

# Hospitality Humour is Behind Leisure's Resilience

The Crisis Looks To Be Over for the Leisure Sector and It's Time to Focus On Growth



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My wife thinks I am addicted to Instagram and, of course, she is right. I cannot help following the latest posts from restaurateurs and operators, keeping up to date with the latest trends and, without doubt, experiencing the social side.

There was one post recently that caught my attention, and not just because it accentuated my questionable taste in substandard dad jokes. It struck a chord because it sums up both the character and resilience of the hospitality sector. The post from @thesussmans in New York City read as follows: "Interestingly pizza restaurants are not experiencing a labour shortage... Why?... People must knead the dough!"

Beneath the questionable taste in humour lies the mindset of restaurants and hospitality businesses at the moment. I feel as though they have been through so much that they have become desensitised to the barrage of challenges.

Instead, they see the hilarity and the opportunity, which is why when I assemble the jigsaw pieces of the sector's journey, it is no longer a grey and unknown mystery, rather a brightly coloured picture.

For so long, the property sector has been desperately trying to hang on to its former life of steady income and safe, stable and secure staff. Meanwhile, property agents have been working tirelessly to secure, maintain and continue new deals in the eye of an unpredictable storm. As we now reach a point of stability and normality, these deals have successfully concluded and indeed opened, much to the delight of a groundswell of customers.

For example, Haugen in Stratford's IQL is packed with bookings galore, while savvy operator Big Easy is about to launch its debut restaurant outside London in Bluewater. The West End has seen its charm and desirability return too. Although it can be said Thursday is the new Friday, I challenge you to take a stroll down Chinatown or a West End Village any day of the week and not witness the bustle of the streets or feel the ambiance of happiness and curiosity that is now filling the restaurants that have longed for this moment.

The return to our cities is the foundation we needed to boost our much-loved sector and underpins the confidence we now see on a widespread level. I could list the challenges the industry has faced, and still does, but the truth is, it is no longer the main conversation.

The fact operators and restaurateurs can now look back and use a hard situation as a punchline to questionable dad jokes highlights that we are now moving forward, and the focus is on how we continue to evolve our businesses and work out new ways to grow. This is not just relevant for existing large businesses, but for the brave and courageous new independents joining our high streets and favourite places. Restaurants are also planning international growth, such as Chotto Matte with the location we recently acquired for them in San Francisco. And whisper it quietly, but we are growing too, having recently welcomed the return of Richard Thomas as director of High Street Agency.

I think it's fair to say, in light of all this, that we have finally reached the end of the unexpected and unpredictable crisis, and we are now looking ahead to a new stage of growth and success. There will always be troubles that face any industry, it's almost guaranteed, but our sector has its mojo back, and I think that is something we should all be proud to have played a part in.

**Ted Schama, managing director at Shelley Sandzer**