

Design

How hotels are reworking outdoor spaces to meet demand

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To accommodate guests' increased desire for outdoor spaces, hoteliers are investing in extra seating options for individuals and groups as well as boosting internet connectivity for a seamless indoor-outdoor transition.



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REPORT FROM THE U.S.—Hoteliers are taking advantage of trends to reimagine and invest in safe and effective outdoor spaces.

Suzie Hall, founder and president of design firm The Cornerstone Collective, said hoteliers should be focusing on solutions and options for maximizing outdoor seating and services during the off-season months, especially in markets with weather turning colder.

“Many owners and operators have been really focusing on social and physical distancing options but to the point that it’s (become) ... almost solo and individual. The reality is that for non-business travel, there’s typically more than one person (traveling) from the same household,” she said. “It’s (a challenge) then when they’re traveling ... to find options that aren’t socially distanced.”

She said it’s key to have a variety of seating options. One trend emerging is “cocooning,” which provides guests with a more sheltered, intimate space, sometimes for their full stay.

This can be done through investment in geodesic domes or “igloos,” separating off spaces with collapsible decorative screens and using tall greenery to soften the experience. Hall added that screens could be used beyond a one-time use and could work in indoor banquet spaces as well.

“We’re going to see the need to separate and segment off those rooms, in my opinion, for some time to come,” she said. “It’s not just a one-time investment for a one-time use.”

Hall added that designing for outdoor meetings should be a priority, too. In addition to great Wi-Fi, elements such as large anti-glare projection screens can help draw business travelers to these outdoor spaces, she said.

“It adds that excitement and energy back into conferences and business meetings,” she said.

The Fontaine Hotel

Rick Oberdahlhoff, director of sales and marketing at The Fontaine Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri, said in an email interview that his property has had a tremendous upswing this summer in guests requesting use of the hotel’s outdoor spaces for small weddings and other gatherings.

As a result, his hotel is making investments now that will help carry this trend throughout the fall and winter months, he said.

Oberdahlhoff said this November the Fontaine will roll out individual “igloo pods” on the pool deck for enclosed dining and drinks.

For a cost-conscious option, he suggests rearranging existing furniture in seating areas to provide safe distancing from other parties or purchasing reasonably priced room dividers and plants to create a sense of privacy without a solid barrier.

He said for small meetings his hotel has hosted in its serenity garden, individual tables were set up in a classroom style to maintain distance with Wi-Fi access and electrical for laptops.

The Don CeSar

Thomas Fraher, GM at the Don CeSar in St. Pete Beach, Florida, said via email his property has worked to accommodate outdoor seating for dining, lounging and group events as more guests demand it.

He said the Don CeSar has enhanced its dining outlets by adding more seating areas with umbrellas and increased sanitization practices. His team is also enhancing its outdoor pavilions to cater to weddings and meetings.

“Even our new luxury front drive and entrance experience is highlighted with expanded space to accommodate more guests gathering in the outdoor area versus inside the lobby,” he said. “Overall, outdoor space is a major priority moving into 2021.”

For upselling opportunities that also limit touchpoints and allow for single-service packaging, the hotel has incorporated specialty cocktail carts, ice cream or popsicle carts and outdoor BBQ grill setups, he said.

Fraher said technology is also top of mind. His team has integrated QR codes and is investing in a new digital platform that will allow guests to place orders via a phone or tablet in any outdoor space on property, then be located through GPS technology.

[Click here to read: “Hoteliers move to QR code use amid pandemic”](#)

“(This allows) our services to be even more efficient, clean and cost effective. We are currently increasing wireless capacity throughout our property to allow for faster speeds and quality access,” he said.

He added strong connectivity for videoconferencing has been crucial to hosting outdoor meetings. He said a corporate client asked for a casual board meeting to take place in the sand of the property’s beachfront location.

“We were happy to accommodate (that),” he said. “Our amazing beachfront is generating high demand from both weddings and corporate events for tent-covered gatherings with open-air sides, and we anticipate this to continue even throughout colder winter months.”

Fraher said the terrace balconies located on the hotel’s penthouse units are also ideal for small executive meetings.

Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel and Spa

Kevin Ellis, GM of the Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel and Spa on Del Monte Golf Course in Monterey, California, said via email that the hotel’s more than 22 acres provides plenty of exterior space to accommodate the demand for outdoor meetings.

He said internet and power were the first items his team needed to address.

“In the last year, we have greatly enhanced the property’s Wi-Fi, including the installation of exterior access points,” he said. “Internet strength is a priority—upload, download and overall signal coverage. I would image this is a trend which is only going to continue.”

Other enhancements include transforming room service into a “roam service,” which can transport food-and-beverage offerings across the hotel in high-end, eco-friendly disposable containers, he said.