this (possibly perceived) gap in deliverables will continue to exist.



**Jo Layton**, MD Group Commercial Sales, The Apartment Service. Jo Layton has joined The Apartment Service as Managing Director – Group Commercial Sales.

She has successfully established The Apartment Service’s new Alliance brand as part of her overall remit to develop the company’s successful agency, network and Roomspace brands. Layton joined from BridgeStreet where she was responsible for sales and marketing throughout EMEA and APAC and was instrumental in the expansion of the UK office. [www.apartmentservice.com](http://www.apartmentservice.com)


MARYMOUNT


INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LONDON

Catholic Day and Boarding School  
for girls aged 11 to 18



- Experience teaching the **IB Diploma** for over 30 years!
- Exclusive pre-IB Middle Years Programme
- Nurture and support: girls gain excellent results
- Places achieved at top Universities worldwide
- Scholarships and bursaries available
- Multilingualism: up to 9 languages taught
- Internationalism: over 40 nationalities, yet one shared mission
- All faiths welcome

Please contact: [admissions@marymountlondon.com](mailto:admissions@marymountlondon.com)  
[www.marymountlondon.com](http://www.marymountlondon.com) Tel: 020 8949 0571  
 George Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7PE.

## Open your mind.



## International Baccalaureate.

Celebrating the best of the English boarding school tradition within the acclaimed International Baccalaureate framework.

We offer boarding, flexi-boarding and day school options just 45 minutes from London.


Newland  
College

Chalfont St Giles HP8 4AD | [www.newlandcollege.co.uk](http://www.newlandcollege.co.uk)