

Getting back to business travel At the hotel

Refer to [+](#) for more information.

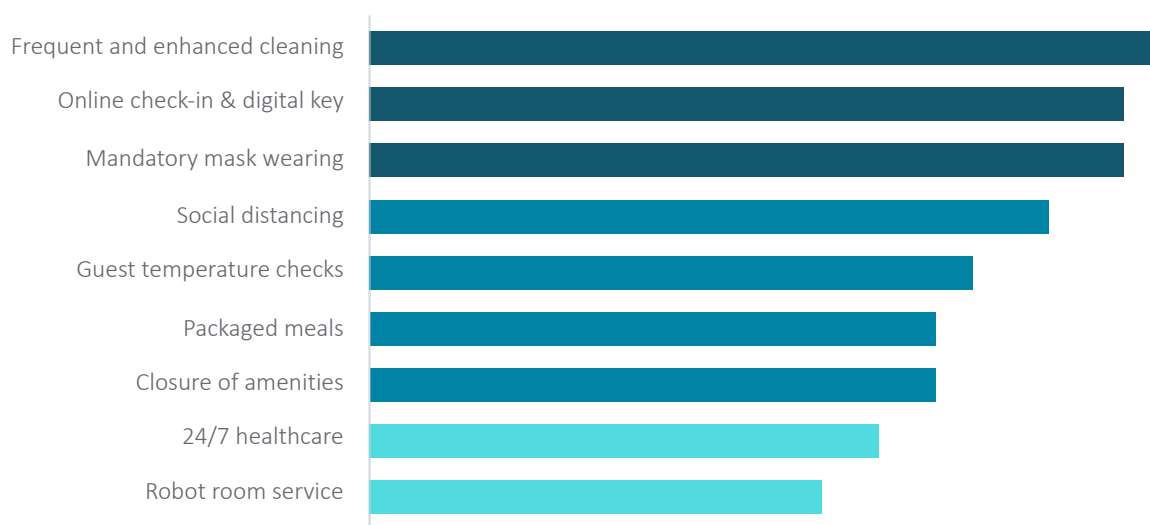
To give people the confidence to resume travel, measures are already being rolled out by suppliers, regulators and other organizations to ensure they can do so safely, with a much-reduced risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Many aspects of a hotel stay may not return to how they were before COVID-19. Some of the changes hotels are making will be temporary, simply to encourage guests to return, or may evolve as the pandemic runs its course; others may become permanent features of a hotel stay. This report details changes already introduced and some that are on the way, and even speculates on some of the more innovative approaches hotels may adopt to protect guests and employees from COVID-19.

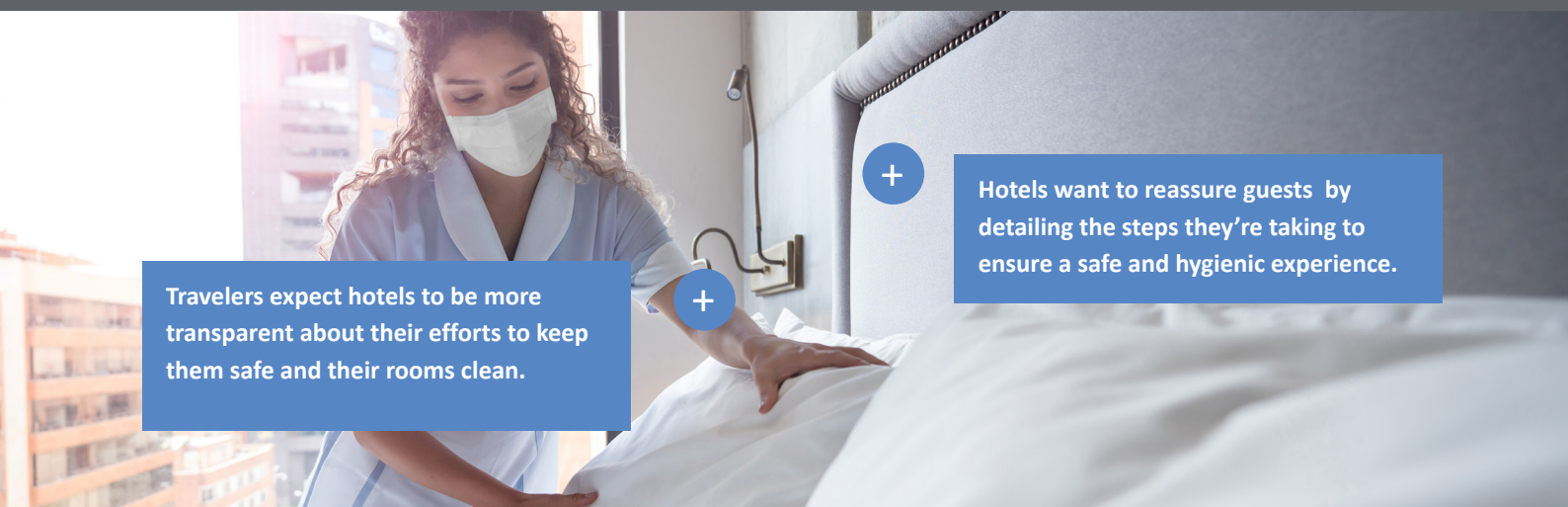


To ensure it's safe for them to resume travel, business travelers believe hotels should prioritize frequent and enhanced cleaning. They also think it's important for hotels to introduce measures to reduce transmission risks and face-to-face interactions. These include contactless check-in and room entry, mandatory mask wearing, and social distancing.

Hotel measures that travelers consider most important for ensuring safe travel



Source: BCD Travel, COVID-19 Traveler Study, June 2020



Travelers expect hotels to be more transparent about their efforts to keep them safe and their rooms clean.

Hotels want to reassure guests by detailing the steps they're taking to ensure a safe and hygienic experience.

A cleaner experience

A branded commitment to cleanliness

As COVID-19 propels health and safety to the top of the agenda, hotel companies have been busy defining, developing, promoting and adhering to cleaning programs to make their properties as hygienic (and appealing) as possible.

Travelers increasingly prioritize hygiene when selecting and booking accommodation.

According to a Procter & Gamble survey, 57% of travelers expect hotels to be more transparent about their efforts to keep guests safe and rooms clean.¹ Hotels have responded by putting cleanliness and hygiene at the center of their customer proposition, in many cases creating branded hygiene programs, such as Accor's ALLSafe, Hilton's CleanStay, Marriott's Cleanliness Council and IHG's Clean Promise. This may provide a competitive edge as travelers increasingly prioritize hygiene when selecting and booking accommodation. Referring to its experience of the Chinese market, Kempinski Hotels COO Asia, Michael Henssler notes, "People here no longer look for the best hotel, the greatest dinner or the lowest price, but for the safest experience."²

As they roll out their hygiene initiatives, hotels want to reassure guests by detailing the steps they're taking to ensure a safe and hygienic experience.³ As it reopened hotels in China, to build confidence in its cleaning program, Wyndham posted its cleaning schedule on social media service Weibo. It also shared videos and pictures to reassure guests.⁴ Many chains have partnered with hygiene specialists like Diversey, Ecolab and Reckitt Benckiser. This is important, as Procter & Gamble notes 70% of travelers are more likely to stay at a hotel using a known and trusted cleaning product.⁵ Some hotel chains have even created web pages dedicated to their hygiene and safety efforts, so guests can find out all they need to know in a single place.

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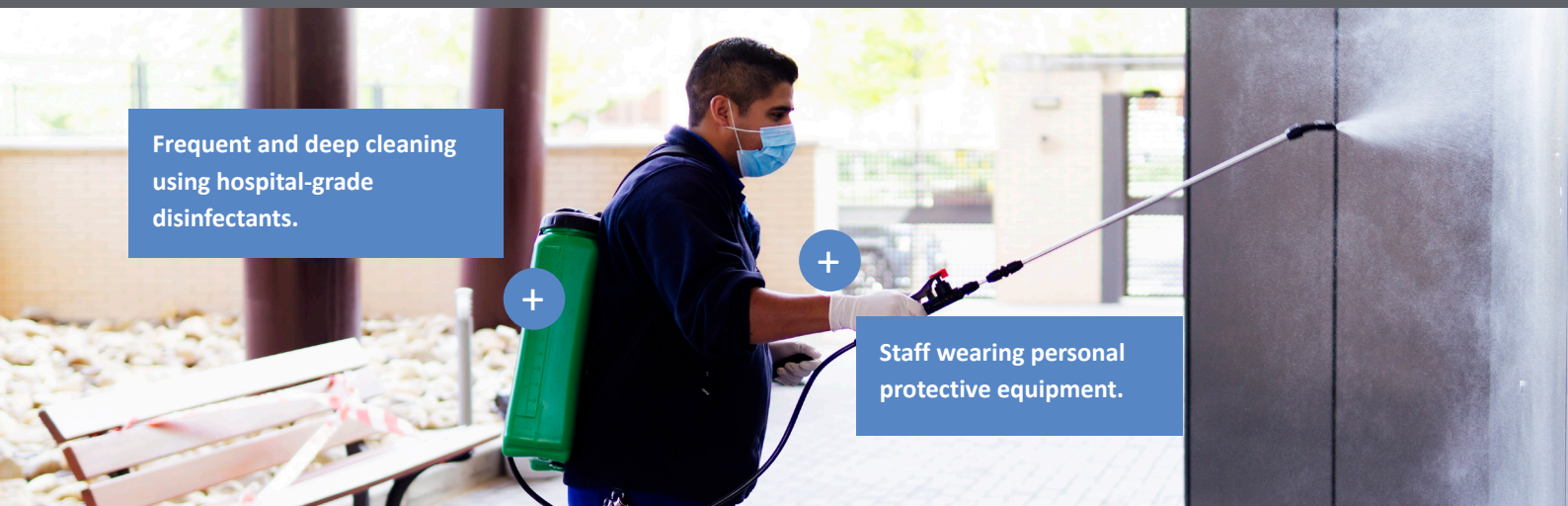
¹[Hotel Management](#), June 22, 2020

²[Hospitality.net](#), May 18, 2020

³[Phocuswire](#), June 11, 2020

⁴[Hotels Mag](#), June 1, 2020

⁵[Hotel Management](#), June 22, 2020



Frequent and deep cleaning using hospital-grade disinfectants.

Staff wearing personal protective equipment.

What hygiene programs typically include

Hotels' hygiene initiatives have many common features, which typically include:

- More frequent and deeper cleaning using hospital-grade disinfectants
- Hand sanitizer and wipes available throughout the hotel, particularly in high traffic areas
- Staff wearing personal protective equipment—rarely a requirement for guests too, but this may change as their numbers grow or if required by local regulations
- Signage reminding of social distancing and personal hygiene

These protocols aren't static. They will change as the COVID-19 situation evolves and demand returns. And they will improve, as hotels continue to invest in hygiene. For example, Hilton and Marriott may introduce electrostatic sprayers to disperse disinfectant across wider areas. Other chains are looking at using ultraviolet light to destroy COVID-19. Hotels will want to be seen to be doing their best to maintain the highest hygiene standards.

Check out not just the chain, but each individual hotel, at time of booking and again before arrival.

As well as taking the industrywide approach to hygiene and cleanliness, many chains have introduced (or are publicizing) more specific features of their programs, which may differentiate them from their competitors. Dedicating an employee to ensure hygiene implementation and compliance is one such measure. Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts has appointed a hygiene officer at each hotel; Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas has similarly introduced guest guardians to ensure hygiene compliance.

Heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems is another aspect where some chains are more prominent in their response to COVID-19. During the height of the pandemic, hotels in China switched off central HVAC systems to reduce the spread of the virus. During the summer months, such an approach could make rooms unbearably hot, especially as few modern hotels offer opening windows. Four Seasons has introduced enhanced disinfection and purification of its HVAC systems, while Anantara is upgrading HVAC air filtration.

To find out what specific hygiene and cleanliness measures a hotel has implemented, travelers will need to check out not just the chain, but each individual hotel, at time of booking and again before arrival.



Auditing and monitoring is as important as the cleaning itself.

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Business travelers can play a role, feeding back to travel managers on the hygiene practices they observe during a hotel stay.

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Certifying cleanliness and hygiene

Travelers need to be confident hotels are adhering to their enhanced safety and hygiene commitments. As guests will want hotels to be vigilant in their approach to cleanliness and sanitization, auditing and monitoring should be as important as the cleaning itself.⁶ Business travelers can play a role, feeding back to travel managers on the hygiene practices they observe during a hotel stay. This information could form the basis for a hygiene component in the pre-trip authorization of future hotel choices made by travelers.

Travelers need to be confident hotels are adhering to their enhanced safety and hygiene commitments.

To avoid a fragmented approach to hygiene, the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) is leading hotels in the U.S. towards a nationwide set of standards. It has signed up 17 hotel chains and management companies to *Safe Stay*, AHLA's endeavor to establish industrywide health and safety protocols. With the potential to become a U.S. hotel benchmark, *Safe Stay* could form the basis for global hotel hygiene standards. This, and any similar scheme, can act as a baseline for cleanliness and hygiene that all accommodation providers can aim for and look to exceed.

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), which represents private companies operating in travel and tourism, is already offering global protocols to ensure the safety of hotel guests and staff.⁷ To rebuild consumer confidence, it has developed, with the support of the UNWTO and based on WHO guidelines, *Safe Travels*, a stamp for hotels that meet its safety and hygiene guidelines.⁸ Hilton, IHG, Marriott, Radisson and Wyndham are among the hotel chains contributing to the development of the stamp. WTTC divides its protocols into four pillars:

- Operational and staff preparedness – obtain a reopening license if required; train staff; create a COVID-19 prevention plan; enable contactless technologies; evaluate cleanliness innovations including electrostatic spraying, ultraviolet light and EPA-based air filtration validated by expert bodies and governments
- Ensuring a safe experience – enhanced and more frequent sanitation and disinfection (including for meetings and events); guest information and social distancing; enhanced food safety and hygiene in restaurants
- Rebuilding trust and confidence – clear, consistent and enhanced communication on new health and hygiene safety protocols; signage clearly informing guests of enhanced cleaning and social distancing
- Implementing enabling policies – hotels call on governments to work collaboratively with them to support the industry's recovery

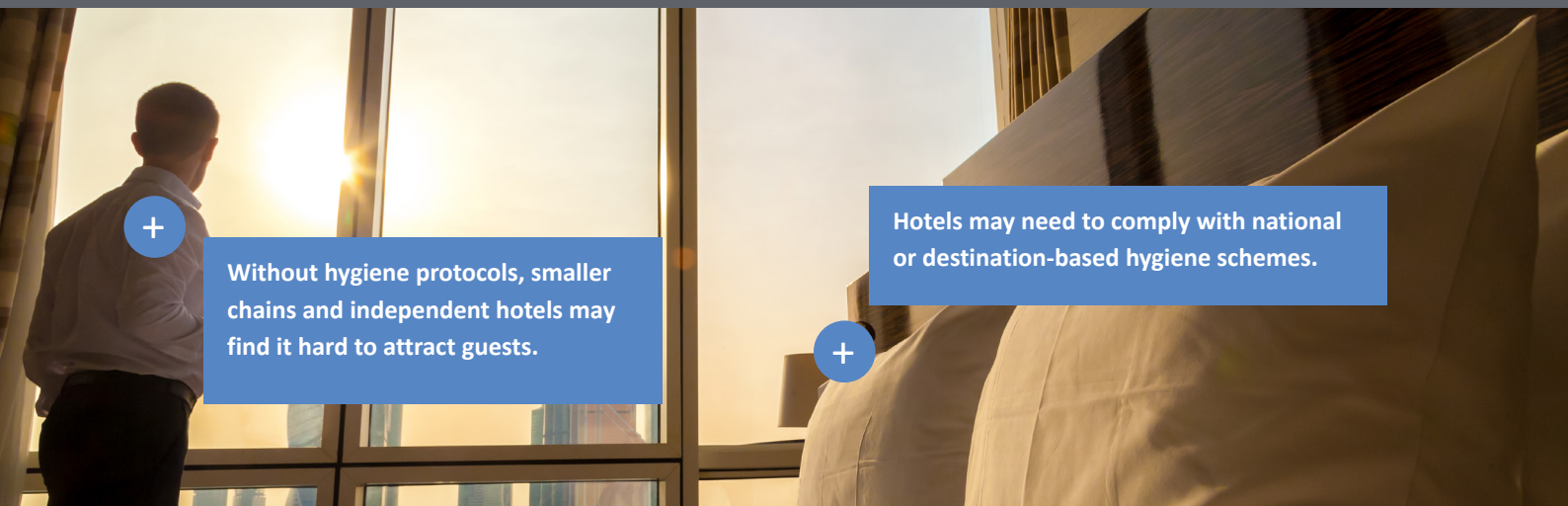


Safe Travels stamp image credit to the [World Travel & Tourism Council](#)

⁶[Business Travel News](#), June 3, 2020

⁷[WTTC](#), *Safe Travels*

⁸[Luxury Travel Advisor](#), June 23, 2020



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Without hygiene protocols, smaller chains and independent hotels may find it hard to attract guests.

Hotels may need to comply with national or destination-based hygiene schemes.

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Where there is no formal hygiene scheme

Smaller chains and independent hotels will find it hard to create and promote their own hygiene protocols, especially with a third-party endorsement. Unless they too can adopt such measures, and advertise their adoption, they may find it difficult to convince guests to stay with them.

Government bodies and tourism authorities may provide some reassurance to travelers due to stay in hotels not affiliated to chain hygiene programs or signed up to a certification scheme. And even where hotels have done this, travelers may want to differentiate between legitimate enhanced cleaning efforts and public relations exercises.⁹ Official schemes can confirm hotel cleanliness has reached certain independently-set standards, which the brands may choose to exceed. The penalties hotels might face for non-compliance with government-backed schemes may incentivize them to aim high in their hygiene standards.

Official schemes can confirm hotel cleanliness has reached certain independently-set standards.

Spain's secretary of state for tourism has published 12 guides detailing new technical specifications for the safe reopening of the country's tourism industry.¹⁰ These contain instructions and recommendations for service, cleaning and disinfection, maintenance and risk management for different tourism sectors, including hotels and tourist apartments.

Other destinations have implemented similar schemes. Israel's Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Health have outlined a new *Purple Standard*.¹¹ Its protocols include universal rules for reducing infection, cleaning and disinfection and operating guidelines, including temperature checks, protective screens and clear signage. There are city-based schemes too. In Geneva, Switzerland, hotels complying with social distancing rules and adhering to stringent health and safety guidelines can prominently display a *Clean & Safe* logo backed by Geneva Tourism and Switzerland Tourism.¹² Turismo de Portugal has launched an official platform where travelers can search for establishments adhering to the tourism board's *Clean & Safe* stamp.¹³ Travelers can rate a hotel's compliance. In Abu Dhabi, hotels can only reopen after receiving clearance and *Go Safe Certification* from the Department of Culture and Tourism.¹⁴ In the U.K., the *We're good to go* consumer mark allows hotels to show they're adhering to government and public health guidance, have carried out COVID-19 risk assessment and have checked required processes are in place.¹⁵

In addition to checking what safety and hygiene protocols a hotel is implementing, travelers should also establish its compliance with national or destination-based schemes.

Certifying preferred hotels

By partnering with safety and security risk assurance and certification program StaySafe Hospitality, BCD Travel has given its clients the option to certify their preferred hotels. Travelers can be confident their employers have selected lodging options that meet consistent and high standards for infection prevention and control, including hygiene and cleanliness. Find out more [here](#).

⁹[Hotel News Now](#), June 1, 2020

¹⁰[Breaking Travel News](#), May 27, 2020

¹¹[Travel Agent Central](#), June 3, 2020

¹²[Travel Agent Central](#), June 8, 2020

¹³[Luxury Travel Advisor](#), June 11, 2020

¹⁴[Breaking Travel News](#), June 24, 2020

¹⁵[Travel Agent Central](#), June 25, 2020

Essential investment in cleaning and hygiene will increase hotel costs.

Alternative accommodation providers can't call on the same resources as hotel chains to enhance hygiene.

A price to pay for hygiene

Hotels see the extra investment they're now making in cleaning and hygiene as a necessity to attract guests and satisfy regulatory requirements. This will inevitably increase operating costs at a time when many hotels are struggling financially. For example, hotel operations platform Optii Solutions estimates room cleaning costs alone will rise by 7%.¹⁶ Hotels may initially be reluctant to pass this on to guests through higher prices, fearing that this would weaken demand. They may also be able to offset some of the extra costs by charging for new ancillary services delivered in response to COVID-19.

Once demand has sufficiently recovered, hotels may be tempted to recoup some of the additional hygiene costs by introducing a cleaning supplement on top of the basic room rate. Travel managers need to look out for this extra item appearing on the cost of a hotel stay. Hotels may also choose to charge a premium for rooms located on lower floors, which guests can access without the social distancing challenges of using an elevator. Loyalty program members, who can use hotel apps to select rooms, may be at an advantage in the pursuit of these rooms.

The hygiene challenge for alternative accommodation

Most alternative accommodation owners, such as Airbnb hosts, aren't able to call on the same resources as hotel chains. Guests must trust that the host or owner will have properly cleaned the premises to reduce the risks of COVID-19 contamination from previous guests.

Airbnb has responded to COVID-19 with the Enhanced Cleaning Initiative, a standardized protocol for cleaning and sanitization. It developed the protocol using guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, experts including a former U.S. Surgeon General, and companies in hospitality and medical hygiene, such as Ecolab.

Airbnb hosts can participate in a learning and certification program, which includes information on COVID-19 prevention and approved disinfectants. Airbnb recommends hosts wait 24-hours before entering a property after a guest's departure. Listings enrolled in the new cleaning program will be available for stays as soon as enhanced cleaning is completed. For added reassurance on hygiene, properties that don't sign up are unavailable on the Airbnb platform for 72-hours between stays.

¹⁶Hotel Management, June 5, 2020



The service experience will change as hotels reduce touchpoints and face-to-face interactions.

Hotels are delivering a contactless experience via mobile apps.

An increasingly contactless experience

A touch-free experience

Travelers can expect staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) to be a regular sight during a hotel stay, as well as transparent screens where face-to-face interaction is still necessary. Hotels are driving an increasingly contactless experience, as they try to minimize the number of touchpoints and face-to-face interactions between guests and staff. The service experience will change.

Hotels realize guest health will be their priority over the next 18 months to two years. However hard they try to keep contact points clean and hygienic, they can best protect guests by transitioning to a full touch-free experience starting from arrival through room entry.¹⁷ For this to work, before arrival, guests may need a digital identity which enables all transactions and experiences. It could be a digital wallet linked to facial recognition. This can be highly secure, using 3D technology to identify a traveler even where the face is partially obscured by a mask. All the guest would need to do is take a selfie on their mobile and associate with a credit card and a form of ID. On arrival, guests would enter a kiosk to have their photo taken, automating the entire check-in process. Cameras throughout the hotel can verify the guest's identity, allowing access to elevators, floors and rooms, without the need to touch any surfaces. The technology exists and could be embraced by hotels.

Hotel apps—more than check-in

A number of the larger chains, including Hilton and Marriott, already offer check-in via their mobile app. Where this is not available, travelers must rely on hotels applying appropriate personal protection and social distancing protocols at physical check-in.

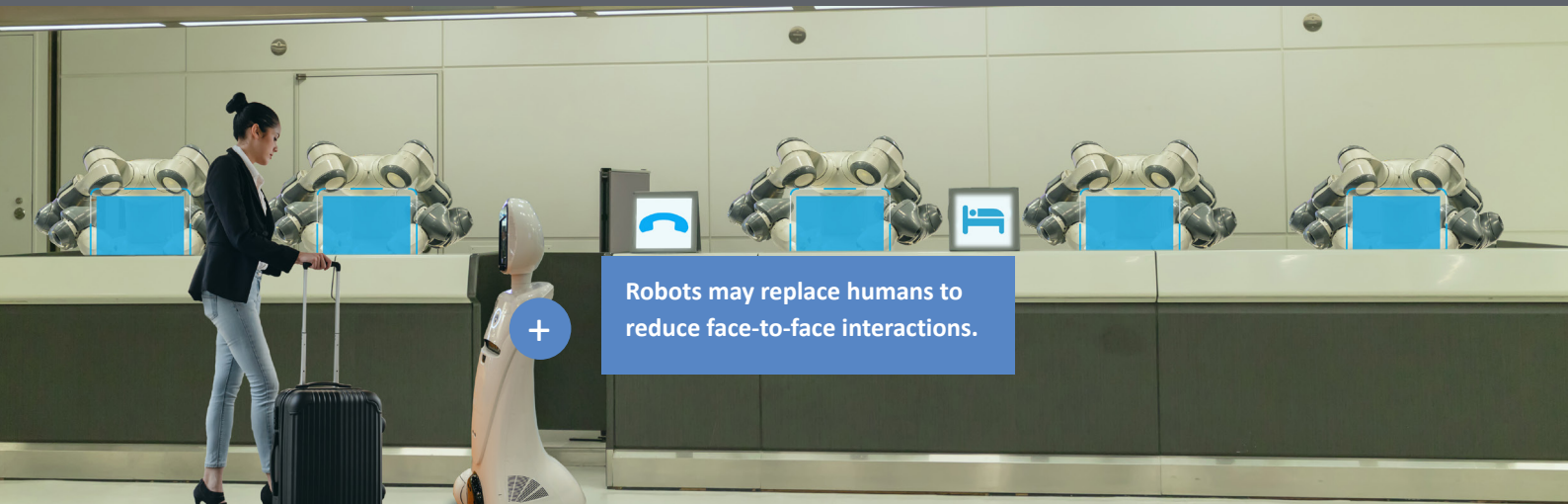
Hotel apps can do more in the battle against COVID-19 than offer contactless check in. They can also provide access to the elevator or guest room or be used to order room service. Some, like the Four Seasons app, include a chat function, providing guests with real-time, contactless interactions with hotel staff.

Hotel apps can do more in the battle against COVID-19 than offer contactless check in.

When combined with biometric information, using facial recognition technologies, hotel apps could even be used to pay for the room or amenities used by guests during their stay. By expanding the hands-free experience, apps offer a way to interact with the hotel in way that's not only safer for guests, but may actually be more convenient, too.¹⁸

¹⁷[Hotel Management](#), May 6, 2020

¹⁸[Hotel Management](#), May 6, 2020



Robots may replace humans to reduce face-to-face interactions.

Robots can help

Robots can help reduce face-to-face interaction between hotel guests and staff. Efforts to protect guests and staff from COVID-19 may reinvigorate hotels' adoption of robotic solutions.

Robots can help reduce face-to-face interaction between hotel guests and staff.

When the pandemic was at its height in Japan, robots were already being deployed in hotels used to quarantine COVID-19 patients with light symptoms.¹⁹ Several Tokyo hotels protected staff by having Pepper robots, wearing protective masks, greet arriving patients. While Pepper simply welcomed arrivals, elsewhere robots were cleaning areas where health risks were highest. Danish company UVD Robots reports a growing interest from hotels looking to deploy its ultraviolet light emitting robots to autonomously disinfect guestrooms and kill coronavirus.²⁰



Innovations travelers may have resisted in the past may now be accepted as a necessity.

While cleaning is clearly an invaluable function, robots can do much more to improve guest health and safety, largely by reducing the frequency of their interactions with hotel staff. Travelers can expect robots to escort them to their rooms, deliver room service and provide concierge assistance.

Robots can be a revenue generator too, particularly when used to offer new services and amenities in response to COVID-19, such as the increased demand for room-service. Innovations travelers may have resisted in the past may now be accepted as a necessity in a post-pandemic world.

Technology reduces risk

Alibaba-owned travel platform Fliggy has opened a hotel showcasing a future where technology delivers a lower-risk guest experience.²¹ Guests staying at the FlyZoo Hotel in Hangzhou can book and select rooms via a mobile app. They can check in using the app or a self-service kiosk and use facial recognition to access elevators and their rooms. Room-service robots deliver food to rooms and restaurant tables.

¹⁹Reuters, May 1, 2020

²⁰CNBC, March 18, 2020

²¹Phocuswire, March 13, 2019

Amenities and hotel facilities may be temporarily reduced.

Signage to remind guests to keep their distance.



**PLEASE KEEP A 2 METER
DISTANCE FROM MEMBERS
AT ALL TIMES**

THANK YOU

A change to the guest experience

Keeping a distance

Contactless services can reduce the chances of physical contact, but there are many other aspects of the hotel experience where other measures will be required.

Signage and floor markers will help guests keep their distance when queueing to check-in, dine or enter the elevator. And when in the elevator, some hotels have limited occupancy to provide extra space between guests. Hotels are also creating extra space by reconfiguring lobbies and other public areas, often by removing furniture or other facilities. Travelers relying on these areas to meet other guests will need to look for alternative locations in future.

Travelers should check the availability of facilities with the hotel before traveling.

Guestrooms losing some amenities

Hotels are making some changes to guestroom amenities in response to COVID-19. While some are providing wellness kits in each room, typically containing masks, hand sanitizers and wipes, others are removing amenities including tea/coffee makers, minibar contents, stationery, alarm clocks, hotel collateral and directories (moving to digital versions).

Rooms may be rested between occupants—often up to 48 hours. This will reduce room availability as demand returns. Travelers should look out for a notification to show when the room was cleaned and sealed.

Access to hotel facilities will vary

Some hotels have temporarily closed communal facilities including gyms, spas and swimming pools. Others feel that it's enough to ensure enhanced cleaning and social distancing are adopted. Where facilities remain open, guest numbers may be limited, and it may be necessary to pre-book some time in the gym. There's a wide variation in what's available, and this may be limited by local regulations. Travelers should check the availability of facilities with the hotel before traveling.

Back to Travel

Find out how you can future-fit your hotel program and make meaningful changes. Check out our [Back to Travel guide](#)—BCD's strategic resource for travel managers to rethink their program's return to active travel.

¹⁷[Hotel Management](#), May 6, 2020

¹⁸[Hotel Management](#), May 6, 2020

The way hotel guests dine in has changed.

Even the nature of room service may change.

A different dining experience

Travelers will see a change in the way they dine as hotels attempt to limit guests' exposure to COVID-19. Many guests are choosing to dine in their room rather than risk mingling with other guests in a communal dining area. Even this experience may be different, with the minibar service suspended in some hotels and a reduced room service menu on offer. The meal may also be left outside the room rather than delivered instead; or it could even be delivered by a robot.

As social distancing often requires a limit on numbers in public areas, guests choosing to dine in the hotel restaurant may need to book in advance to secure a table. They might need to do this using the hotel's app, which can also message them when the table is ready. Reserving a table is even more important as dining options outside the hotel may be similarly restricted – travelers should no longer expect to turn up and dine. Some hotels require guests to wear masks in the restaurants, which they can rest in pouches attached to the seat when eating.

Some of the changes travelers can expect in hotel restaurants:²²

- Both front and back-of-house staff will wear masks. Some restaurants may offer masks to guests for the walk to table, washrooms, etc.
- Buffets and other self-service options may only operate with strict social distancing and staff serving the food.
- Restaurants will be reconfigured with fewer tables to accommodate social distancing, or hotels may simply limit customer numbers.
- Table menus will be single-use or replaced by contactless, online menus with choices viewed and ordered via a mobile app.
- Tables will be sanitized and disinfected between use. Fresh condiments, packaged or disposable cutlery, and hand sanitizer available at entrances and in other appropriate locations will all help with customer confidence.

Reserving a table is even more important as dining options outside the hotel may be similarly restricted

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Before arrival, travelers should find out all they can about the hotel's hygiene and social distancing protocols. During their stay, they should minimize contact with staff and other guests. Using room service when possible will help. And if staying in a room on a lower floor, use the stairs instead of the elevator to reduce the chances of being in close proximity with other guests.



Jorge Mesa
Director, Client Shared Services,
Global Crisis Management,
BCD Travel

²²[Hotel News Now](#), June 24, 2020



Hotels will prefer not to have infected guests on their premises.



Some hotels insist all guests and visitors wear masks inside public spaces, except when eating and drinking.



Guests may need to prove they are healthy and well at check-in.

Looking after guest welfare

Keeping COVID-19 away

The best defense a hotel can take is to prevent anyone infected with COVID-19 from entering the property. Travelers arriving in some hotels can expect to have their temperature checked at the entrance. This can be done discretely if doorframe thermal scanners are installed. Some hotels may also require guests to present health certificates and declarations. In China, arriving guests must present a satisfactory QR code on the government COVID-19 app.

Shangri-La Hotels conducts temperature screening at all key entry points. All new arrivals must fill in health and travel declaration forms. Arriving luggage is disinfected. Accor includes similar measures in its ALLSAFE safety and hygiene program. Temperature checks are mandatory for all guests staying in a Taj, Vivanta, SeleQtions and Ginger property operated by Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL).²³

Personal protective equipment for all

Most hotel staff will be wearing some form of personal protective equipment. But some hotels insist on it for travelers too. All MGM Resorts properties in the U.S. require all guests and visitors to wear masks inside public spaces, except when eating and drinking.²⁴ It's important that travelers check out each hotel's rules before arriving to avoid an awkward situation.

When a guest is taken ill

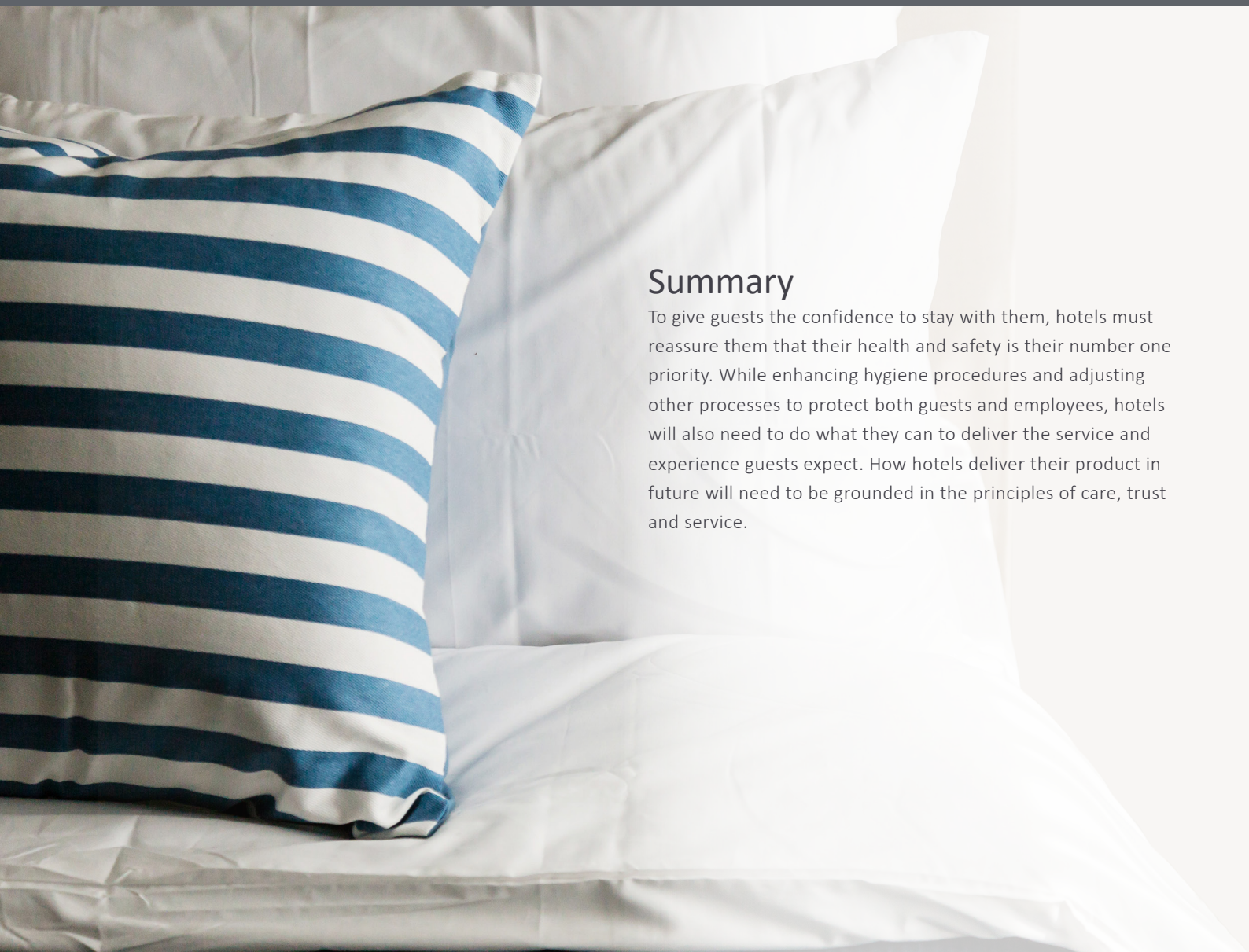
While each hotel may approach this situation differently—typically to comply with local health authority rules and regulations—the guidance Marriott has issued to its hotels provides a useful example of how they may respond to protect and reassure guests with a case of COVID-19 is suspected:

- If a guest starts to feel ill, they will be encouraged to contact the local health authorities.
- Appropriate quarantine and cleaning protocols will be implemented.
- Even if a case of COVID-19 is only suspected, the affected room will be removed from service to undergo a specific cleaning protocol. The room will not be returned to service until the room has been disinfected.
- Similar recovery protocols apply to public spaces and work areas.

It's important that travelers check out each hotel's rules before arriving.

²³[Travel Agent Central](#), June 2, 2020

²⁴[Hotels Mag](#), June 26, 2020



Summary

To give guests the confidence to stay with them, hotels must reassure them that their health and safety is their number one priority. While enhancing hygiene procedures and adjusting other processes to protect both guests and employees, hotels will also need to do what they can to deliver the service and experience guests expect. How hotels deliver their product in future will need to be grounded in the principles of care, trust and service.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report? Please email [Mike Eggleton](#) to share your thoughts.



Mike Eggleton

Director
Research and Intelligence

About BCD Travel

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