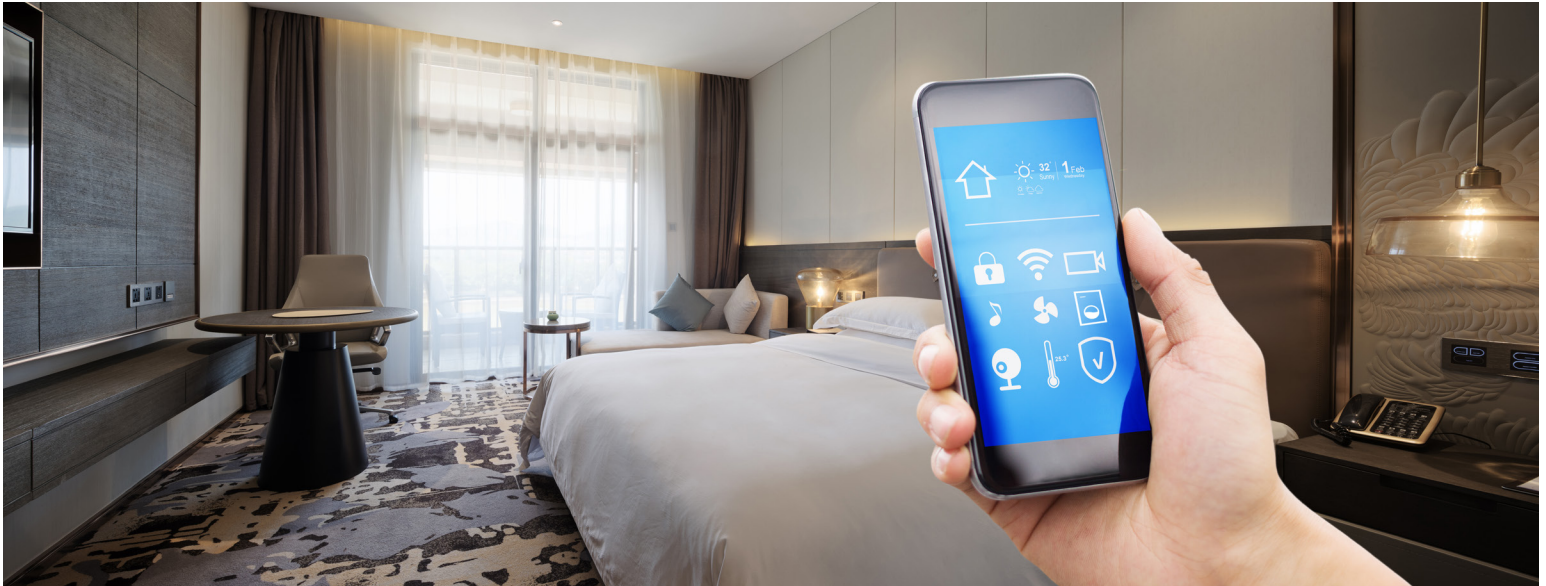


Pandemic Gives the “Smart Hotels” Trend a Boost



In addition to the bruising that the Covid-19 pandemic gave retail and office properties, hospitality is another sector that’s been hugely affected. This is largely a result of travel bans and “shelter at home” orders around the world, but the remote work and conferencing trend have also had a role to play. For some hard-pressed regions, mandatory quarantines after travel were the only regular source of guests during peak pandemic periods.

Hotels and hospitality have responded to the challenges through innovation and sheer grit. On the plus side, however, one positive burgeoning trend that’s been boosted by these matters is the rise of the smart hotel.

Smart, How?

Typically, when we call something “smart” – and we’re not talking about IQ – it’s a designation used to indicate it’s connected to the internet – in terms of the inclusion of digital and communication tools. A building might be considered smart if its HVAC and other systems are autonomous or remote monitored, if its security and access use digital tools (like biometric systems), if services are enabled via a guest’s smartphone or it uses connected building management systems (BMS).

There are plenty of examples that would fall under this broad categorization and this variation in definitions is also why many places simultaneously lay claim to the title of “first smart hotel”. One likely contender is the KViHotel in Budapest which when it opened in 2017 eschewed reception and concierges in favor of a smartphone interface. Hotel brands Marriott and Hilton were also two of the first big names to begin exploring the applications of smart tools in their properties. Additionally, some regions – such as the Middle East – that already enjoy a reputation for exceptional hospitality are enthusiastically looking to innovations and technology to stay ahead of the curve.

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Reduced Contact and Costs

Going digital is great for many reasons, but during the pandemic especially: hotels where guests have fewer touchpoints with other people (including staff) have seen an increase in interest.

Additionally, with the strategic deployment of the right smart tools, a hotel can reduce its personnel costs – which could mean keeping your head above water in economic crunch times. In some state-of-the-art hotels, this is not just a matter of checking in via an interface, but even the use of robots to deliver luggage and meals to rooms.

Challenges to Consider

Before an entire shift to digital, however, it’s worth considering that some target clientele may prefer the human interface. Additionally, the more personal information captured on guests, the bigger the burden of securing that data.

Ultimately, this trend is not about replacing existing, non-smart hotels but about augmenting the range of experience options available to travelers, as well as guests’ expecting more innovative tech to be incorporated into all aspects of our homes and hotels. The latter is certainly something to consider for new developments as well as those planning improvements in the mid-term.

