

The Best Just Got Better **iSi**

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Celluloid Heroes

Hollywood Hotel's take on complimentary breakfast makes it a star in Los Angeles.

By Jodi Helmer



On the expanded buffet, baguettes, imported cheese, and deli meats are favorites among Europeans; flour tortillas, scrambled eggs, and salsa appeal to Latinos. The Hollywood is studying potential items to appeal to its growing number of Asian guests.

In the 1990s, the continental breakfast at the Hollywood Hotel in Los Angeles consisted of coffee and prepackaged donuts. "At that time, it was all guests expected from a free breakfast," explains GM Jeff Zarrinam.

Today, a robust complimentary breakfast buffet has become a key differentiator for the hotel, despite that it has no dedicated F&B program—only breakfast service. Although the logistics are complicated and staff must be cross-trained to perform multiple roles, Zarrinam never considered charging guests.

"No one wants to be nickel-and-dimed," he says. "We would rather go overboard to please people with amenities that add value instead of handing them a bill with dozens of charges."

Rolling the cost of the breakfast buffet into the room rate has also helped generate repeat business and boost group sales. Mandy Rassuli, sales and catering director at the Hollywood, says other hotels in the area charge \$20 to \$30 per person for a similar breakfast spread.

"Breakfast is a total selling point for us," she says. "We get a lot of repeat annual visitors



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and that tells us that we're doing something right."

A STAR IS BORN

In order to be close to Universal Studios, TCL Chinese Theatre (formerly Mann's), and the Walk of Fame, guests at the 127-room hotel previously resigned themselves to seeking out area restaurants for their morning meals. Zarrinnam realized it was going to take more than a great location to attract guests in a competitive hotel market.

In 2006, the hotel revamped its breakfast program to feature filling foods including made-to-order eggs, fresh fruit, and sausage, along with continental breakfast staples such as cereal, muffins, and bagels. For guests on restricted diets, the hotel offers a selection of kosher, gluten-free, and vegetarian options at the breakfast bar. Despite the upgraded offerings, breakfast remains free.

BLOCKBUSTER SEQUELS

Since it was first introduced, the breakfast menu has expanded and evolved to meet the diverse tastes of the hotel's international guests. For example, heartier items such as baguettes, imported cheese, and deli meats are favorites among Europeans, while flour tortillas, scrambled eggs, and salsa appeal to Latinos.

Zarrinnam is in the process of researching breakfast options that will appeal to the increasing number of Asian guests.

Sourcing from national suppliers such as US Foods, Shamrock Foods, and Costco allows Zarrinnam access to a huge range of foods and the option to customize each order while keeping costs in check.

"The breakfast program is dynamic," he says. "It's always changing based on guest feedback."

Zarrinnam even experimented with the hours of the breakfast service before finding the sweet spot: 6:30 to 10:30 a.m. daily. Starting the service later or ending it earlier increased guest complaints about the hours, he says.

GEARING UP

In 2013, the hotel invested in an Update International convection oven and new Teflon pans, allowing them to replace scrambled eggs on the breakfast buffet with made-to-order omelets and waffles.

"We used to prepare all of the foods in the back of the house and bring them to the front of the house to be served," explains Rassuli. "Now our guests can watch their breakfast being prepared and personalize their choices; it's something our guests love."

The hotel also installed durable, lightweight aluminum tables from Southern Aluminum (www.southernaluminum.com) and countertops from Carlisle Food Service Products and updated the look of the space. In addition to adding aesthetic appeal, the surfaces are simple to clean, which makes staff more efficient.

SHOW TIME

Zarrinnam acknowledges that a lot of effort goes into operating the hotel's breakfast program. It takes five staff members to set up, run, and clean up the continental breakfast. The hotel lacks a dedicated F&B staff because its dining program is limited to breakfast, and that means the staff must be nimble. The same workers who are slicing fruit, refilling juice pitchers, and preparing made-to-order omelets also help with housekeeping, maintenance and guest check-ins after the breakfast service ends.

"We all collaborate to make the guest experience the best it can be," Zarrinnam says. "No other hotel in Hollywood [offers] this kind of spread, and guests notice."

Besides the repeat bookings, the breakfast program also generates a different kind of ROI: Rave reviews on online sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Expedia.

"Good reviews bring in more guests. You can't buy that kind of advertising," says Zarrinnam. "When you give people what they want, it's good for business."

Jodi Helmer is a freelance journalist covering food, drink, and sustainable living.

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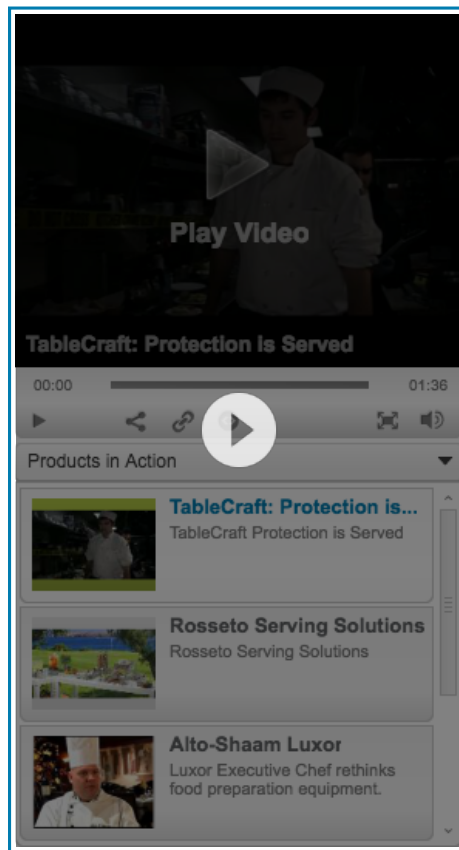


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