

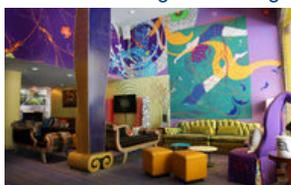
## ITINERARIES

# The 'Smart' Trend in Hotels

By JULIE WEED  
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At the InterContinental Miami hotel, guests in the lobby can call up the drink menu and flag down a server to order using a touch screen on the coffee tables. The Park Hyatt Tokyo and Park Hyatt Seoul give guests free access to over 2,300 international newspapers on their smartphones or tablets using the hotel's Wi-Fi network and an app called **PressReader**.

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Jim Wilson/The New York Times  
The Hotel Triton in San Francisco has themed suites for its guests and a whimsical touch in the lobby.

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Hotels around the world are using technology in new ways, with the goal of speeding up or personalizing more services for guests.

David-Michel Davies, president of the Webby Media Group, said he visited Internet companies around the world each year for the Webby Awards, which honor excellence on the Internet. He said he had found that hotels were using technology as a substitute for human hospitality.

Instead of the staff at the front desk offering advice on where to go for dinner, guests may be lent an iPad loaner with maps and suggestions for local restaurants and sightseeing. A hand-held device in the room might control the television, blinds and temperature, replacing the role of the bellman who would describe how the features in the room work when he dropped off a guest's luggage. "Hotels are transforming service into a digital concept," Mr. Davies said.

Barbara Kahn, who studies consumer decision-making as director of

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the Jay H. Baker Retailing Center at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, said most guests, especially younger ones who are used to having information at their fingertips, were comfortable with the transition to digital. Some hotels, especially luxury brands, are more likely to keep both the staff interaction and the technology offerings, she said.

Hotels are also using technology to save money and manage inventory. Workers used to have to count sheets, towels, robes and table linens by hand on the way out of the hotel to the laundry and on the way back in, to try to avoid theft. Some hotels now stitch in small radio frequency ID tags, which transmit radio waves, so that when a cart of laundry passes by a sensor, the number of items inside is displayed. The method saves time in counting items and has decreased theft, said Sanjay Sarma, a professor of mechanical engineering at M.I.T.

Some technology offerings extend beyond the hotel's walls. The Park Hyatt Tokyo rents guests a pocket-size mobile Wi-Fi connector to use with an iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry or laptop to make international calls and get Internet access wherever they go during their stay.

The cost for the connector is 2,500 yen a day (about \$25), and it can be used by up to 10 devices for people who are traveling together. Along with the convenience of 24-hour Web access, the device offers a break from the expense of international cellphone calls.

Ana Silva O'Reilly, a travel blogger and marketing consultant based in London, said she had found that hotels were moving beyond Facebook to other forms of social media. When she recently posted on Twitter that she would be checking into the Four Seasons Hotel in Milan, the hotel responded, saying it was looking forward to her arrival. "I know hotels do it all for my loyalty and my money, but it does feel welcoming when they contact me," she said.

Ms. O'Reilly said she also used Foursquare to share where she was by "checking in" at that location. She was recently surprised to discover as she was checking in at a [Starwood](#) hotel that she qualified for a Foursquare promotion and received 250 points for her Starwood loyalty program account. A Foursquare check-in at the hotel bar offered her a second drink free, and a check-in at the spa offered a 15 percent discount.

"It's a clever way for hotels to get guests to explore the hotel," Ms. O'Reilly said. Starwood varies its promotions at different hotels and spaces in the hotel, and periodically runs propertywide promotions for overnight guests.

Ms. Kahn said personalization continued to be another big theme in hospitality. Hotels at all price levels have achieved "operational

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excellence” and know how to run a clean, well-managed property, she said. So they need to look beyond that to attract customers.

Personalization might include letting guests choose from different morning newspapers, lines of bath products, or individually decorated and designed rooms. Staff members are trained to learn and use the guest’s name and preferences.

Personalization also continues to mean attending to each guest’s requests. Many hotels will lend guests electronic chargers or curling irons to replace those left at home. Some hotels lend workout clothes. The Berkeley hotel in London will even lend guests a mink stole, vintage Chanel earrings or other items for a night on the town, delivered in an elegant custom-made trunk.

Hotels have also started to individualize a stay by giving guests a more flexible check-in and checkout time. Guests at Four Points by Sheraton Los Angeles International Airport can check in any time and stay for 24 hours if they provide their arrival time in advance and are paying \$119 or more for their reservation. This option adds convenience for international travelers arriving or departing at unusual hours.

Some hotels take a quirkier route to personalization. The Hotel Triton in San Francisco offers pet sitters for guests in all-day meetings who need their furry companions attended to. Chalkboards above the desks in its guest rooms let staff members welcome travelers individually. Grateful Dead fans can stay in a Jerry Garcia-inspired suite, and sweets lovers can book a stay that includes unlimited Häagen-Dazs ice cream.

The Triton also has rubber ducks, sometimes personalized, that it leaves for guests in their bathrooms. Antonio Flores, the hotel’s general manager, said that Google, which has its headquarters nearby, sends many of its potential recruits to stay at the Triton when they come to town for an interview. “We created a Google rubber duck to give each one,” he said.

Personal health and wellness at hotels have been evolving beyond allergy-free pillows, concierge-led runs and gluten-free menu items. The MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas offers 42 “Stay Well” rooms, which include antimicrobial coatings on television remotes, bathrooms and other areas that are often touched, as well as a dawn simulator alarm clock and filtered air flow systems. The shower water is infused with vitamin C.

Despite all the new bells and whistles, sometimes the most basic of the modern services is what counts the most. Guests’ No. 1 choice of a hotel amenity is free Wi-Fi, according to a 2012 Hotels.com survey. Holly Isdale, a financial consultant for high-net-worth families, based

in Bryn Mawr, Pa., wrote in an e-mail: “I won’t pay for Wi-Fi and won’t stay at a hotel twice if it charges for Wi-Fi. Given the prices of business hotels, it seems ridiculous to charge for Wi-Fi.”

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