



INTRODUCTION TO THIS DOCUMENT

Skift have provided this presentation from the point of view of Hotels Chains in Asia, looking at the options available to them and the operators they work with

OUR TAKE-AWAYS:

This is what we learned from this document:

- **Hotels in Asia, as part of their preparation for post-COVID-19 recovery, are relying on automation as part of their strategy of providing social distancing solutions and minimising human contact. Artificial intelligent robots are already being deployed to deliver food and drinks to guests under quarantine and hotels using automation have ‘an edge’ in the current situation.**
- **Demand for contactless service is the new norm and automation can be deployed to do more than food delivery. They can be deployed as self-check-in kiosks and there are plans to introduce facial recognition features and cashless payment systems.**
- **The growth in hotel robots is expected to be a rising trend.**

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Asia's Hotels Warming Up to Automation Thanks to Growing Social Distancing Norms

— *Xinyi Liang-Pholsena*

7-9 minutes

Meet Genie, Gena, and Genius, the latest hires at L'hotel Island South in Hong Kong to beat the coronavirus travel slump.

The 76-meter tall members are part of a trio of artificial intelligence robots that the L'hotel Group, which operates seven hotels and serviced apartments in Hong Kong, has deployed since March to serve food and drinks to guests under quarantine stay at the 432-room L'hotel Island South, according to a spokesperson.

A hotel staff will store the food and beverage inside the robot's compartment with an integrated locking system with touchscreen interface. Upon delivery, guests are required to enter the PIN received in order to access into the compartment.

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L'hotel Group, part of Hong Kong property developer Chinachem Group, believes growth in hotel robots would be a rising trend in the next five years. "Continuous optimization of [Genie, Gena and Genius] will make [them] not only delivery robots, but also an all-rounded assistance in the hotel performing multi-tasking functions," said the company.

Reboot With Robots

Just as tourism boards around the world are now eager to get their respective country's hotels and attractions [certified for cleanliness](#) in the preparation for post-Covid recovery, automation is likely to gain traction in hospitality as hotels look to re-strategize and implement fresh solutions as [social distancing becomes a norm even as lockdowns are eased](#).

"As a general trend, we might expect to see more brands investing in automated services and robot implementation, particularly as we now see robots moving out of the warehouse and factory into the larger world – helped along by falling hardware costs and the rise of 5G networks," said Brendan Daly, general manager of Yotel Singapore.

The first Asian outpost of the London-based micro hotel chain is [no stranger to automated services](#) since its launch in 2017. Yotel Singapore has recruited a pair of robots, Yoshi and Yolanda, whose key function is to autonomously deliver amenities to guests across the 610-room property.

"These [robotic] applications are highly useful in a hotel environment and increasingly, we can envision how they will change the way service is delivered alongside evolving guest

expectations,” Daly remarked. “Interestingly, the contactless feature which our robots provide is now seen as favorable in an age where the demand for contactless service is on the rise.”

Similarly, having delivery robots deployed at five of its Singapore properties, is giving Millennium Hotels and Resorts “an edge in the current situation”, Gilbert Ong, director of marketing and communications (cluster) at Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel and M Social Hotel Singapore told Skift.

These robots can call for the elevator and get the correct floor, find the right room and contact the guest on the room phone. “This minimizes human contact which is plus point for all guests staying with us [right now],” said Ong.

Touchless hospitality

The coronavirus pandemic is also expected to give a boost to automated hotel check-ins, as hygiene concerns fuel demand for touchless technology.

Along with the need to reduce face-to-face contact, the current health crisis has triggered more inquiries for Yanolja’s untact (or contactless) self check-in kiosk, which was launched in November last year as Yanolja’s first product under Y Flux – a fully integrated, cloud-based hotel automation solution.

“Inquiries from local hotel owners regarding Yanolja’s self-check-in kiosks have more than doubled since the Covid-19 outbreak,” said Jung Jae-hoon, who oversees Y Flux as head of supplier oriented service unit at Yanolja. The leading hotel booking app in South Korea has in recent years stepped up its [diversification drive into hospitality tech solutions](#).

Yanolja's self check-in kiosk will automatically link with online reservation channels so both walk-in and pre-booked customers can use the machine, an improvement from its earlier iteration of being available for walk-in guests only.

A key advantage, said Yanolja, is the boost in efficiency the automated kiosks will bring for both customers and hotels. For customers, it means significantly lesser time is spent at check-in as they can collect their room keys from the kiosk in less than five seconds simply by scanning the QR code provided at the time of reservation. Hotels, meanwhile, can reduce time spent on face-to-face services and secure more time to provide personalized and sophisticated services.

Jung added, "The essence of untact technology is not minimizing face-to-face contact between people or building an unmanned solution. We expect that once the technology is widely available, hotel employees will be able to provide more sophisticated and personalized face-to-face services, which in turn will greatly increase customer satisfaction. Also, hotels will be able to leverage customer behavior data and analytics, collected and managed through the new technology, to provide better and more customized experiences."

Like Jung, Daly insisted that the technology was "never built for the purpose of automating service and replacing human contact, rather to augment our service". However, unnecessary human contact, which could be potential points of virus transmission, could be easily omitted without affecting the hotel's service standards, he added.

Plans to introduce facial recognition technology as well as cashless

payment systems are now in the works for Yotel Singapore, according to Daly. “As other countries expand their own digital and payment landscapes, we work towards a future where unnecessary physical transfer can be minimized to elevate the overall guest experience from a health/safety perspective, on top of a technology one,” he added.

Human Complement Or Substitute?

But at a time when many hospitality jobs are under threat or eliminated as the coronavirus pandemic grips the world, would it seem contradictory to bring more automation to the sector?

While enlisting robots will help in boosting productivity — two robots are equivalent to one human staff per shift at Yotel Singapore — Daly argues that the common perceptions of robots taking away jobs or being antithesis of what a satisfying guest experience should be overthrown.

The use of automation and technology, he stated, can augment service in a positive way by freeing human staff of mundane tasks and engage in more meaningful interaction with guests.

“We need to balance between driving revenue and improving productivity. Automation has long-term savings but we are not retrenching anyone as that will offer only a short-term gain of cost savings,” said Daly.

“Instead, we are using this time to plan for our future workforce.”

Photo Credit: A food delivery robot at L’hotel Island South in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong-based hospitality has turned to robots amid the coronavirus travel slump. L’hotel Group