

The Connected Visitor Economy

July 2015

Responsible Travel - The New Evolution of Hotel Safety and Security



Feeling secure. Has hotel safety and security evolved – and who has the responsibility?

Travel for business, leisure and meeting grows at a prolific pace in both established and emerging markets around the world. Hotels accommodating this travel offer a huge variety of room type, rates, interior design, restaurant, lifestyle, wellbeing, information technology and leisure concepts.

One aspect that seems to go unnoticed or is kept quietly off the hotel agenda is 'Safety and Security'. Go to any hotel website or marketing channel and sustainability – social responsibility – environment are there and highlighted: in many ways a given expectation with awards, certificates, acknowledgements and accreditations given to full web and brochure pages.

In the last 30 years there has been both a revolution and evolution in the area of sustainability and social responsibility. But what about humble 'Hotel Safety and Security'? Has it evolved? Is the hotel guest or room buyer really that interested in whether it has or not? Is feeling secure in a hotel taken for granted and a 'given expectation'?

The risk of experiencing a crime (security) or personal injury (safety) in a hotel is very low. There are no industry published figures and insurance companies keep loss run figures detail on hotel incidents close to their chest. Yet if you multiplied the number of rooms in any given hotel by average occupancy room night stays, by average number of occupants per room, add in non-residents using the hotel facilities then divide by the number of crimes or injuries experienced by guests or non-residents in the given hotel – the risk of experiencing would be something along the lines of the .001 out of 100.

When looking at it this way, one of two thoughts spring to mind. 1. Hotels must be really safe and secure – I will take those odds and think no more about it. 2. What if I or my family, is the .001? Do I want such an experience? If something does happen? Does the hotel know what to do? Have they taken all precautions? Have they invested in safety and security? Is the staff trained correctly? Has the life



safety equipment been serviced? What standards and regulations do they comply with? Has hotel safety and security evolved in line with guest expectations?

Development of hotel safety and security

People are, by genetic makeup, travellers. It is in our DNA. We've progressed from being nomadic hunter-gatherers to farmers and on to city dwellers. Wherever people stop or settle down, they first look for food, shelter and comfort. How benign or hostile an environment is a deciding factor on whether a traveller stops and stays or for how long. The more secure people feel, the more they want to stay. It is human instinct to enjoy staying in hotels.

The modern era for hotels, apart from port cities, really opened up with the arrival of the locomotive train and the growth of towns, cities and commerce along railway routes. In early days the only real security a hotel had was a metal key for the guest room door, some form of alarm to notify if the hotel was on fire, possibly a room to store luggage and a safe at reception to keep valuables. In a city centre it was sometimes the traditional doorman - both the gatekeeper guardian and first contact greeter for guests arriving at the hotel.



In many markets, especially emerging markets, resort locations and small independent hotels, 'metal door key security' and someone 'shouting fire' is still the norm.

As train travel evolved to airline travel, rapid expansion of hotels around the world resulted with many airlines developing their own hotels as well as needing hotels for their aircrews. With airlines comes a greater awareness and requirement for safety and security. With the advent of safety and security technologies such as fire sprinkler systems, automatic fire detection systems, CCTV, electronic door locking systems, control rooms, uniform guards at hotel entrances in the lobbies or patrolling on floors, the doorman's security duties became more and more redundant.

Through evolution in systems and technology came hotel safety regulations, licensing requirements, hotel fire building codes and design standards for some jurisdictions and for most hotel chains. On top of this came internal self-assessment and audit systems within the bigger chain hotels - due diligence inspections by tour companies, government agencies or multinationals. Safety evolution grew with a focus on preventative slips, trips and falls, first aid response training, food safety and crisis management training.

Next came an evolution in insurance claims and insurance claims management. Liability went hand in hand with safety and security and in some cases a fear of 'having too much safety and security' in case it could lead to liability. The 'Good Samaritan' taking a step back for fear of the 'Bad Lawsuit'. Hotels and hotel chains appear to be content with their safety and security evolutionary status; does the hotel guest and travel market think the same?

What do guests and hotel room buyers want from hotel safety and security?

Unless a hotel is in a high security threat location where terrorism is a high risk, security and safety may not always be visible unless the guest looks for it. CCTV cameras can be seen in public areas, while fire detectors, sprinkler heads, fire extinguishers and perhaps a guard in the lobby can all appear reassuring. Some guests in some markets or cultures welcome this. Equally, some guests would prefer safety and security to be 'invisible' – but still there.

Getting hard data on safety and security from academic or hotel industry sources is not readily available or easy to come by. The crime figures where a hotel is located may be available through online crime mapping tools. Fire statistics and incidents in hotels around the world are usually available in open media source and hotel fires will always be reported by local, national or international news.

A search of what academic and industry related research exists on a global basis reveals.

- Physical (and 'overt') safety and security features are welcomed by hotel guests and B2B customers
- Safety and security are criteria that influence hotel selection
- Customers (leisure, business guests and meeting planners) are willing to pay extra for safety and security
- Hotels can therefore charge more for their safety and security features (Cornell 2009)



- Compliance with regulatory frameworks, effective response to emergencies and uniformed guards are important features for hotel guests
- In Europe, although there is a rise in travel insurance claims for medical expenses, less than 1% of the volume is related to accidents in hotels; 98% of 25,500 respondents feel hotels are generally safe with 1 in 3 expressing some concern about pools and heating systems
- 17 out of 24 EU countries have hotel-specific safety regulations that mostly concentrate upon premises condition
- Third party safety and security accreditation can serve as an instantly recognisable 'trust symbol' for guests as well as an added value compliance and due diligence measure for a hotel's own internal/local systems and procedures



Research and findings within APAC, EU, UK and US on what guests really want from hotel security and a sample of what the incidence of hotel safety and security events are as follows:

Chan, E. S., and Lam, D. (2013). "Hotel safety and security systems: Bridging the gap between managers and guests", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 32, 202-216.

A study of 153 travellers in Hong Kong SAR undertaken by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University showed that the most important safety and security features for hotel guests are the following:

1. Well-equipped fire prevention systems according to the local regulation
2. Emergency plan (e.g. evacuation plan for fire)
3. Emergency lighting system
4. 24-hour uniformed security guard
5. Regular testing of hotel safety and security systems
6. Closed-circuit television systems (CCTV) for hotel public areas
7. PA system with multi-language announcements for emergencies
8. 24-hour first-aid-trained employees
9. Pressurised stairways
10. Safety and security training for hotel staff
11. Registration procedures for employees needing a key as part of their normal duties
12. An established chain of crisis management and command and control outside of normal working hours

Rittichainuwat, B. N. (2013). "Tourists' perceived risks toward overt safety measures", *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 37(2), 199-216.

- A study among 500 travellers in Bangkok showed that 84.4% of the respondents (special occasion travellers, leisure travellers, business travellers and backpackers) were pretty relaxed or felt safer with overt safety and security measures in a hotel
- An increase in security measures in Thai hotels would worry 32.8% of the respondents

Hilliard, T.H. and Baloglu, S. (2008). "Safety and Security as Part of the Hotel Servicescape for Meeting Planners", *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 9:1, 15-34

- One study among meeting planners conducted by the University of Nevada Las Vegas in the USA showed that for 79% of the respondents, safety and security is one of the most important factors when selecting a hotel
- They were more keen on safety and security features they could see and touch (sprinklers, CCTV, smoke detectors, etc.) considering them an important part of a hotel's 'Servicescape'
- 78% of the respondents indicated that a safety and security certification would positively impact their actual hotel selection and their willingness to pay more for it

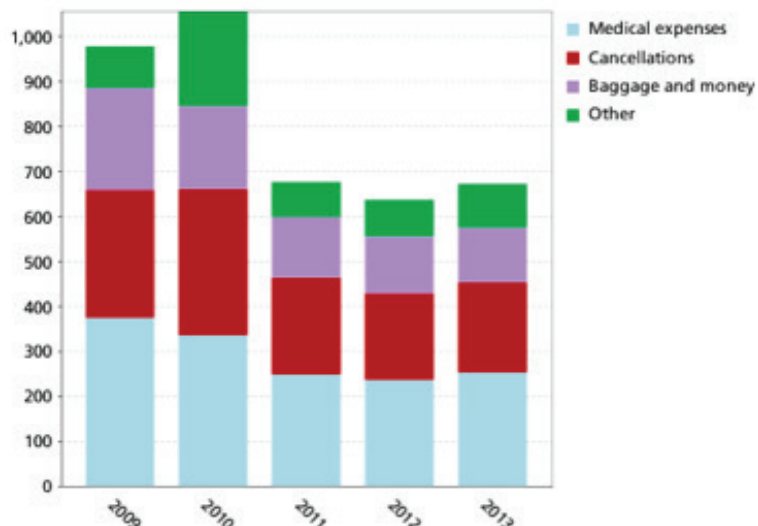
Enz, C. A. (2009). "The physical safety and security features of U.S. hotels", *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 50(4), 553-560.

- One study among 5,500 hotels in the USA conducted by Cornell University showed that upmarket hotels usually have the highest safety and security scores with lower price segments presenting progressively fewer safety and security features
- The study showed that that a price premium (higher advertised rack rate) is associated with those hotels that offer a full complement of safety and security features

Alleweldt, F., Tonner, K., & McDonald, M. (2008). "Study on Safety and Liability Issues Relating to Package Travel", *European Parliament* (IP/A/IMCO/FWC/2006-058/LOT 4/C1/SC5)

- The main causes for accidents in a hotel facility, according to HolidayTravelWatch, were listed as poor lighting, poor maintenance, no steps, poor boiler systems and poor hygiene handling. According to the organisation, there is a trend of an increase in illness cases (food hygiene-related)
- Again, the bulk of medical claims consist of illness-related cases, and less than 1% of injury claims. Most frequent causes of injury were recorded as slips and trips, fractures, cuts, bruises, carbon monoxide poisoning and bike accidents

Total number of claims on UK travel insurance policies by type of claim (000), 2009-2013



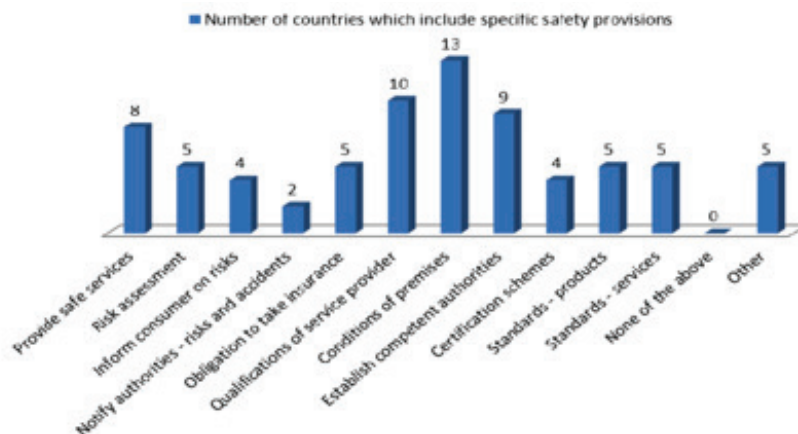
Source: Association of British Insurers/Key Note
[Flash Eurobarometer 350, Safety of Services](#)

A 2012 study of 25,524 European citizens by Eurobarometer showed that:

- 98% of the respondents did not report any accidents while staying in a hotel in the last two years
- At least nine out of 10 of hotel users rated the building and equipment and hygiene at their hotel as safe, but they were less certain about the pool (64% safe) and heating systems (61% safe)
- 92% said the premises and equipment were in good enough condition, while 82% said safety information was displayed, and 62% said the staff seemed to be properly qualified in terms of safety precautions



17 EU countries have hotel-specific safety regulations



Source: European Commission, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers, Consumers Directorate, Product and Service Safety Unit (JUST E.3)



Is there a need for a ‘new evolution’ in hotel safety and security?

Looking at facts, figures, research data findings and asking the hotel industry, independent hotels and international chain hotels, the answers may be ‘we are doing fine, thank you’, or ‘we have reached the top of our evolutionary scale where safety and security is concerned’.

Feedback from guests, coupled with research findings, appears to suggest that guests ‘want more and want to know more about a hotel’s safety and security and how it keeps them safe and secure’.

Benchmarking against other travel industries

When benchmarking hotels against another travel industry with a similar safety and security risk profile such as the airlines reveals an interesting differentiation. Both industries are ‘low probability, high impact risk’. Flying is the safest form of transport unless something happens. Staying in a hotel is absolutely safe, until something happens. Equally, the same can be said for the cruise ship industry that combines travel with accommodation.

The airline industry applies common security standards through IATA Certification. The cruise ship industry has standards relating to safety and security called SOLAS.

For the hotel industry, there are currently no international or independent standards for guest safety and security adopted across the industry even though guests are the reason for the hotel industry, placing a high degree of choice and expectation on hotel safety and security in certain markets and sectors.

Where fire safety is concerned, most hotel groups and hotels installing fire systems ensure they are compliant mainly with US NFPA Standards, EU Fire Standards or UK BS British Fire Standards. These standards are usually adopted by emerging market countries for their own regulatory fire codes.

For workplace safety of hotel employees, especially in the international hotel chains, the US Codes of OSHA, the UK or the EU employee-based Health and Safety will be adopted. Where food safety is concerned, the international standard adopted by hotels is HACCP.

International standards and certification in the hotel industry specifically for guest safety and security awaits a new evolution.

Evolution through hotel safety and security certification

Many international hotel chains have their own risk management plans, standards and procedures and these on the whole are very good. However due to their very size and international reach, they can only generally monitor and verify by self-assessment or through internal safety and security team auditing their own rather than through an independent third party. Equally, big brands are usually a mix of franchised, managed, leased or owner operated.

This means only a minimum basic level of safety and security may be in place, rather than consistent best practice. For instance, a well-known hotel brand within the same city may have both managed and franchised brands and they may both have fire sprinkler systems as a brand standard. However, the maintenance training and operation of the systems could vary significantly between the managed and franchised hotels. This is something the guest does not always know.



Let's look at how safety can slip through the internal self-assessment and local regulatory gap, even for a well-established and respected international hotel chain.

What's wrong with this picture?

The service kitchen is sparkling clean but at the top right hand side of the picture are two downward pipes with nozzles on the end, which is an automatic fire suppression wet chemical system for the kitchen range and deep fat fryers. However, in this case, the nozzles have been positioned incorrectly by pointing to the floor rather than the kitchen range. If there was a fire, it would burn rather than being extinguished.

Evolution leverage for safety and security as a marketing tool

By identifying what the guest wants from safety and security and providing a consistent benchmark, brand standard, design guidelines and external, travel industry recognised certification, evolution can be leveraged into a safety and security marketing tool, rather than hidden from view.

This is similar to, say, a hotel restaurant striving for Michelin stars or Rosettes, or demonstrating sustainability and environmental credentials by going for a 'Green Award'. They already have excellent internal standards in place and now they look to verify, recognise and award these standards, just as their Food and Beverage, Service Excellence or Sustainability Programmes are. What hotel associations and organisations such as PATA, the International Conference and Congress Association (ICCA), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) are advocating is to reach out to the consumers and raise awareness for hotels and resorts actively using safety and security as a confirmation of best practice and industry consistent standards, transforming into a marketing tool.

Hotels as support to the community and multi-agencies in a crisis

The other new evolution for hotels to take, and many already do so, is to align with emergency and local crisis management plans for local communities and multi-agencies.

Whether a crisis is a natural disaster such as a flood or an earthquake, communicable disease or civil disorder, hotels as communities in themselves open just like hospitals every day of the year 24/7 to provide shelter, accommodation and food. Communications can of course at a commercial rate play a central role in any crisis incident and those hotels best equipped to deal with such emergencies will have in place a robust and well-rehearsed crisis management manual that is widely appreciated and understood by employees at every level.

This is recognised by many organisations such as UNISDR working on hotel support in crisis projects and ICCA who have met the demand from global members by producing Crisis Management Guidelines with hotel support as a focus.

Travel industry benchmark and embracing standards: the 'New Evolution'

Evolution is continual, constantly adapting and changing, bringing improvements and resilience along the way.

The hotel industry's approach and recognition of safety and security as a need, differentiator and value incentive resource for its guests, employees, owners and investors has evolved over the years but now seems to be at a resting point.

Many hotel companies and hotels seem comfortable with the 'low probability' part of the risk equation whilst being underprepared or under-resourced for the 'high impact'. Many exhibit best practice and yet this is not always standard across the industry or within hotel groups and chains.





Call for action!

Social responsibility, sustainability and environmental initiatives were, over the years, warmly embraced and are now a 'given' requirement and expectation from the concerning guests.

Evidence, as presented, now suggests that the 'New Evolution' in Hotel Safety and Security will be likewise realised because of similar consumer pressure, through:

- The PATA Hospitality Committee to consider advocating safety and security benchmarking against other travel industries;
- The PATA Hospitality Committee to consider to continue supporting the UNISDR DRR PSP* Hotel Resilience programme toward a practical solution;
- The hotel Industry's associations and organisational stakeholders to adopt a consistent industry standard or external accreditation towards guest safety and security; and
- The hotel Industry to capitalise on the marketing potential of best practice safety and security implementation and standards

* UNISDR DRR PSP stands for United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - Disaster Risk Reduction Private Sector Partnership

About the Authors

Andy Williams and Bert van Walbeek are Vice Presidents of Safehotels Alliance AB, which is an international, independent, certification company and the originator of The Global Hotel Security Standard®. Academic support was provided by Prof. Alexandros Paraskevas, Professor of Strategic Risk Management at the University of West London.

Certified hotels demonstrate to Corporate Travel Managers, Wholesale Buyers and MICE Planners that a hotel or hotel group has consistent, objective and best practice commitment to safety and security on a global as well as brand specific level. Equally, Safehotels Alliance AB offers additional value USP's for a hotel's marketing strategy, response to RFP's and compliance programs.

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