The Definitive Guide to Hotels During COVID-19

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As lockdowns are lifted and the world starts to reopen, the recovery plans for business travel are starting to take shape. However, the way we all travel has changed on several levels – it's no surprise that COVID-19 has brought a whole new world of precautions, protocols and procedures to ensure traveller safety. To help our customers make informed choices when it comes to accommodation, we're providing the facts, from what hotels are doing to keep their properties clean, through to providing ways that businesses can support travellers in this new world to safeguard their health and wellbeing.

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# What our preferred partners are doing when it comes to cleanliness

At Corporate Traveller, our preferred partners include global hotel chains such as Accor, Hilton, Hyatt, IHG and Marriot. During COVID-19 we've been working closely with these chains and others to ensure they are keeping the health and safety of their guests at the forefront. All hotels in our programme are implementing cleaning and safety protocols and working with organizations to certify that all hotels meet the requirements.

		Accor	Choice Hotels	Hilton	Hyatt	IHG	Marriott	ΝΗ	Radisson	Wyndham	
Initiative/ Programme name		All Safe	Commitment To Clean	Clean Stay	Care & Cleanliness Commitment	IHG Clean Promise	Marriott Global Cleanliness Council	Feel safe at NH	Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol	Count on Us	
Applicable to all hotels		1	1	1		1		1	1	1	
Partner		AXA/Bureau Veritas	Ecolab	RB/Lysol and Mayo Clinic	GBAC STAR accreditation	Ecolab		SGS	SGS	Ecolab	
Cleaning Products & Protocols	Increased frequency and cleaning protocols for high-traffic areas	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	Use of hospital-grade disinfectant or equivalent Government approved	1	<i>s</i>	1	<i>s</i>		1	1	1	1	
	Housekeeping "on-demand" option	1	<i>s</i>								
	Reinforced cleaning of high-touch points in rooms	1	1	1		1	1	1	1		
	Hand sanitizing stations/disinfecting wipes in high-traffic areas	1	<b>\$</b>	1	<b>\$</b>	1	1	1	1	1	
	Staff training	1		1	1		1	1	1	1	
	Hygiene Manager on property	1	1		1			1			
Physical distancing	Contactless check-in/check-out	1	×	1		1	1	1	1		
	Protocols encouraging appropriate social distancing	1	×		×	1	1	1		1	
	Limited Common Area Gathering	1		1		1	1	1		1	
	Pre-packaged breakfast items vs. buffet	1	<i>s</i>				1	1			
	Room seal on cleaned doors			1							
	Guest rooms not be entered for 24 to 72 hours after check-out										]
	De-clutter Paper Amenities	1		1			1				
	Personal protective equipment for hotel staff	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		
Communications	On-property signage reiterating guidelines	1	1				1	1	1		1
	Communications from front desk staff to guests	1	1				1	1	1		1
Technology	Mobile check-in	1		1			1	1			
	Keyless room entry			1			1				1
	Others (electrostatic sprayers, ultraviolet light instruments, air purifiers, ozone generators)			1	1		1	1			

\*This table represents just some of the hotels we work with. For a full list, which may include some hotels you don't see here, please contact your Travel Manager.

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### Hotels During COVID-19 FAQ

Hotel stays in the second half of 2020 may not be what you're accustomed to, therefore, we've pulled together some commonly asked questions your travellers might have before their next trip.

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### How will my travellers know which hotels are open?

You can easily determine which hotels are open by reaching out to your agent or checking your online booking tool.

#### What can I do to ensure our hotel needs are covered?

We have been very successful negotiating with key hotels to guarantee they remain open during set time frames to ensure your travellers are taken care of with a consistent option. If you require a hotel in any market due to employee housing, travel or quarantine, please contact your Travel Manager for assistance. We will work on a solution for whatever your needs may be. Please be prepared with number of expected travellers, dates, location, budget and business purpose.

# How can we make sure our travellers will have access to food?

Many hotels have had to change their Food & Beverage process to meet quarantine rules around dining. If they are unable to provide room service, they should be able to provide a grab and go option. We recommend calling ahead to the hotel prior to arrival to determine exactly what is available or to set up specific meals. If we are negotiating a hotel contract for your business, please let us know of any dietary requests so we can include that in our conversations. Additionally, our Travel Managers will also work with your individual travellers to ensure they know what is available to them each time they travel. Your travellers may also prefer a rental car (see car section) during their trip to ensure they are able to access local grocery stores or food take away options.

## What other interruptions could our travellers expect in a hotel?

There are quite a few cities with tighter restrictions on travellers entering and may have a quarantine period. We highly recommend that travellers call ahead and determine if the hotel has any restrictions on movement upon check-in. Travellers should also ask what the required safety precautions are for that market and property – for example, they may need to have a mask on while in the hotel public spaces or be required to have their temperature taken.

# When will hotels start to reopen once travel restrictions are lifted?

Like most hospitality businesses, hotels have gone into a "hibernation" period during this period of no demand, allowing the few that remain open to service the decreased reservations. Once demand is expected to return, hotels will be able to quickly reopen although potentially at a decreased capacity. Some hotels are in a better position than others based on location, brand, cash reserves and staffing decisions during Covid-19.

#### Should we anticipate lower rates post Covid-19?

Not necessarily. Hotels are going to be facing many new costs around cleaning staff, supplies and handsfree technology. Additionally, rooms are now being kept empty for long periods between guests to better ensure your travellers safety. This means running a hotel will be much more expensive over the next few months and hotels will have to maintain a rate that allows them to cover those expenses. We also anticipate market compression as hotels decide not to open or to open with diminished capacity. Therefore, we expect to see drastic rate fluctuations as hotels readjust to changing market conditions. Fortunately, Corporate Traveller has access to exceptional discounted rates and can make sure you continue to maximize savings!

#### What are hotels doing about cleanliness?

There is a massive endeavor to create a new standard of sanitization for the hotel industry. All of the major hotel chains are implementing new processes and safety precautions to ensure the safety of their employees, your travellers and the general public. These include touchless check-in, limited public area usage, separation glass at reception and increased sanitation. See the chart above for details but you can also find specific information by brand on our Global Traveller Hub.

### Top 5 Tips for resuming business travel with hotel needs

#### 1. Look at your travel policy in detail.

Work with your Travel Manager to review your preferred programme to ensure all hotels are known as COVID clean hotels. Amend your policy to state that employees must stay at a COVID-19 Clean hotel.

**2.** Stay up to speed on regions where your travellers need to go or transit through. Keep across any breaking infections in the region your employees are travelling to.

#### **3.** Know your hotels.

We do this for you but it's also important to understand what your hotel providers are doing in terms of cleaning and hygiene practices. From Hilton 'CleanStay' to Marriot's 'Commitment to Clean', hotels are setting the bar high for cleaning standards in a post COVID world. You can refer to the grid above to find out more or visit our global travel hub, which provides our preferred partners new protocols – easily accessible all in one spot.

#### 4. Help your travellers be prepared.

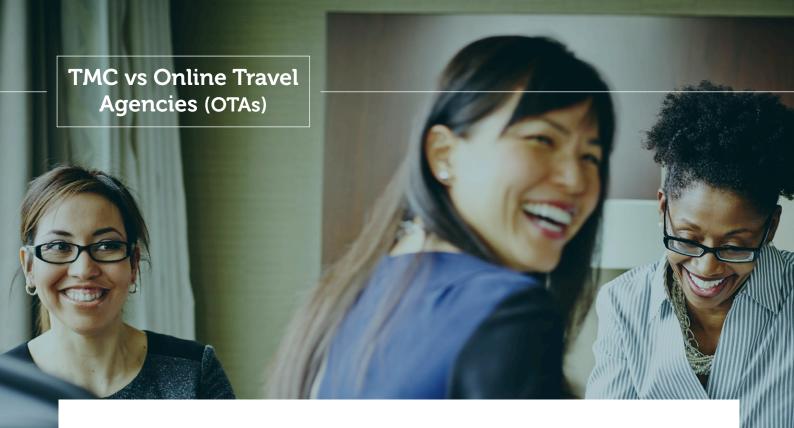
Many airlines and airports will turn away customers who are not wearing a mask. Additionally, travellers might want to travel with other PPE such as gloves, sanitizer wipes and a digital thermometer. If you're looking to go the extra mile for your staff, have travel packs stocked with these items for them to use on their next trip. For more information on what to prepare for on your next business trip, visit our Packing & Preparation page in our Traveller Resource Hub.

#### 5. Ask for feedback.

Check-in on your travellers post-trip to find out what they're thinking. Were they comfortable with the accommodation choice? Did they see anything that would be cause for concern? Our Travel Managers will also do the same so that we can keep up to date with real-life feedback. One of the benefits of booking all travel with your TMC is if there are any post-trip concerns with traveller health you can easily track their journey using the TMC's reporting.



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#### As recovery looms, you may see increased promotions from online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia and Booking.com.

Although these rates may initially look attractive, it is important to understand the potential risks. At the most basic level, OTAs are 3rd party resellers of hotel inventory. As such, the OTA "owns" the reservation and all communication to/from the hotel must be managed by the OTA. What this means is that all support is provided by the OTA and not the hotel or your TMC.

During the chaos of travel at the start of COVID-19, travellers were unable to rely on the hotel staff or brand for support, changes or cancellations, which caused visible issues. Not only did travellers find themselves stranded or in an unexpected quarantine, they also experienced lengthy hold times and poor customer support from the tech reliant OTAs. Refunds were difficult, time consuming and unreliable.

As your business moves into a new era of travel, it is critical that your travellers feel confident that they have someone looking out for them at every step in their journey. With decades of experience, we have fantastic multi-layer relationships with all of the hotel chains and can "skip the line" during long hold times, escalate issues and maintain open lines of communication to proactively identify potential disruptions.

We do hear a lot of feedback from some of our clients about OTA rates being cheaper, so we've provided information below to educate travellers on important points to be aware of when thinking about booking a hotel online.

### Make sure your travellers are comparing apples to apples.

OTAs typically quote the average nightly rate exclusive of fees making their rates look lower as TMCs quote the total expected cost to allow accurate budgeting. It is important to also factor in the incremental cost of items like WIFI, early check-in, late check-out, upgrades and breakfast that your travellers may receive as part of loyalty programs and status.

#### Don't forget about status

Currently, booking an approved corporate rate through Corporate Traveller ensures that your travellers will always receive loyalty benefits and sometimes additional bonuses which all add up to better travel experiences in the future. Conversely, most OTA bookings are ineligible for loyalty benefits or points, so it is important to be aware of what each rate actually includes – for the comfort levels of your travellers and their overall experience when on the road.

#### **Traveller Experience**

From a traveller experience point of view, hotels sometimes provide less desirable inventory to OTA guests who are only loyal to the cheapest rates. These rooms might be small, windowless or near elevators. Business travellers, on the flip side, are considered prioritized guests because they are repeat customers and brand loyal, getting the best rooms, upgrades and service. When you consider the potential stress of discomfort and travel disruption, ask yourself what the productivity impact could be while your employees are on their business trip.

#### **Final note**

If you do want to allow your travellers to book OTA inventory, we would strongly recommend you ensure they are doing so through your chosen travel provider. Duty of Care is going to be a top concern over the next few months and, should a traveller book online with an OTA, your TMC will lose visibility of that travel journey, which will ultimately hinder the ability to assist in the case of a disruption. By booking through your approved provider, they can help with contacting the 3rd party and/or provide quick resolution that might involve rebooking directly. Corporate Traveller has relationships with the OTAs and we're here to make sure you use them appropriately and safely as needed.

# A SmartSTAY: Providing Duty of Care to our Travellers

At Corporate Traveller, we take pride in our collection of over 5,000 SmartSTAY hotels across the globe. We have forged strong relationships with all brands that are part of this programme, with contacts at each hotel ready to provide support when needed. Not only does booking a SmartSTAY hotel provide a level of Duty of Care for your travellers, it also offers our clients competitive rates as well as a minimum of three amenities per stay.

# These amenities always include breakfast and WIFI but also a variety of other value adds such as:

- Early or late checkout
- Lounge Access
- On property credits or discounts
- Upgrades
- Welcome amenities

Regardless of their programme, all SmartSTAY providers meet their brand's cleanliness criteria, providing confirmation that strict cleaning and safety protocols have been implemented, so your organization will have extra peace of mind that your travellers will be looked after when booking with us.

#### Some of these measures include:

- Enhanced cleaning and hygiene practices in all areas of the hotel.
- Increased frequency and cleaning protocols of high traffic areas.
- Social distancing measures in foyers, lifts and other common areas.
- Contactless check-in/check-out.
- Pre-packaged breakfast items vs buffet.
- Personal protective equipment for all hotel staff.





### Booking a hotel during COVID can be stressful, which is why having the support of a TMC is a necessity.

Our local teams know your traveller and organizational preferences, but are also backed by the strength and support of our global networks. This allows us to support your travellers in ways that other TMCs can't. It's how we were able to bring home New Zealand travellers when the lockdowns began and how we have continued to safely book travel for our clients on the road.

Contact us today on 0800 838 010 and bring an expert on board to help get your business back to business.

SmartSTAY properties in New Zealand

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