

Student Challenge 2027

THE HOTEL THAT SHOULD EXIST

Design a lifestyle hotel for the future traveller

Scenario

It is 2035. People still travel for holidays, work, recovery, connection and curiosity, but the boundaries between these reasons are less clear. Their expectations are shaped by how they live at home, what they value, what they are tired of, and what they want more of.

Some travel to feel free. Some want privacy. Some want to reconnect with family, meet people who think like them, regain energy, or spend several days without a plan. They are willing to pay more when a hotel understands what they need and reflects the way they want to live.

The market already has hundreds of hotel brands. The question is not whether it needs another name and logo. The question is whether there is a future traveller need important enough to justify a new hotel product.

Your task is to create the lifestyle hotel that earns the right to exist.

You will choose a future traveller, understand how that person lives and why they travel, and translate that insight into a complete hotel experience. The hotel must give the guest a clear reason to choose it and a meaningful reason to remember it.

Mission

You are the Future Hotel Experience Designer. Your role is to turn one future traveller's lifestyle, needs, and desired emotional state into a coherent lifestyle hotel concept.

You are not starting with a building. You are starting with a person.

First, understand:

- how the traveller lives and where they live
- what they value and what they consider a normal standard at home
- what is missing from their everyday life
- why they want to travel now
- how they want to feel during the trip
- how they want to spend their time
- who they want around them - and who they do not
- what they are prepared to pay more for

Then create the hotel around that understanding: its promise, location, spaces, service, programmes, food, rhythm, atmosphere and communication.

The goal

Create a lifestyle hotel concept that future travellers would choose, owners could understand and hospitality professionals could translate into a real product. The concept should show how guest insight becomes experience, how experience informs space and how the hotel creates value throughout the year.

The central question

How should this guest feel while staying here - and what should remain with them after they leave?

A critical distinction

A wine tasting, wellness programme, dinner or guided tour is an activity. It is not automatically the reason for travelling. Your concept must uncover the deeper motivation: freedom, belonging, privacy, ease, stimulation, recovery, closeness, discovery, confidence or another clearly defined state.

Key elements your concept must include

1 The future traveller

- Who is this person, beyond age and income?
- Where and how do they live?
- What does an ordinary week look like?
- What do they already expect because they have it at home?
- Which values influence what they choose and what they reject?
- What are they willing to pay more for?

2 The reason for travelling

- Why is this person leaving home at this moment?
- What feeling or change are they looking for?
- Do they travel alone, with a partner, friends, family, or a community?
- Do they travel because of the hotel, the destination, or both?
- How much structure, spontaneity, contact, and privacy do they want?

3 The hotel product

- Why does the guest choose a hotel rather than a villa, apartment, resort or private rental?
- What is the hotel's central promise?
- What happens there that the guest cannot easily find elsewhere?
- What does the hotel deliberately not offer?
- What makes the guest willing to pay for this experience?

4 Experience before architecture

You do not need to design a building or submit architectural plans. Define what the space must allow the guest to do and feel. Explain the balance between privacy and interaction, rooms and shared spaces, movement and stillness, stimulation and calm. Architecture and design should follow the experience, not the other way around.

5 Time programmes and hotel life

- How does the guest want to spend the morning, afternoon and evening?
- What can be planned and what should remain spontaneous?
- Which programmes, rituals, services or partnerships support the desired feeling?
- Which offers run throughout the year and which belong to a specific season or period?
- What can the guest buy, book, taste, learn, create or take home?
- Which elements generate additional revenue because they are genuinely relevant to this guest?

6 The complete guest experience

- What does the guest expect before arrival?
- What should the first hour feel like?
- Which moments define the stay?
- How does the hotel protect the guest's preferred rhythm?
- What is the strongest memory of the stay?
- With what feeling does the guest leave?
- What would make them return or recommend the hotel?

7 Brand and communication

- How will the right guest recognise that this hotel is for them?
- How will the hotel communicate a feeling without relying on empty lifestyle language?
- What does it promise - and what does it refuse to promise?
- Why is the concept worth paying more for?

- Who is this hotel not for?

8 Technology

Technology is expected to work. It is infrastructure, like hot water. Do not create a technology strategy or recommend specific hotel systems. Explain only where technology removes friction, protects choice or privacy, and where human presence remains essential. Technology should support the experience without becoming the concept.

What You Need to Submit

Each participant must submit the following by **6 December 2026 at 23:59 CET**.

One Hotel Concept Pitch

Up to five minutes. Up to 10 slides. One video.

Bring your lifestyle hotel to life through the story of the future traveller you designed it for. Combine visuals and your own narration to show how understanding this person leads to the hotel's spaces, services, programmes and promise.

Structure your pitch around these ten slides:

Slide	What to show
1. The hotel that should exist	Introduce yourself, name your hotel and explain its purpose in one sentence.
2. Meet your future traveller	Show how and where they live, their values, everyday pressures, expected comforts and what they would pay more for. Include the key evidence or observations behind your thinking.
3. Why they leave home	Explain why they travel, how they want to feel and how they want to spend their time. Why would they choose your hotel and its location?
4. The experience begins	Show two moments: discovering and choosing the hotel, then preparing for the stay. How does your communication create the right expectations?
5. Life inside the hotel	Show two moments: arriving and settling in, then spending time in the hotel. Reveal the guest's freedom, choices, rhythm and desired level of connection or privacy.
6. What stays with them	Show two moments: leaving the hotel and life after returning home. What do they feel, remember, take home or want to return for?
7. The hotel behind the experience	Show the essential spaces, design choices and service approach that make this experience possible. Explain where personal attention matters. Architectural plans are not required.
8. Reasons to stay throughout the year	Present your core programmes and offers. Explain which operate year-round, which are seasonal and whether they are reasons to travel or additions to the stay.

9. What the guest pays for

Indicate the intended price level, what is included and what guests can buy or book separately. Explain why these choices have value for your traveller.
10. Make the case

Bring together the guest need, hotel promise and reason to choose it. Why does this hotel deserve to exist?

For each of the six guest moments on slides 4 - 6, make clear: what the guest needs, what happens, how you want them to feel and what the hotel does to make that possible.

Use your visuals and narration together. You do not need to put every explanation on the slide.

Make it your own

Use photographs, illustrations, sketches, diagrams, moodboards or simple animation. Record your presentation with your own voice; appearing on camera is optional. Clearly identify external sources and any AI-generated material.

Technology can support the experience, but you do not need to specify systems or platforms.

How to submit

Upload one MP4 or provide a video link that the jury can open without requesting access. No separate written document or storyboard is required.

What matters

We assess your understanding of the traveller, the coherence of your hotel concept, the quality of the guest experience and the practical logic behind it. Editing skills, expensive software and cinematic production do not earn extra points.

For finalists only

The five strongest concepts will be presented live at BEST STAY 2027 in Zagreb on 19 February 2027.

Finalists will prepare

- A five-minute live pitch in English
- A final presentation of no more than ten slides

BEST STAY will cover event attendance and online presentation coaching for all finalists.

Timeline

Date	Milestone
12 OCT 2026	Applications open
26 OCT 2026	Applications close
27-30 OCT 2026	Selected participants receive confirmation and full brief - Video Call
6 DEC 2026	Concepts and deliverables due by 23:59 CET

Date	Milestone
18 JAN 2027	Top five finalists announced
29 JAN 2027	Finalist coaching session online
19 FEB 2027	Final pitches and winner announcement at BEST STAY Zagreb

Who can apply

- Individual undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students
- Recent graduates who completed their studies within the previous 12 months
- Students of hospitality, tourism, business, marketing, design, architecture, psychology, technology or another relevant field
- Applicants able to work and present in English and attend BEST STAY in Zagreb if selected

Applications are individual. Professors and external experts may provide feedback, but the concept and submission must remain the student's own work.

Use of AI

AI may be used for research support, idea testing, language and visualisation. Applicants remain responsible for every claim and decision. Sources, AI tools and material outside support must be disclosed. Fabricated research, invented interviews and work the student cannot explain are not permitted.

Awards and finalist value

- Presentation at BEST STAY in front of hospitality owners, leaders, operators and partners
- Full BEST STAY 2027 attendance for all finalists
- Presentation coaching
- Certificate
- The final winner prize package will be announced before applications close

The final test

Do not create a building and then search for a guest. Create the hotel around how the future traveller lives, why they travel, how they want to spend their time and what they should feel when they leave.

Questions

Contact register@beststayevent.com

BEST STAY 2027 | 18 and 19 February 2027 | Sheraton Zagreb | Programme in English

Guest Journey = what happens.

Guest Experience = how it feels.

Guest Memory = what remains.