

## Operations

# Hoteliers refine European breakfast to rack up returns

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International chains operating in Europe are expanding their breakfast buffet items to better reflect local tastes and satisfy guest requests to grow their bottom lines.



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REPORT FROM EUROPE—Breakfast buffets offered by the major hotel companies active in Europe are becoming healthier, more local and more varied as operators realize the meal’s impact on their earnings and food-and-beverage managers accommodate guest demands.

“F&B has long been an amenity that hotels had to suffer through, but now many are seeing it is a way to make it part of the whole experience and make it profitable,” said Aaron Allen of global restaurant consultancy Aaron Allen & Associates. “And breakfast is a big part of that.”

Well-being is at the core of changes to breakfast, Allen said.

“There is a movement toward healthy, such as replacing margarine with olive oil or finding alternatives to processed foods or those with lots of chemicals,” he said. “And these trends are fueled by millennials who want an authentic experience and will pay for it instead of worrying about paying off their mortgage.”

Natural products are gaining ground and properties operated by Madrid-based NH Hotel Group, according to Emilio Suero, VP of food and beverage for all NH brands.

“We always have a minimum of at least eight varieties of fresh fruit on our buffet tables, and this is especially important for our business travelers who make up 65% of our guests and need to eat healthy on the road,” Suero said. “We also have to pay close attention to eating trends so we can offer things like

gluten-free products to our guests (as) breakfast is a very big contributor to income.”

He added that, on average, 35% of an NH property’s income is from F&B, and breakfast accounts for 40% of that.

### **11 million breakfasts**

Breakfast at NH is not included in the room rate, Suero said, with breakfast buffet prices averaging €12 (\$14.18) and up at its premium brands NH Collection and Nhow.

“Seventy percent of our guests have breakfast in the hotel,” Suero said. “Annually, that’s 11 million breakfasts ... but more than volume, what’s important is how our guests perceive the quality of what we offer. We pass out questionnaires to guests covering 13 areas of the total service, and on average the quality of our breakfast ranks third in appreciation after our check-in and check-out procedures and our cleanliness.”

Breakfast also is appreciated by guests at Scandic Hotels, the Nordic region’s largest chain by property count.

“When looking at guest comments on TripAdvisor, guests frequently comment on the hotel’s location, a good night’s sleep and the breakfast, so it is important,” said Morten Malting, [Scandic](#)’s director of F&B.

Malting said breakfast often is the only meal some guests will try at his company’s hotels, and breakfast is often the last impression a property can make on a guest before check-out.

### **Leveraging local**

Allen said he advises clients to gather 20% of their fare from local sources, while the rest can be familiar items perhaps from farther afield.

“Lots of hotel managers forget about local-sourcing their offerings and providing a sense of place, both of which are becoming very important,” he said.

NH Hotels offers jamón serrano, the country’s famous air-cured ham, at all of its hotels, with a superior product available at NH Collection properties. Hotels located in the Mediterranean region offer finer coffee options, Suero said.

Thinking local is also big at Scandic. Not only are the buffets heavy on Scandinavian products, but also on nationally or regionally specific items, Malting said, who added breakfast normally is included in Scandic room rates.

Along with the Finn crisps, Scandic staff in Finland provide rice-filled Karelian pie with rye crust, while properties in the country’s Tampere region offer locally made blood sausage.

In Berlin, Scandic guests enjoy smoked salmon and trout from local fishermen within 50 miles of the city, while in Hamburg cinnamon rolls known as Franzbrötchen star on the buffet tables.

### **Faith in food**

Hotel chefs and servers have to be aware of religious dietary requirements and laws, sources said.

“In Norway, we launched turkey bacon to go along with our pork bacon. It is more environmentally friendly, more healthy and suitable for people of other religions,” Malting said.

Locally sourced fare and organic, vegetarian and allergen-free offerings are all closely monitored by management to ensure good earnings and repeat guest business.

“A fixed allocation is made from the room to the F&B department, and we also allocate the cost part of the breakfast and can see a full (profit and loss result) for our breakfast department,” Malting said.

InterContinental Hotels Group’s Holiday Inn Express brand also offers breakfast as part of its room rate and adjusts buffet items to take into account eating habits within any market, said Mike Greenup, [IHG](#)’s VP of brand management of upscale and midscale hotels in Europe.

“In the United Kingdom and Ireland, we found guests frequently asked for bacon to be added to the menu, so we introduced it back into our hotels earlier this year,” Greenup said.

Greenup said while breakfast at [Holiday Inn Express](#) is more focused than at its sibling brand Holiday Inn, it does offer alternatives like vegetarian sausages and gluten-free or sugar-free options upon request.

“[Holiday Inn](#) offers a larger range of hot and cold continental breakfast, which isn’t included in the price of a room,” Greenup said.

Allen said hotel F&B is on the verge of AI innovation.

“We’ll see more virtual assistants for guests with robot-like devices,” he said. “This will do away with that swap-meet atmosphere you get in the breakfast buffet line with everyone jostling to get at the bacon.”