

# 100 Years of Hotel Trends

By [Monica Poling](#), brought to you by [travelpulse.com](#)



*PHOTO: A miniaturized replica of the classic Holiday Inn roadside sign, on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Detroit. (photo by Monica Poling)*

Was it just a few years ago that everyone was talking about free Wi-Fi as the hottest new “thing” to hit the hotel industry?

How quickly the conversation has shifted to robot butlers, wallet-free payment systems and “immersive” experiences!

Indeed, hotel trends are indeed fleeting. So fleeting, in fact, we thought it would be interesting to take a step back in time and identify some of the top hotel trends over the past century. Some have come and gone (whatever did happen to all those vibrating beds?), while others, like chocolates on our pillows continue to be a mainstay today.

## 1900s

Average daily rate (1900): \$2.00

In the early 1900s, more people were indulging in cross-country travel as rail travel started to hit its peak. To accommodate this new class of traveler, luxurious hotels opened nationwide. In Canada, many of the rail hotels of this era were built to replicate the grand chateaus of Europe.

The early 1900s also marked the emergence of customized, in-room offerings. When it opened in 1904, the St. Regis in New York City became the first property to provide adjustable heating and cooling in every guest room. By the latter half of the decade, phones and radios also started to make their first in-room appearance.

*Notable openings: Fairmont San Francisco; Moana Surfrider (Waikiki, Hawaii); St. Francis (San Francisco, California); Taj Mahal (India)*

## **1910s**

The 1910s were a decade of great turmoil. War broke out in Europe while Mexico, Russia and China struggled with revolution. But the decade also saw the early origins of several major industries that would forever change hospitality.

Commercial aviation got its start as did motor coach transportation, while the introduction of the Model T Ford revolutionized the automobile. Cruising also became more commonplace, although two of the grandest ships to set sail—the Titanic and the Lusitania—were also tragically lost.

The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 spurred a great fascination with global travel, especially in destinations along the West Coast, where the increase in ship calls stimulated significant new port infrastructure and grand new hotels to accommodate travelers who'd made the crossing.

*Notable openings: Beverly Hills Hotel, (California); Chateau Laurier (Ottawa, Canada); Clift Hotel (San Francisco), Huntington Hotel (Pasadena, California); Halekulani (Honolulu, Hawaii)*

## **1920s**

Average room rate (1920): \$2.50

The Roaring 20s were a time of great prosperity when cars, telephones, movies, electricity and formalized vacation days all became part of the popular vernacular.

The concept of lodging also underwent a shift as more people started using their automobiles for leisure. Route 66 was a year away from completion, but the world's first motor hotels (motels) were opening up alongside America's roadways.

Art Deco became a popular design motif with luxury hotels. When the Ritz-Carlton Boston opened in 1927, it charged a whopping \$15 a night but also pioneered a number of firsts, including the first private in-room bathtubs.

During this decade, the Savoy in London—now a Fairmont—was the first to send a representative overseas to New York City, to “help travel agents make bookings for their clients.” The representative asked other top hoteliers to join a collective, which eventually became Leading Hotels of the World.

*Notable openings: Biltmore Hotel (Los Angeles); Copacabana (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil); Drake Hotel (Chicago); Hotel Le Bristol (Paris), Hotel Pontchartrain (New Orleans); Peninsula Hong Kong*

## **1930s**

Average room rate (1930): \$5.60

The prosperity of the 20s gave way to the Great Depression and the more austere 1930s. Nearly one in five workers were unemployed while fascism and Naziism were taking root in Europe, all of which put a damper on a burgeoning tourism industry.

Though turbulent, the decade also produced a lot of great art, literature and architecture. The Empire State Building, the world's tallest opened in New York, while Americans had their first taste of technicolor movies, including *The Wizard of Oz*.

The financial situation meant hotels struggled with occupancies at less than 50 percent. Many of them declared bankruptcy. Despite the downturn, room rates soared, which meant hotels had to be creative with their guest offerings. When the Waldorf Astoria in New York opened in 1931, it became the first hotel to offer 24-hour room service, a feature that quickly became popular at other luxury hotels.

*Notable openings: Chateau Marmont (Los Angeles); Hotel Nacional de Cuba (Cuba); King David (Jerusalem); Los Flamingos (Acapulco, Mexico)*

## **1940s**

Average room rate (1940): \$3.21

Although the 1940s saw the advent of World War II, the decade also marked a return to prosperity. The war created numerous new jobs, with many women joining the workforce for the first time. The extra disposable income led to a corresponding growth in tourism.

Technology also started to play a greater role in popular culture. Capitalizing on the growing visitor market, Western Hotels (then owned by United Airlines and the precursor to today's Westin Hotels & Resorts), introduced the first branded hotel credit card in 1946. A year later, Western launched the first-ever hotel reservations system.

*Notable openings: Ashford House (Ireland); Dan Hotel (Tel Aviv); Flamingo Las Vegas; Royal Palms Hotel & Casitas (Phoenix)*

## **1950s**

Average room rate (1950): \$5.91

The Korean War, the earliest beginnings of the Space Race and the Cuban Revolution dominated the news during the 1950s, but it was also the first time people could consume news via commercial television. In addition to TVs, more Americans were purchasing automobiles, which led to a corresponding increase in both business and leisure travel.

In response, hotels began increasing their guest-centric amenities. At the Mayfair Hotel in St. Louis, preferred guest Cary Grant once requested the hotel lay out an in-room trail of chocolates for a lady friend he was meeting. The manager continued to place chocolates on pillows for his guests, creating an enduring new trend.

Technology's role continued to grow in hospitality. By 1951, Hilton Hotels was the first to feature a television in every hotel room. Universal credit cards—such as Diners Club and American Express—were introduced, prompting significant changes in consumer behavior. By the end of the 1950s, Sheraton had introduced the first-ever automated reservation system. It also launched the first toll-free reservations number the same year.

*Notable openings: Disneyland Hotel (Anaheim, California); Fontainebleau (Miami); Half Moon Rose Hall (Jamaica)*

## 1960s

Average room rate (1960): \$10.81

The 1960s were a time for voices to be heard. It was the era of the anti-war movement, civil rights protests, feminism and gay rights. It was also the Summer of Love for the city of San Francisco.

Travelers were on the move as well. Air travel became considerably more common, and hotels rushed to open airport-adjacent properties—a concept Hilton Hotels claims it launched with the 1959 opening of the San Francisco Airport Hilton.

Some hotels were using ancillary fees to increase their revenue, and many quickly copied the Hong Kong Hilton (which closed in 1995) after it installed the first-ever in-room minibars.

On the other side of the spectrum, Kemmons Wilson, the founder of Holiday Inn, was so tired of hotel up charges, he had all his properties install ice machines on every floor. According to [Hospitality Gecko](#), it was also during the 60s when hotels first started to introduce mini shampoo bottles in each bathroom.

*Notable openings: Mauna Kea (The Island of Hawaii); Sheraton Foxhead Motor Inn, now Sheraton on the Falls (Niagara Falls, Canada); Sheraton Marie Isabel (Mexico City).*

## 1970s

Average room rate (1970): \$19.83

Space exploration, the energy crisis and the rise of terrorism all saw their roots in the 1970s, but technology also continued to take great leaps and bounds. Buildings soared to new heights during this time, as architects competed to build the tallest structures in the world, including Toronto's CN Tower, New York's World Trade Center and both the Sears Tower and the John Hancock Tower in Chicago.

The decade gave birth to Amtrak, which created a resurgence in domestic rail travel interest. It was also the era of airline deregulation, which forever changed how airlines and subsequently hotels would market to potential clients. Americans continued their love affair with television and were further inspired to travel with the roll out of the most-tourism-positive television series ever, the Love Boat.

The consumption of mass media carried over to hotels. By 1973, the Sheraton Anaheim became the first hotel to offer in-room movies. Later that decade, HBO was born and many hotels rapidly added it to their in-room offerings. So popular was the amenity, motels would often include a mention about HBO availability in their roadside signage.

Meanwhile, the energy crisis of the 1970s gave rise to the industry's earliest adoption of eco-friendly practices as hotels began to ask guests to turn out their lights and air conditioning before leaving the room.

Overseas, Americana was taking root. Hotelier [Gordon Gorman reflects](#) that the 1970s were a time when staff at his hotel in Great Britain marveled at a development from America known as the Club Sandwich.

*Notable openings: Hooters Casino Hotel (Las Vegas); Hyatt Regency New Orleans; Keio Plaza Hotel (Tokyo, Japan); Shangri-La's Fijian Resort (Fiji)*

## **1980s**

Average room rate (1980): \$45.44

While people during the 80s were listening to Madonna, Boy George and Michael Jackson, they were also glued to their televisions, especially enthralled by a series of high-profile disasters, including the destruction of the NASA Space Shuttle Challenger, the eruption of Mount St. Helens and the destruction caused by the Loma Prieta Earthquake in San Francisco.

Technology continued to lead hotel advancements, with the decade welcoming the first electronic key cards. Paying by credit card had become commonplace, and Westin Hotels continued to lead res-system developments by introducing the first to allow reservations and check out by using a credit card.

Competing for guest loyalty first got its roots this decade and, by 1983, both Holiday Inn and Marriott had introduced the first hotel guest loyalty rewards programs.

Hotels also started focusing more on targeting sub-segments of travel.

In the luxury market, Four Seasons became the first hotel company to introduce a company-wide, European-style concierge service at all properties. It also opened the first hotel, Four Seasons Dallas, to offer a full-service spa. Meanwhile, Hyatt was targeting family travel with the 1989 introduction of Camp Hyatt, the first formalized kids club program for the hotel industry. Marriott Hotels was eyeing the business traveler with the opening of its Courtyard brand.

*Notable openings: Arizona Biltmore; Disney's Grand Floridian Beach Resort (Orlando); Four Seasons Houston; Westin Century Plaza (Los Angeles)*

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## **1990s**

Average room rate (1995): \$65.84

Multiculturalism and alt culture helped define the 1990s, which also saw the end of the Cold War. Mostly, however, the 90s was the era of the internet—despite the dot com bubble.

By 1995, hotels had largely introduced their first websites. By 1996, Microsoft launched the first OTA, Expedia.com. Shortly thereafter Travelocity and Priceline are also introduced.

While the emergence of the internet caused travelers to slowly turn away from travel agents, hotels still considered agents a valuable market segment. It was during the 1990s that Carlson (Radisson) Hotels launched "Look To Book," among the first online platforms designed to reward travel agent loyalty.

*Notable openings: Barcelo Bavaro Palace Deluxe (Dominican Republic), Hard Rock Hotel & Casino (Las Vegas); MGM Grand (Las Vegas)*

## **2000s**

Average room rate (2000): \$85.89

Globalization became the catch-phrase after the turn of the millennium as did social responsibility. Of course, the single-most defining moment of the decade was the September 11 attacks in New York City, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania.

A global economic crisis followed, which decimated travel and created a new normal for the hospitality industry.

With the significant decrease in leisure travel, hoteliers upped the ante on their offerings for business travelers. The concept of free in-room Wi-Fi first took root during this time, especially at mid-market and budget properties.

Hotels were also dealing with a surge in demand for energy efficiency or “green” products. Signs asking guests to save their towels were no longer good enough. In 2008, Hilton Vancouver Washington made history when it became the first property to be both LEED and Green Seal certified

By the end of the decade, travelers started to rely upon their mobile devices as an information source and hotel apps subsequently started to make a rapid appearance.

*Notable openings: Four Seasons Resort Lanai (Lanai, Hawaii); Grand Palladium Jamaica Resort & Spa; Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel; Lebua at State Tower (Bangkok, Thailand); Mandarin Oriental Miami; The Standard High Line (New York City)*

## **2010s**

It's too early to write history on our current rapid-pace decade.

Safe to say, it started off with a bang when newly elected president Barack Obama told business travelers to avoid Las Vegas. The short-term challenges of that speech led way to a realization that the industry needed to come together with a single voice to stress the importance of travel.

It's probably not coincidental that 2010 also saw the formation of Brand USA, the marketing organization charged with promoting the U.S. as a visitor destination.

Still, it's quite likely that the next trends will be something we haven't yet imagined. Tomorrow's writers will likely mention the emergence of robots, virtual reality, the sharing economy and, of course, the cyber hacking as defining trends of this decades. Hoteliers' focus on local culture and farm-to-table cuisine will likely also get a mention as will the emergence of pet-friendly hotels.

But the future could hold space travel modules or the decline of air travel as the public's demand for alternative high-speed transportation modules are finally realized. It's just too early to tell.

**What do you think will be the big trends of this decade?**

*Notable openings: Aulani by Disney (O'ahu, Hawaii); Fogo Island Inn (Newfoundland, Canada); Nizuc Resort & Spa (Cancun, Mexico), Ritz-Carlton Ranch Mirage (California); The Pyramid at Grand Oasis (Cancun, Mexico)*