

## **Hotel Fitness and Wellness – Here to Stay**

Fitness and wellness have become an increasingly integral part of hotels. The health oriented demand segment is growing globally and research has shown that this segment is loyal to their lifestyle: guests who exercise on frequent basis also like to exercise while on business travels or on holidays. For hotels to remain relevant and competitive, there is a need to offer decent fitness facilities and wellness services.

To assess the state of the industry and to outline best practises going forward, SHC spoke to Mark Arnall who is an expert of the field. Mark is a personal trainer and physio working in Formula 1. Over the past 18 years Mark has travelled the world with the F1 circus, staying 200 nights annually in hotels – all while trying to maintain himself and his driver in top shape. Mark is currently with the Ferrari team working with Kimi Räikkönen and prior to that worked at McLaren with Mika Häkkinen and David Coulthard.

Mark is an external advisor to SHC in topics relating to hotel fitness and wellness.



**SHC: How would you describe the current fitness offering in hotels globally?**

*MA: Across the board I would say average but there are of course exceptions to this with some hotels offering fantastic facilities and services. Considering the general trend towards health and wellbeing, the hotel industry has been somewhat slow to adapt. Thankfully this seems to be changing.*

**SHC: Are there differences between regions?**

*MA: Asia is doing a great job and there are some really impressive hotel fitness facilities such as the Kerry Hotel (Shangri-La) in Shanghai which rivals stand-alone gyms. There are also some very good facilities in many hotels in America and the Middle East. Some serious money is spent there on hotel gyms, it would just be nice to see more thought go into what is set up. In my experience hotels in Europe tend to offer the least in terms of specific fitness facilities. It is amazing that a hotel can still offer a fitness room that consists of an old bike, rusty multi gym and some cobwebs! Understandably many hotels in Europe are older buildings and it takes more creativity to develop a good gym.*

**SHC: What is then required of a good hotel gym?**

*MA: Not a huge space filled with machines, which seems to be a common misconception in the hotel industry. A good gym is more about functionality, variety, flexibility and durability. It is a shame when a hotel has a great space and then asks a Fitness company to fill it with their machines. This creates a rigid and limited set up. It is great when you see well designed hotel gyms with functional equipment. There are a lot of business and leisure travellers that train regularly and know how to train. They do not need enormous facilities; most would be happy with a small functional gym. As an example the Address Montgomerie in Dubai makes good use of a smaller space. Exercise equipment such as the TRX suspension trainer, ARKE functional training sets, kettle bells and stability / medicine balls do not require much space or initial capital layout, yet they can provide a great full body work-out.*

**SHC: How important is fitness offering in resorts?**

*MA: There will always be people who will want to go to a resort and collapse on a beach for a week and do nothing. There are also increasingly many people to whom training is a lifestyle and they would not stay in a resort if there were no decent training facilities available. Hotels should be mindful of this. Some hotels such as the Thanyapura Resort in Phuket have taken the game to a new level as they are built entirely to appeal to this segment. Generally I would say that in a resort setting there should be a comprehensive fitness offering built around the hotel's location, which can also include many outdoor options.*

### SHC: Is a fitness facility a must in a hotel?

*MA: I would say that these days it is, but if there really is no possibility for a gym, a hotel can still take a positive approach to health and fitness. For minimal investment, hotels can provide in-room work-out kit which can include a TRX suspension training system, stability balls, medicine balls etc. This kit combined with simple body weight exercises can provide a full body workout in the room, which can be enhanced with specific DVD programmes outlining various options such as 25 minute high intensity session, comprehensive 45 minute work-out or focus on travel related recovery. Hotels can also provide a special kit and programme for example for yoga / pilates lovers. The options are endless and hotels should try to keep things fun and interesting to motivate travellers. This can go a long way to satisfy the fitness-oriented guest.*

### SHC: Other than the gym, what other fitness offering can hotels provide?

*MA: Depending on the location of the hotel, I would suggest pre planned running routes taking in the most scenic / interesting areas with several options, for example 2.5km, 5km and 10km. If the hotel wants to go further, it could offer heart rate monitors with the routes built into the watch GPS systems. There could be mention of special places to train outdoors, for example fitness parks along the route. The pre-set routes can also be done with bikes. As an example the Crown Towers Hotel in Melbourne, which has a great in-house fitness facility, still promotes the external biking and running routes to the guests.*

### SHC: If a hotel really does not have a space for a gym, what are their options?

*For smaller hotels – perhaps urban boutique or historic properties - it might make more sense to partner with an existing local gym. It is sad to see shoebox gyms that are neglected with housekeeping and maintenance just for the hotel to say they have a gym. There are plenty of these in Europe and in these cases I would rather see no gym than a bad gym.*

### SHC: Is it a good idea for hotels to partner with external fitness related facilities?

*Absolutely, hotels could make much better use of their neighbourhoods and partner with relevant external suppliers. Travellers want to experience the destination and working with outstanding sports suppliers can help provide these unique experiences. Is there a great pool or climbing wall nearby? Or boxing studio, bikram yoga, Flywheel Stadium Cycling or CrossFit facility? It makes a lot of sense to create partnerships – this can be a real win-win situation for everyone. Mention of these nearby sporting options on hotel website can also help with bookings as it creates the comfort that sport options are available if one so desires. A good example of this is the Hotel Zetta (Viceroy) in San Francisco which outlines their partnerships with Barry's Bootcamp, SoulCycle and others on their website.*

**SHC: How do you see the wellness offering in hotels?**

*MA: There is a big trend towards health and wellness in general and hotels could and should capitalise on this to attract guests. In terms of hotels, their wellness offering should include anything and everything that can improve the wellbeing of the guest.*

**SHC: How important is nutrition in hotel wellness offering?**

*Nutrition is a big part of wellness and has a natural link to hotels since people have to eat when they travel. This is particularly important to people who travel a lot. I often get asked for advice on how to eat healthier in hotels as this is an area where many business travellers struggle. What I have realised is that travellers want to live healthier while on the road but they do not necessarily know how.*

**SHC: How can hotels improve their F&B offering in terms of wellness?**

*This is largely an awareness and educational issue. Many hotels already have health conscious menu items but the nutritional benefits may remain unknown to the guests. If a hotel highlighted foods that for example had positive effects on the immune system or brain function, rather than the standard letter “H” to indicate a healthy option, guests might be more inclined to order these dishes. The Park Hyatt in Zurich with their “beauty, mood and brain food” menu or the Kempinski Corvinus in Budapest with their breakfast energy shots are examples of this. This can be taken a step further by offering tailor-made nutritional options. Similarly, the offering in the guest room could be improved by complementing the trusted mini-bar Pringles and chocolate with healthy alternative snacks.*

**SHC: Are there areas of wellness that you feel are currently not offered in hotels?**

*Absolutely yes, the biggest being recovery. This is an area that I think is almost entirely overlooked at the moment. Travelling is tiring for everyone and a lot more could be done to help guests recover from their travels. An example is a set of basic recovery equipment such as foam rollers and massage balls. There are hosts of other options to tackle travel fatigue and reduce the effects of jet-lag. In Formula 1 we focus a lot on recovery from travel and I have set up lots of programmes based on arriving in better shape which is as important for business travellers as it is for an athlete.*

**SHC: Many hotel operators have been launching their fitness / wellness programmes in recent years. What is your opinion of the increasing operator interest in fitness and wellness?**

*MA: These are great initiatives with huge potential. There is enormous need for such programmes and operators that can best deliver (execute on property level – not only nice PR words!) will have a big competitive advantage. This can create a very real USP and there is still plenty room to do more.*

**SHC: What would be your advice for hotel owners and developers to optimise their fitness and wellness offering?**

*MA: Give the guest what they want! And more and more they want fitness and wellness integrated into their everyday life so this is what should be offered. From a developer's perspective, catering to the wellness and fitness oriented clientele does not necessarily require enormous investments as the industry provides a variety of training kit that is both space and capital effective. There are also great opportunities to create new sources of revenue through these services.*

**SHC: And finally, how do you maintain your fitness when you travel?**

*MA: I carry a TRX with me everywhere. This means I can do a full body workout in any hotel I stay in. From a cardio point of view I prefer to be outside so I go for a run or if there is a good stair case close by I will do a stair workout. But fitness is only one aspect. I also carry with me recovery equipment such as massage balls and foam rollers as in F1 we travel constantly and therefore suffer from all the same travel related aches and pains as any other business traveller.*

#### **About Tea Ros - Strategic Hotel Consulting**



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