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# How to make sure your next hotel stay is a safe one

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The thought of sleeping in a hotel room — where countless people have stayed before you — may hold little appeal right now. But take heart: Whether you need to travel for essential reasons or are starting to plan for upcoming adventures, there are steps you can take — and questions you can ask — to help ensure safe and enjoyable hotel stays.

To prepare for the increase of travelers as restrictions ease, the American Hotel and Lodging Association has just introduced Safe Stay, a set of health and safety

recommendations for hotels nationwide to help protect consumers and staff from coronavirus. The guidelines, based in part on recommendations from public health experts and the Centers for Disease Control, and Ecolab, which provides cleaning and

## Make note of a hotel's cleaning protocols.

disinfecting solutions and services for hotels, include best practices for guest interaction and recommendations on cleaning public spaces and communal areas, spacing out furniture in public areas, installing extra hand-sanitizer stations, and reducing in-person contact for room service and other hotel offerings.

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One Amsterdam restaurant built separate 'greenhouses' for safer outdoor dining

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# Take steps to minimize risks during next hotel stay

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Based on these guidelines and recommendations from health and travel experts, here are some tips to consider before booking your next hotel stay.

### Ask questions and do some research

Whether you book a room through the hotel or a third-party site, call the hotel first to find out what it has done to make the space as safe as possible. For starters, does the hotel offer contactless check-in or other options? Many hotels now offer virtual check-ins (you can use your phone to check in and even access your room) and virtual concierges that can provide information and services, or they have installed plexiglass screens at check-in desks for the protection of guests and hotel workers. Has the hotel incorporated safe-distancing practices in lobbies and common areas — spacing out furniture, adding six-foot markers in areas where queuing becomes necessary, and encouraging designated one-way flow at entrances and exits to keep guests distanced?

Ask if the hotel has incorporated extra cleaning protocols to disinfect high-touch surfaces around the property and in guestrooms. Many major hotels, such as the Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, InterContinental Hotels Group, and Accor, now use electrostatic sprayers with hospital-quality disinfectant to sanitize guestrooms and public spaces.

Find out if the hotel limits the number of people in an elevator or has incorporated one-way stairwells to help keep guests separated, so you can be informed before you arrive. If you need valet service, because of mobility or other issues, ask if the hotel has protocols in place for disinfecting contact points in your vehicle.

Many hotels now take rooms out of commission for a night or two between guest stays, as an extra precaution — make sure you ask.



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**A worker cleaned at the entrance of the Bellagio Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas on March 13.**

### Consider which services you need

Decide what's important to you during your hotel stay. Do you prefer a hotel that offers in-room workouts (some hotels provide a Peloton bike and other gym equipment in guestrooms, or offer yoga and Pilates workouts via the in-room television); dining options (many hotels offer contactless room service, while some have reopened restaurants but limit the number of patrons); or access to a pool?

"The biggest question we are seeing at the moment is, 'Is the pool open?'"

says Vanessa Snider, founder of The Luxury Service, a Los Angeles-based travel agency. "Some properties with open pools have redesigned their guest seating to allow for safe social distancing. Other properties have elected to keep their pools closed but are allowing guests to lounge around."

Adds Anthony Berklich, a New York-based travel consultant, "Rooms might become more like self-contained hubs for food, entertainment, and fitness to minimize exposure to other guests for the time being."

With such a range of services offered — or not — it pays to ask for discounted rates at hotels that have limited their guest amenities.

### What to do upon arrival

Assess the situation when you arrive: If you step into the lobby and notice lounge furniture still clustered together, no plexiglass barriers or face masks separating you and staff at check-in, little presence of social distancing reminders or notices about upgraded cleaning standards, or a lack of hand sanitizer stations, rethink your stay.

"When checking in to the property, if things look haphazard or not in line with proper sanitization, it's best to assume they are sloppy and aren't taking precautions," says Berklich, who founded the travel platform Inspired Citizen and logs more than 200,000 miles of travel a year. "Check out and request a refund, or speak up to have them modify things — to your comfort

(level) and to the guidelines that we've all learned over the past months about hygiene."

Like the days of old, when airlines offered passengers flight kits, some hotels now provide amenity kits, such as Santa Fe's La Fonda on the Plaza, which provides guests with sanitizing wipes, disposable slippers, and hand sanitizer. (The Inns of Aurora in New York's Finger Lakes region also offers guests comfort amenities such as Yoga cards for personal practice, Bombas socks, and tea from its signature blend.)

Regardless of what cleaning practices a hotel employs, it's best to travel with your own small disinfectant kit with "bleach wipes, mini cans of Lysol spray, and latex gloves," says Berklich, and use these to disinfect high-touch surfaces in your guestroom, such as doorknobs, light switches, the phone, the remote control, and other surfaces.

Also remove any decorative pillows and quilts, which may not be frequently cleaned, and consider traveling with an old sheet that you can throw over a fabric chair or sofa (with a plastic bag to put it in for the trip home). Berklich recommends traveling with "your own inexpensive pillowcases that can be disposed of when leaving the hotel."

For peace of mind, consider traveling with your own reusable drinking or coffee cup — or at the very least, give the one in your room a good wash in hot water before using. While these may seem like extreme measures, you can never be too careful and there is no guarantee what you will find from one hotel to the next.

Finally, make sure you read the fine print before booking your upcoming hotel stays.

"Cancellation policies have also never been more flexible, so make sure to find out about these before making any final bookings," says Snider.

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