

Top US trends for restaurants and bars range from artisan salt selections to Izakaya bar menus; chefs growing their own gardens, and cupcakes moving from kids plates to adult menus. Top hotel trends include the rise of smallish boho-chic hotels, to the introduction of interesting “get frisky” packages for feline pets.

Industry veteran Andrew Freeman says of the 2008 trends to watch: “Today, the modern diner and traveler expect a more personalised and fun approach to their experiences from the bar to the hotel suite.

“Savvy guests are up on all of the trends and expect to be wowed. They desire unique and one of a kind offerings.”

He says now more than ever, guests make their choices based on great word-of-mouth and social networking online buzz.

From the marketing standpoint, the biggest trend of the year is giving back is essential—and both restaurants and hotels are partnering more with charitable organisations that align with their values, benefit their communities and make good business sense.

The trend list was developed by AF&Co., from a combination of close industry observation, coast-to-coast travel, discussions with industry experts, meetings with hotel and restaurant clients, press contacts, conferences attended and media sources. During 2007, the AF&Co. consultants traveled 100,800 miles, ate 1092 restaurant meals, produced six restaurant openings and four hotel launches and finally, slept for a total of 210 nights in hotels.

Here is what they found:

May I take your order please: Restaurant & Bar Trends

Saline solution

Artisan Salt: fleur de sel, sel gris, Hawaiian pink, Himalayan black; even smoked salt has appeared in dishes from tuna tartar to salted caramel ice-cream.

The Aussie invasion

OZ has arrived. Well beyond wine imports, menus are loading up with Aussie olive oil, honey, fruit pastes and seafood.

The lounge around

More full-scale dining room menus and innovative bar menus are being offered in the lounge and bars. Now, guests can relax, order as much or as little as they like, and be casual as friends come and go.

Small plates go global

From Japanese Izakaya, Indian Chaat, Middle Eastern Mezze to Spanish Tapas, the small plates craze keeps going and growing in every kind of restaurant concept across the country and the world.

Artisans in Residence

From house-made salumi like prosciutto, sausage, coppa, salami, mortadella to house-cured olives. Chefs take more pride in making everything in-house. You say salumi, I say salami.

Blooming chefs

Chefs with a green thumb are growing their produce, usually organic, on their own farms, behind their restaurants, or on rooftop gardens. You can't get more local than this.

The cupcake revolution

From delicious cupcakes with buttercream frosting to homemade twinkies and old-fashioned butterscotch puddings, nostalgic desserts remain a favorite. Now many are garnished with retro treats like Pop Rocks and Caramel Corn.

That size fits you perfectly

Dishes now come in small, medium and large portions to satisfy a wide range of tastes and appetites. The entrée as we know it is not going away, but size does matter.

Fine dining re-defined

Diners still crave four-star cuisine and service, only now they want these experiences in more relaxed settings.

I can get it for you retail

Fine dining goes retail. Like that pasta or hand-crafted teapot? Today, even the best places have to-go sections or catalogs.

Sweet says hello to savoury

Caramel with foie gras, sorbet in your soup, salt on desserts, and truly tangy frozen yogurts – sweet and savoury join forces with delicious results.

Extreme green

Obedying the mantra of SOL food (seasonal, organic and local) is almost the norm. Now, restaurants are going completely sustainable with biodegradable disposable tableware, eco-conscious cleaners and a suite of green business practices.

Sexy unisex bathrooms

Please put the seat down when you're done. Unisex bathrooms are popping up in hot restaurants, bars and lounges across the country. Will this be the end of long lines for the ladies?

It's a split decision

A range of wine service options: by the glass, the bottle, the 2 oz. taste, even the quartino. Quaffers have plenty of choices now. Still can't decide? Split the difference and get the half bottle.

99 bottles of beer on the wall

Gastro-pubs with dedicated beer lists, featuring special brews, house-made drafts and hard-to-find ales are all the rage. Adding to the experience are custom glassware selections and special pairing menus.

Reaching beyond riesling

Gruner Veltliner and Blaufrankisch. These wines from Germany and Austria (and others from beyond) may be tough to pronounce, but they are easy to drink and pair. Will we be Hungary for more next year?

Bar none

The chef's new signature dish – bar snacks. Homemade pretzels, paprika-tossed nuts and hand-rolled sesame sticks take the place of stale popcorn and keep guests reaching for more.

Shaken, stirred, muddled and organic

Bar chef/mixologists get more creative with hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind organic cocktails using fresh fruit, herbs, spices, vegetable purees, house-made syrups, and innovative infusions. More and more

bars now have a selection of organic beverage options.

Staying in the groove: hotel trends

Going in and coming out

Gay and lesbian travel (LBGT) continues to gain velocity and popularity. With a \$64.5 billion market share, major cities and hotels around the world are opening their doors wide to welcome this very discerning crowd.

Netting new clients

Catch potential guests on the Internet. Consumers today continue to rely less on printed and bound guides, turning instead to social media websites, travel sites and blogs for planning, scheming and dreaming. Savvy hotels are creating websites with a taste of things to come, and adding systems to make reservations a breeze.

Lounge act

Stylish hotels are forgoing traditional lobbies and creating vibrant lounge environments. Sleek couches, oversize chairs and lighting are replacing the staid and stuffy reception area to create hip social spots for swanky cocktails and music that attracts guests and locals alike.

Wired from door-to-door

The technology boom continues. Free wireless Internet, remote paperless check-in and check-out, on-line reservations, Ipod docking stations, movies on-demand and in-room Play Stations are now expected by today's modern traveler.

Heading for greener pastures

The green train has left the station and more hotel companies are jumping on board. Here's the basic packing list: high-efficiency light bulbs, non-toxic paints and carpeting, low-flow showerheads and toilets, non-toxic cleaning materials, organic cotton towels and linens (laundered only on request), air-filtering systems and hotel collateral printed on recycled paper using soy-based inks.

Beyond the bare essentials

Forgot your Ipod? Covet that cozy robe? Now just about everything in your hotel is available for purchase. Left your toothbrush, deodorant or swim suit at home? Thoughtful hotels have amenities that cover just about every guest request.

At your leisure

Business is booming, but not with the typical business traveler. Leisure travel and multi-generational family adventure vacations are on the rise. Grandmother and granddaughter travel packages keep the generations connected.

Take a deep breath and say "ohmmm"

From Yoga studios to one-on-one gyms and medi-spas, hotels are seriously focusing on your well-being by offering personalised treatments packages including diet coaching, outdoor excursions and rejuvenating boosts with custom massage menus.

Boho-chic

Small boutique hotels are now popping up in bohemian neighborhoods surrounded by art studios, ateliers and galleries. They soak in the local culture by supporting local artists with custom-designed rooms and unique decor.

The halls of comfortable learning

Hotels get a "PhD" in service when they offer tours of local markets, in-depth peeks into local

culture, cooking classes with the chef, and other cultural educational experiences.

Creature comforts get frisky

Get your bow wow going and say hello to Rover and Spike. Today, most hotels are already dog friendly, so get ready to welcome the next breed of pets – Frisky the cat and Polly the parakeet.