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What It's Like To Stay In A Luxury Hotel Right Now



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The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston FERTITTA ENTERTAINMENT

Travel came to a standstill in the United States in March, as the coronavirus emptied roadways, attractions, restaurants, bars, hotels and the skies. But there's finally some movement. As the lockdown lifts in cities all over the globe, more and more hotels are reopening.

To provide some guidance to the hospitality industry, [Forbes Travel Guide](#) put forth its own [recommendations](#) on ways to deliver luxury service during COVID-19. Nimble hotels have become well versed in health protocols, social distancing and evolving regulations (since health guidelines vary by state, check with the property on specifics before booking and refer to our

[list of reopened hotels and their safety protocols](#)) and those that have adapted best are employing some of the latest technology, careful planning and not a small amount of creativity. These adjustments haven't come at the sacrifice to service.

If the steady stream of reopenings is any indication, many hotels seem up to the task. "I think it will be a challenging journey, that's for sure," says Chris Erickson, hotel manager of [The Grand America Hotel](#) in Salt Lake City. "We feel like we hit the bottom, and we're climbing out of this. But I'm excited and looking forward to a really strong end of 2020 and 2021 coming out of this on top."

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10 Hotels With Unusual Architecture

We take you through the full post-quarantine hotel experience, from the moment you pull up to the valet to checkout. This is the first installment in a three-part hotel series that also will examine the changes being made to restaurants and food offerings as well as at the spa, gym and golf course.



A bellhop at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort — Falling Rock NEMACOLIN WOODLANDS RESORT — FALLING ROCK

Arrival

When you roll up to [Four Seasons Hotel Seattle](#), the valet will open the car door while observing social distancing. But you won't be handed a valet ticket; instead you will take a photo of it. "[Guests] are finding it very, very useful as they don't need to hold anything or put anything away," hotel manager Ryan Grande says about the new system.

Measures will be taken to keep your car clean: the valets wipe down the steering wheel, stick shift and seat before entering the vehicle and upon leaving it.

A wipes-and-sanitizer-toting bellman will ask if you need assistance with bags. The bellman changes gloves every time different luggage is touched. But being a downtown urban hotel, most people bring carry-on-sized bags and elect to handle them themselves, Grande says.

Expect to have your temperature taken, whether you are checking in for the night or coming for dinner (it will happen every time you re-enter the

property). The hotel uses a contactless device that reads your temperature within seconds. If it exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit, staff will follow up with questions about your health and previous travel. In case any answers flag that you have symptoms or if you are demonstrably ill, staff will escort you to an isolation room close to the lobby and a local doctor's office will be called to assist.



Four Seasons Hotel Seattle FOUR SEASONS HOTEL SEATTLE

Check-In and Checkout

If you download the [Four Seasons](#) app and add a credit card to your profile prior to arrival, check-in will be speedy at the Seattle hotel. Check in online and then stop at the front desk to pick up a key card and a QR code, which you can scan with your phone to retrieve the room service menu. At the end of your stay, you can bypass the desk altogether after you check out on the app.

Nemacolin Woodlands Resort outside of Pittsburgh has pivoted to a preregistered check-in process. Instead of standing by as a front desk agent creates the key card upon arrival, it will be waiting for you. One person is

tasked with the job of making and then sealing them beforehand so no one touches your keys.



A guest room at Four Seasons Hotel Seattle FOUR SEASONS HOTEL SEATTLE

Guest Rooms

At Nemacolin's Five-Star [Falling Rock](#), you will find the same luxurious Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired accommodations as before, but minus the hard-to-clean accent pillows, bed throw, compendium (it's now on the TV), menus (accessible via QR code) and other paper products. Don't fret if you miss the magazines and newspapers — they are available upon request. Bibles are too, and if you want one, it's yours to bring home.

A new addition to the room is a welcome amenity kit for the times: disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer and face masks. Some hotels are giving the masks flair — Nemacolin has indigo logoed coverings with adjustable pull-cord loops, the Dorchester Collection's masks come in each property's signature color and [Grand Hotel Tremezzo](#) in Lake Como used silk.

At Nemacolin's check-in, you will be asked if you'd like daily housekeeping service or a daily delivery of amenities like towels. Falling Rock has continued its nightly turndown service complete with milk and cookies.

Previously, staff members left the treats in the room, but now they ask if you would like them to be dropped off.

After checkout, Nemaquin's policy dictates the room will sit empty for 24 hours until its next guest arrives (so if you leave Sunday, the next visitor can use the room on Tuesday).



One of the face masks given out at at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort — Falling Rock NEMACOLIN
WOODLANDS RESORT — FALLING ROCK

Guest Experiences

In the wake of the pandemic, the role of the concierge has expanded. “The concierge desk will be a one-stop resource for the most accurate information on health, safety and tourism,” says Robert Marks, chef concierge of Omni San Diego and director of the Americas at UICH Les Clefs d’Or, the international organization of professional hotel concierges. They now have to be experts on things such as the hottest restaurants in town and their social distancing measures, where to find a COVID testing center and what you need to know about local, state and national regulations.

But Marks says this will be an opportunity rather than a hindrance. “I truly believe we are entering a new, golden age of personalized service,” he says. “Imagine personally monogrammed face masks or hand sanitizer in designer bottles scented with your favorite flowers. The taking of a guest temperature can be arranged to feel like a red carpet experience instead of an uncomfortable ordeal, elevator cars can be exclusively reserved for a guest during a certain time period, 24 champagne bottles can be lined up to demonstrate 6 feet of distance.”

“There will be a million way that concierges can amaze guests in the age of COVID-19,” Marks says. “And now, as always before, it will be through small gestures, authentic moments and the quiet shared understanding that we are all in this together that will allow guests to feel safe, valuable and wowed by the experiences their warm-hearted concierges can deliver.”

As hotels strive to offer contactless service, they are leaning on technology, including at the concierge desk. For example, the coronavirus prompted The Peninsula Hotels to launch an e-concierge called PenChat. The 24-hour private messaging service works through existing apps like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat or LINE, and can be used before, during or after a stay.

Prior to COVID, Nemaocolin used its own app to send text message reminders about daily activities, though many guests would ignore the texts and then just go down to talk to the concierge, says Christopher Baran, director of sales and marketing at Nemaocolin. But the app is used much more frequently now, he says.



Take a socially distanced swim at The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston FERTITTA ENTERTAINMENT

While the ability to text, video chat and message guests are options, Marks still believes the in-person interactions will continue. “The human connection is more valuable than ever after weeks and weeks of isolation,” he says.

COVID also is influencing guest excursions. Hotels report seeing an increase in requests for private, social-distance-friendly outings. “People have really gravitated to getting back to that social interaction, but in a privatized type fashion,” Baran says. “It’s not that group tour anymore, but really that one-on-one with our art curator to walk the property and see all of the art.”

Nemacolin debuted a picnic experience featuring a menu of the best offerings from all the onsite restaurants that can be enjoyed throughout the property's 2,000 acres. It's been so popular that the hotel is running out of picnic baskets, according to Baran. He says they also are fielding more requests for private dinners and have become even more creative with them. For one couple, the hotel set up a meal at Woodlands Auto Toy Store, the onsite car museum, complete with candelabra, fresh flowers and a backdrop of rare and antique automobiles.

[The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston](#), which remained open during the pandemic, is catering to guests' requests with a slate of new private experiences, including helicopter tours (which depart from the onsite helipad) and a chance to meet a macaw, cockatoo, python, Eurasian eagle owl, sloth and more from the confines of the property courtesy of the Downtown Aquarium.

Another area of guest service that is morphing in the COVID era is transportation. As some hotels are reconsidering house cars, Four Seasons Hotel Seattle has suspended its service. "I think this might offer a resurgence of livery service, or private car service, versus a shared ride service," Marks says.



The lobby The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston FERTITTA ENTERTAINMENT

Public Spaces

Other than the signage promoting social distancing and mask wearing, the lobby at The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston looks virtually the same as before. Some properties have installed Plexiglas barriers at the reception desk, but those weren't a good fit for the lavish Houston hotel, says hotel manager Steven Chou. Instead, The Post Oak opted to space out stations for the front desk and concierge to allow the staff and guests ample room.

Pre-COVID, the lobby served as the hotel hub, but of course, people are now spending their time elsewhere. "It does feel that people aren't congregating as much in public areas," Chou says. "They are mainly going to the restaurant or they are going to different outlets within our hotel."

In Houston's steamy summers, The Post Oak's pool is an oasis. The hotel restricts access to two adults per guest room, and a pool attendant is on hand to monitor the capacity and adherence to social distancing protocols.

The Post Oak has plenty of other places for guests to gather so distancing has been relatively easy. You can linger outside in front of the hotel (Chou says this has been a popular spot), in the concierge-level lounge, in the spa deck or amid Assouline books about travel, art, food, fashion and architecture in the library.



The casino at Wynn Las Vegas ERIC JAMISON

The public spaces at [Wynn Las Vegas](#) and [Encore at Wynn Las Vegas](#) are among the properties' biggest draws, namely the casinos. Upon entering either resort, you must walk through a non-invasive thermal scanner that checks if your temperature is below 100.4 degrees. As mandated by the state, everyone in the casino must wear a face mask (which are available at every entrance, the information desk and the high-limit slots area), and the resorts ask visitors to maintain distancing whenever possible.

You will notice several changes on the casino floor. There are Plexiglas dividers at some gaming tables, slot machines have been reconfigured to provide more space and table games have fewer chairs. There aren't crowds,

since the casino is limited to 50 percent occupancy. And touchless hand sanitizers dot the casino floor and stand next to each table game.

But rest assured you'll still get the full Vegas experience. Wynn's casinos remain open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Complimentary drinks are still served at table games and slot machines. And since the company paid all employees their full wage plus tips during the lockdown, the same staff is there delivering Five-Star service.

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