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The Future of Travel: “Robo-assistance, robot room deliveries, and smart entertainment hubs” With Isabelle Matter of YOTEL

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By Candice Georgiadis, Founder of Digital Day Agency



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newest YOTEL rooms have SmartHubs, where travelers can dock their phones and play any of their own app content through our HD TVs or premium sound system, allowing them a break from laptops and other devices. And to ensure committed guests don't deviate from home exercise routines—or for those who want to give something new a spin—we offer Peloton bikes at YOTEL NY.

As a part of my series on “The future of travel”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Isabelle Matter The General Manager of YOTEL San Francisco. Isabelle is a hospitality professional with over 20 years of hotel and travel industry experience, working with companies like Hilton, Joie De Vivre and for the past two years YOTEL. She has spent the majority of her career in the lifestyle and boutique hotel space and has always enjoyed bringing an entrepreneurial approach to the art of hospitality. Highly focused on the customer experience, Isabelle works toward creating meaningful connections with customers and associates alike. Isabelle studied at Unilex College, College Saint Andre, and the Conservatory of Ballet. Her personal motto is “work hard, give freely, be kind, and be the best that you can be”.

Thank you so much for joining us! Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific career path?

I grew up in France, in a food and wine region (the Alsace region), where we take every opportunity to celebrate life and gather around good food, good wine, and good people. I come from a family of chefs, my father was a Michelin star restaurateur and hotelier, and I was lucky enough to explore and be exposed to a world that speaks to the soul in a universal language. The opportunity to serve, and to perhaps make a little difference in someone's day, along with a liking for adventure is what has been the most meaningful for me in the world of hospitality.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started your career?

There have been so many through the years, but what comes to mind most is opening YOTEL San Francisco this February.

Launching a brand new hotel is a unique experience, and I have many fond stories from this journey already. What a great feeling to be involved in a project from the beginning, put the pieces of the puzzle together and finally see it all coming to life! But more importantly is bringing a team of people together and truly working towards the same goal.

Every morning, most hotels will do a stand-up meeting with the leadership team to talk about whatever is going on that day, goals and priorities, etc. We had this same meeting every day for a year during our pre-opening time, when we were still working out of a remote office as the hotel was being built. Throughout the months a new face would join the team here and there, until finally the day came when I looked around the circle at our morning meeting and realized we had a full group of leaders ready to open the hotel. I can't explain that feeling, but it was a special moment for me.

We don't often get to experience starting from scratch, and while it can be full of challenges, it is also extremely rewarding to get to build something together.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

One of my first hospitality jobs was working in the front office planning department for Club Mediterranee. I was so excited, but there was a lot to be trained on. During one of my early shifts, I was learning how to check a guest in and how to introduce guests to the week's resort activities upon their arrival. After watching the person that was training me do it a few times, I felt confident enough to try it out for myself. It just so happened that on my first guest interaction, I was checking in a regular that had been coming to the resort for years. I was nervous, so I didn't catch on that the guest was a regular and told him a bunch of information he already knew, spending time reviewing the map of the property—little did I know, he knew it like the back of his hand!.

My main takeaway from that first experience is still relevant to the world of hospitality, and always will be—you have to listen to your guests, to your customers; they'll tell you what they want. In today's world, customization is key to the guest experience. When you listen to what your customers want and tailor the experience to those wants, you make the travel experience that much more memorable. That's how you built a loyal customer base.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

YOTEL has always been focused on innovation and efficiency, It's apparent in everything we do, from our design to our programming. Earlier this decade, we were one of the first hotels to use automated kiosks to allow guests to check in, dramatically speeding up a simple, but additional, process for travelers who may be weary from their long flights. When done properly, kiosks can drop check-in times to one minute—we're providing a customer service difference-maker as soon as the guests enter the lobby.

We integrated super-fast, free Wi-Fi and dedicated co-working space before the trend bubbled in the hospitality space, because we know guests value efficiency and time as key determinants of their experience.

It's these details that make YOTEL stand out and allow us to continue to improve our brand and our product with every new property that opens.

Which tips would you recommend to your colleagues in your industry to help them to thrive and not “burn out”? Can you share a story about that?

Travel, for work or on your downtime. The nature of our profession is to create comfortable and convenient “home-away-from-homes.” Without occasionally getting our own 30,000-foot views and experiencing other cultures, we might not have the greatest inspiration to practice what we preach.

I used to work for a company that had a sabbatical program (one month off every three years) for their employees, which allowed people to recharge and created great synergies, making sure that things were covered in their absence.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

Yes, a good friend of mine, who I worked with and for, who has become a mentor over the years. This is someone I can go to with almost anything on my mind, someone I trust, and care for. We learn together, learn from one another and we laugh a lot. Laughter is the best medicine, especially in the more stressful times in this industry. After all, we're making people's lives better through travel and new experiences, so there's a lot of be happy about.

Let's jump to the core of our discussion. Can you share with our readers about the innovations that you are bringing to the travel and hospitality industries?

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Which “pain point” are you trying to address by introducing this innovation?

We know that our guests value time, efficiency and experience, so every innovation we introduce needs to address one of those three points. We want to make the hotel stay a little more welcoming—imagine finding a Peloton when you're expecting an elliptical or an old treadmill, and then grabbing a warm towel after your post workout shower ahead of a morning meeting. We want that feeling to extend to all aspects of the guest stay at YOTEL.

How do you envision that this might disrupt the status quo?

The industry as a whole is moving in this direction, but we consider ourselves front runners in the movement. Travelers these days have a different set of expectations and needs than travelers five, ten or 15 years ago, and we like to think that as we continue to revolutionize our product and listen to our guests, we'll continue to stay ahead of the curve and be a disruptor in the hotel space.

Can you share 5 examples of how travel and hospitality companies will be adjusting over the next five years to the new ways that consumers like to travel?

1. Major hotel chains will eventually follow our lead and kiosks will become the primary method of hotel check-in, with friendly humans available to perform concierge-like tasks.
2. In busy cities, hotels would be wise to partner with ride-sharing companies and establish themselves as convenient pick-up points, in lieu of old-fashioned shuttles.
3. If they haven't already, hotels should make everything available via an app, from a question-answering concierge to your final bill.

4. Public spaces will become increasingly necessary—not just the traditional hotel bar, but innovative, multi-functional spaces that allow guests to work, meet, play and socialize.

5. Localized experience will become more relevant and valuable, in lieu of a traditional concierge experience. Travelers want to explore like locals, and authentic, insider travel tips and content will become a major differentiator for hospitality brands.

You are a “travel insider”. How would you describe your “perfect vacation experience”?

For me, it has to be something adventurous. The right amount of nature and people, comfortable but simple, full of discoveries and relaxing. Travel is about expanding your horizons, your mind, and your experiences..

Can you share with our readers how have you used your success to bring goodness to the world?

Anyone working in hospitality will tell you that we change lives, it’s a key reason for doing what we do. Sharing experiences, mentoring team members, using opportunities to make someone’s day by making them feel like a VIP are the main things that come to mind for me. I truly believe we have the opportunity to make people’s day better, it’s one of the best parts of this job.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. 🤖

That’s a great question. I would start a massive buddy program, where people can help one another, be here for one another, providing advice and friendship, that can be passed on over and over again. Mentorship is key in any field, especially in ours, but it’s not always about getting work advice. I think, collectively, we can do and be so much more!

How can our readers follow you on social media?

To connect with me on LinkedIn, you can find me [here](#). For the latest on anything YOTEL I would recommend following our main handle Instagram handle for the brand, [@yotel](#).