

# Tomorrow's World

Travel through  
time with the latest  
hotel innovations

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Welcome to the hotel of the future. Can't find the room key? Don't worry, just whip out a smartphone instead. Hankering for a late-night club sandwich? The robot butler is on his way. Missing loved ones back home? Call them via video link or have their 3D holograph appear right in front of you.

This might sound like pure science-fiction, but it's much more than just a distant possibility - these are all real developments happening right now at hotels around the world.

And for anyone wondering what happened to needing nothing more than clean sheets and a comfy bed, it's worth remembering that what we expect from a hotel room can change significantly over time.

After all, it wasn't so long ago that a trouser press and tea-making facilities were the height of hotel sophistication; these days, guests are more likely to ask about Wi-Fi or where to stream their favourite shows.

Here, we look at technology trends you need to know about to help sell a stay in some of the world's most innovative hotels.

## ► EXCITING TIMES

At the forefront of hotel technology is NH Hotel Group's flagship property, the NH Collection Madrid Eurobuilding, which opened in October after a multimillion-pound refurbishment.

This is a 'Living Lab' hotel, featuring 3D holographic technology in its meeting rooms, an enormous vaulted screen projecting digital artwork across the lobby, plus four state-of-the-art rooms that test which innovations - such as calling reception via video link or wireless charging of mobile devices - work best in real life.

Fellow Spanish properties Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel and Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza are also testing the latest in wearable technology with the VIB, or 'very important bracelet'. This not only acts as a room key and payment system (it can be linked up with a PayPal [→](#)



account), but can also interact with the 2m-tall touchscreens dotted around the hotels so guests can post straight on social media – cue some envy-inducing Instagrams for friends and family to drool over back home. The bracelets are priced from €29 a day, with a kids' option from €19.

That's not the end of the 21st-century touches, though: Ushuaia also boasts Microsoft Surface tablets in the lobby and Xbox 360s in selected suites – perfect for playing against friends in other rooms – while Hard Rock gets guests into the party vibe with Fender guitars available for hire, along with a free amp and headphones, for anyone who wants to stage their own personal jam session.

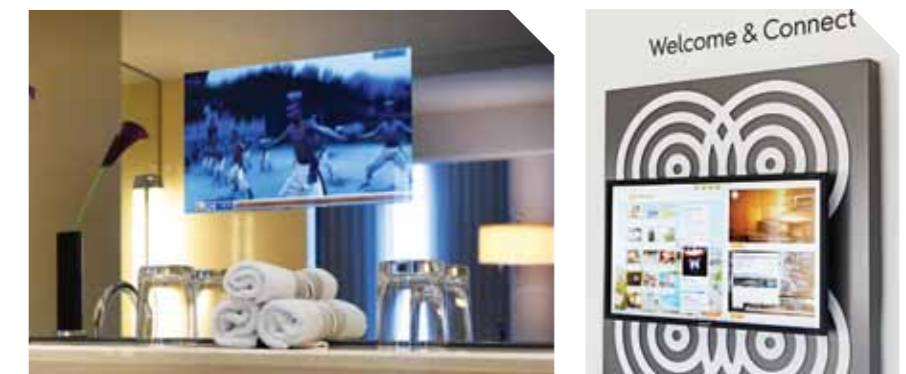
Keeping guests content was also at the core of Thomas Cook's move to introduce SunConnect resorts last summer, following a survey to find out what customers wanted from their hotel. Free Wi-Fi came top of the list, along with good food and good service, which is why these properties offer complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the resort, along with charging points for smartphones and tablets at the bar, and online platform MySunConnect where guests can plan excursions, share photos on Picture Flow and book extras such as spa massages without having to lift a finger.

The Facebook generation can get in on the act too, with Xboxes in the teen lounge and fun group activities organised by the in-resort



Thomas Cook offers a week's all-inclusive at the four-star **SunConnect Grand Ideal Premium** in Turkey from £1,545 for a family of four, including flights from Gatwick on October 14. [thomascook.com](http://thomascook.com)

A night's B&B at **Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel** starts at £152 per double room, based on two sharing. [ushuaiaibeachhotel.com/en](http://ushuaiaibeachhotel.com/en)



entertainment team, known as ConnectScouts.

#### ▶ GET AHEAD OF THE GAME

It would be hard to find an international hotel chain without its own app these days, allowing guests to check in online or customise their stay before they even arrive.

Rotana has rolled out check-in via app across all its properties in the past six months, with a priority desk where visitors can pick up their key when they arrive. Hilton has taken it a step further by allowing Hilton HHonors members to choose not just their room type but the actual room itself – down to the exact number, if they want – with the help of photos and floorplans available on the app.

Guests could even bypass the check-in desk altogether soon, with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones replacing room keys in more than 150 Starwood hotels (under its Aloft, Element and W Hotels brands) already this year, as well as in four brands of Hilton hotels across the US this year,



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soon to be followed by the majority of Hilton's international properties by the end of 2016.

What about those who need special arrangements? Well, there's an app for that too. Four Seasons' new app has options to request extras such as forgotten toiletries or baby equipment, plus insider advice on the best dining, shopping and attractions nearby, while the Conrad Concierge app lets guests request everything from golf course tee times to guided shopping tours.

It's not all about the big brands though, with small hotels like the

32-room Arrive, set to open in Palm Springs this summer, also embracing the latest technology. As this boutique is owned by Facebook millionaire Ezra Callahan, one of the site's first employees, it should hardly be surprising that it has everything from online check-in and phones that double up as keys, to an option for arranging housekeeping via the app and streaming Netflix and Hulu shows in every room.

#### ▶ IN-ROOM ENTERTAINMENT

These technological advances aren't just good marketing – they can really improve a guest's stay, whether it's finding the bathroom at night with the help of smart floor tiles to light the way (at Element hotels), or watching the morning news while you brush your teeth with TV screens built into the bathroom mirror (at Jumeirah Frankfurt).

There's no need to wait on hold for room service at The BodyHoliday in Saint Lucia, the latest in a string of hotels to install tablets in each of



its 150 rooms and suites, so guests can order food and drink or make instant spa reservations without even having to lift the phone. And booking a beauty treatment is just as easy at Sol House Trinidad Mallorca, where all guests have to do is tweet their request before it appears on the lobby Tweet Wall for the so-called Tweet Concierge to make the booking on their behalf.

But if it's instant room service clients are after, the robot butler at

Aloft Cupertino is on hand day or night. The so-called 'Botlr' was introduced at this Californian property – fittingly just moments from Apple's international headquarters – to deliver amenities to guest rooms or work behind the scenes.

With a butler-like uniform and instructions to accept tweets rather than tips as a thank you for good service, it's all delivered with the brand's classic sense of humour, so expect to see the technology rolled out across other Aloft hotels in the coming months.

TOP: Starwood Hotels' keyless entry system

MIDDLE LEFT: Jumeirah Frankfurt

MIDDLE RIGHT: SunConnect touch screen

LEFT: Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel

MAIN PIC: Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza

LEFT: Aloft Hotels' Botlr, or robot butler