

Independent restaurants are the most effective at making guests feel welcome

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New research has revealed that 60% of diners feel independent restaurants are the most effective at making guests feel welcome, with chain restaurants and gastro pubs some way behind at 13% and 11% respectively. Bars were highlighted as being least effective, with only one per cent, according to the survey by HospitalityGEM.

The results also suggest that the role of a singular host in every site may be outdated, with only 11% stating that this was a necessity. 87% of diners highlight that it is either not necessary or that it is dependent on the type of site; suggesting that hosting should be viewed as a team-wide responsibility.

When looking at the components of what makes a great host, 59% of diners felt that 'ongoing (but appropriate) engagement with you throughout your visit' was the most important factor in making a guest feel welcome and looked after. This is followed by 19% of respondents who felt it was down to 'staff awareness of their environment and of guests' moods/needs'.

'Ongoing and appropriate engagement' is reinforced by the 69% of diners who prefer to speak to the person who has actually served them in the event of an issue, rather than a manager or team leader. This figure rises to 73% with those aged 36-45. However, a difference in preference is highlighted with those aged over 65, a third of whom would rather speak directly to a manager if an issue arose.

When asked to recall a time where they were made to feel exceptionally welcomed in a pub, restaurant or hotel, it's clear that a personal and genuine approach is key to a successful visit. One respondent stated that staff 'made us feel less like customers and more like guests' and another said 'we were made to feel as if we were guests, not customers'. Another diner highlighted their preference for 'those who show personality and adapt to the type of occasion their diners are coming to the restaurant for'.

When considering key touchpoints in a restaurant experience, diners rated them in the following order in terms of which contribute most to making them feel welcome and looked after.

1. Meeting and greeting
2. Check backs throughout the meal and ensuring satisfaction
3. Efficient provision of bill and processing of payment
4. Offer of second drinks
5. Being guided through the menu once sat
6. Communication on departure

Steven Pike, Managing Director of HospitalityGEM commented: "These results are reflective of the trend towards less formal situations for eating out, particularly among younger generations, but they also highlight the importance of really effective teamwork and attentiveness throughout a guest's experience. This means recruiting people with the ability to interact well with their colleagues as well as with diners. But it also requires a very clear set of operational processes so that the service appears fluid."