

# Robotic Cleaning, 'Private' Inns and Online Yoga

The travel industry innovates to keep its businesses alive during the pandemic.

By ELAINE GLUSAC

While most hotels that remain open after the outbreak of Covid-19 are stepping up cleaning routines, the Westin Houston Medical Center in Houston is going beyond Lysol and bleach. In addition to standard cleaning protocols, it says it is the first to deploy two newly acquired robots to sanitize rooms and common areas.

LightStrike Germ-Zapping Robots — already in use at more than 400 hospitals in the United States, according to their manufacturer, Xenex Disinfection Services — use xenon ultraviolet light pulses to kill viruses, bacteria and fungi. Peer-reviewed studies published by the company have found the robots have decreased environmental infection rates between 50 and 100 percent.

"To provide our guests and clients with an additional level of well-being, we decided to add another step to our current disinfectant protocol by implementing the germ-zapping UV light robots," wrote Archit Sanghvi, the vice president for operations at Pearl Hospitality, the hotel's owner and operator, in an email.

Other hygienic practices in use at the new hotel — which handles, among other guests, patients seeking treatment at the Texas Medical Center — include removing non-essential items like decorative pillows and magazines, and disinfecting the TV remote control and placing it in a sealed plastic bag.

The housekeeping robots are just one way the travel industry is innovating during the pandemic. Below are a few other examples.

## A Hotel of Your Own

Whether because of government mandate, financial strain or doing their part to flatten the curve, many hotels are shutting down in the crisis. But a few are offering their entire premises for social-distancing seclusion.

In Kennebunkport, Maine, the Kennebunkport Resort Collection is renting its Cape Arundel Inn & Resort to individual parties seeking to practice social distancing on the shore. As of this month, the seven-room main house will rent for \$9,500 a week or \$36,000 a month, including weekly housekeeping, meals, bicycles and access to a lounge with a billiard table and fireplace.

A three-bedroom cottage on the 15-acre grounds is available for \$2,500 a week and \$10,000 a month, including weekly housekeeping, meals and bicycles. A full buyout of the 14-room resort costs \$19,000 a week and \$70,000 a month.

Nearby, nine Cabot Cove Cottages will reopen May 1, offering weekly (\$1,500) and monthly (\$5,500) rates that include weekly housekeeping and loaner bikes and kayaks.

In keeping with social-distancing practices, the resorts will be minimally staffed. A concierge will be available by phone, and the kitchen staff will set dining tables with food before guests arrive and clean up after they leave.

Food delivery is also available, but valets are not. According to an email on the new procedures, "Guests are politely encouraged to handle their own luggage upon arrival."

## Flying Private

As fliers seek to avoid commercial carriers or go where service is diminishing, private jet companies like flyExclusive and JSX say demand is up.

The private aviation company JetSuite said that inquiries from travelers who have

not flown private in the past have gone up by about 10 percent. Stephanie Chung, the president of JetSuite, said family travel had increased for both spring break and among those retrieving students from schools and colleges that were transitioning to online courses.

While demand at XO has recently plateaued, the private aviation company initially saw its membership surge 88 percent between February and mid-March at the introductory level, which costs \$595 a year, not including flights.

Ron Silverman, the chief operating officer of XO, said many flight requests in early March were for returning travelers from places closing down like ski resorts or Europe, or for those going to second homes.

"I don't think people are going on vacation," he said.

## Virtual Spa Services

Like classrooms and conferences, many travel operators are going virtual, including spas.

In lieu of going to a wellness center, seekers of spiritual balance can visit the "virtual studio" of Aspen Shakti yoga studio in Aspen, Colo., which is streaming free yoga and meditation classes. One-on-one therapies in shamanic healing, meditation and tarot readings are also available virtually, allowing patrons to sign up for live reiki and shamanic energy healing, for example, with a private teacher starting at \$175 per hour-long session.

Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas, which operates 18 hotels and 30 spas around the world, is offering online instruction in yoga, meditation and forest bathing.

For a more comprehensive program, Hilton Head Health, the South Carolina-based weight loss and wellness resort, has started a 16-week program online with more than 70 videos on cooking and nutrition, exercise, sleep habits, stress management and more (from \$14.99 a month).

## Armchair and Local Travel

Tour operators and destination marketing organizations are looking past travel restrictions to engage potential future travelers with virtual visits. For those with Iceland on their bucket lists, the new "Iceland Academy," from the tourism group Promote Iceland, features humorous videos on everything from safe driving to hot-tub etiquette and how to pack for the country's

From top: the Westin Houston Medical Center, which added germ-zapping robots to its housekeeping team; JetSuite; the Cape Arundel Inn & Resort in Kennebunkport, Maine.



WESTIN HOUSTON MEDICAL CENTER



JETSUITE



HEIDI KIRN

changeable weather.

In lieu of visiting its member thoroughbred horse farms around Lexington, Ky., Visit Horse Country is offering a schedule of live video tours posted to Facebook and Instagram, including visits to a foal nursery and feeding carrots to mares. The city's tourism organization VisitLEX is running a daily video schedule on its social media platforms including distillery tours, cocktail classes, live music and local chef appearances.

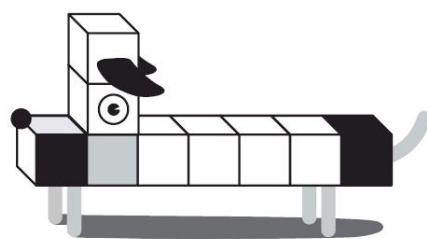
Armchair travelers can explore the ancient statues of Easter Island and the glaciers of Patagonia through a free app called Chile 360° developed by Imagen de Chile, a private organization that promotes Chile.

Cultural organizations around the world are hoping to break into Netflix territory

with streaming productions from the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, video documentaries from the Prado Museum in Madrid, and scholarly seminars on cities like Beijing, Venice and Tokyo for armchair travelers from the tour company Context Travel.

For those missing the togetherness of group travel, FTLO Travel, a trip operator for travelers in their 20s and 30s, is holding digital happy hours where perspective travelers can mingle from afar.

As the concept of travel focuses closer to home, some destinations are pulling together social-distancing-appropriate tours, including Experience Scottsdale, the tourism group in Scottsdale, Ariz., which has published five jogging routes that take in city sights, from outdoor sculptures to desert mountains.



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