

Is the Digital Hotel Our Future?

Hotels have been moving away from personal service and toward a more tech-focused experience

By [Amy McVay Abbott](#) | October 20, 2025 | [Travel and Adventures](#)

Hotels are increasingly adopting a more high-tech experience called the digital hotel. Need a towel? Some hotels let you request one through their app, which gives you a code to access the linen room.



Boomers are traveling more than ever and represent over 40% of travelers. | Credit: jovanmandic

On a recent southern trip, my husband and I landed wearily at a large property owned by a national chain in an Alabama city. It was 5 p.m.,

hardly an off-hour. The hilly parking lot was packed due to a college football game 60 miles away.

I was ready to see a live, smiling human. I prefer the personal touch.

We found a parking space near the Florida border and dragged our bags, my oxygen and my husband's bag with his [medications](#) and insulin case up the hill, ready to check in.

A sign at the desk indicated we should use our phones to check in. I was ready to see a live, smiling

human. I prefer the personal touch.

Hotels have been moving away from the full service we knew. [Gen Z and millennials](#) want a more tech-focused experience. A 2025 study in [Social Indicators Research](#) looked at what hotels want in a more digital environment, which included:

- Mobile check-in/check-out, digital room keys and app-based service requests.
- Voice assistants, LoTech-enabled lighting and climate control, and entertainment systems.
- Chatbots for customer service, AI-driven personalization and automated housekeeping or maintenance alerts.
- Tablets or apps that allow guests to book spa appointments, order room service or get local recommendations.
- Real-time analytics to optimize staffing, energy use and guest satisfaction.

[Hospitality Technology](#) reports, "According to the 2024 Lodging Technology Study, 71% of hotel operators believe guest-facing technologies

are empowering, while 62% say the same for employee-facing tech.

However, some also note friction points, such as connectivity issues or lack of human interaction."

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Still Traveling and Seeking Ease

Boomers are traveling more than ever and represent nearly [40% of all travelers](#).

Bellhops were as rare as landline telephones and all three hotels had kiosks in the soda-and-snack area that did not accept cash.

My husband and I both have chronic health conditions and traveling to our son's wedding in a DC-adjacent Maryland suburb found us dragging a week's worth of luggage from our ride-share to our room as we had done in Alabama. No app could have summoned a valet as the hotel did not have them.

Recent travel hasn't matched the ease I once knew as a business traveler or tourist. Working for a global

company that hosted large meetings, large hotels had teams to support our groups. Luggage was left outside our door on departure day and showed up at the airport transportation, as if by magic.

In the past few months, however, I've spent 14 hotel nights in three different cities (Indianapolis, Nashville and Washington, D.C.) Bellhops were as rare

as landline telephones and all three hotels had kiosks in the soda-and-snack area that did not accept cash.

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Arriving at a luxury hotel in Indianapolis for a wedding, we found our room lacked a window with outside light, though the one facing a dark hallway was open. Entering the room, we were in darkness and I had to go back into the dimly lit hall and call the desk, then crawl through a phone tree to find out where the switches were. The switches were hidden on black lamp bases, making them impossible to see and unnecessarily complicated.

A Zurich Hotel Hiding in Plain Sight

Laurie Casey, a retired publishing executive from the Indianapolis area, and her family spent their last night in Europe in a Zurich hotel. Without a car, they booked a place close to the train station where they arrived from her older son's wedding in Italy.

"We walked around the hotel, dragging

"We walked around the hotel, dragging our luggage and were unable to find an entrance," Casey said. "We

our luggage and were unable to find an entrance. We knew it was the hotel based on Google Maps."

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The family walked into a coffee bar and waited in line, only to be told they needed to go to a nearby kiosk to check in. While Casey had already provided the hotel with her credit card, the kiosk asked for it again.

"The kiosk didn't accept my card," she said. "By now it is after hours, and even my younger son and his fiancée of the tech age couldn't figure it out. And the kiosk was in every language but English." Eventually, using the common words in another language, they were able to find their reservation, but the kiosk asked for payment again. Casey had prepaid months in advance.

"After I paid another 254 Swiss francs, the kiosk spit out my key card." Casey paid for her son's reservation, wondering if she would be refunded the double-dip payment.

With both key cards, the party had no idea where to go. There were no directional signs, no obvious hallways or doors. Once again, they asked the barista, who showed them a plain door where their keycards worked and they found their rooms. Casey said she was grateful the two couples had no problems in the rooms because there was no one to call.

She received a full refund for the extra charges from her credit card a week later.

Casey has not been scared off from travel. She will go to Rome for the Jubilee Year of the Roman Catholic Church with her sisters. "Only I have learned that I'm going to do more research this time," she said.

Like Casey, travel remains a priority for those 50 and older, according to the [AARP 2024 Travel Trends Report](#). These travelers will spend an average of \$6,659.

"The hotel had no single-use plastics, used touchpad codes instead of physical room keys, glass cups without liners in bins, and breakfast delivered in a paper bag each morning."

Vicky Levy of AARP noted in the study, "They've not declined in the amount of travel that they're doing. They're not spending any less. It shows a strong desire, strong prioritization and a lot of buying power."

European Two-Star Hotels Meet Basic Needs

Anne Born, author of "[Buen Camino: Tips from a WINTER Pilgrim](#)" and other books, stays in dozens of hotels each year with her extensive travel schedule. She frequently travels to Spain, Portugal, Italy and England,

and finds her hotel experiences have been consistently positive, even in the modest, two-star hotels she prefers. "Hotels in those countries are clean and offer the basic services I need. I'm not interested in big luxury, just comfort and courtesy," Born said.

At a Madrid hotel, Born was delighted at the joining of tech and sustainability. She said, "The hotel had no single-use plastics, used touchpad codes instead of physical room keys, glass cups without liners in bins, and breakfast delivered in a paper bag each morning."

Born felt these thoughtful details showed a genuine commitment to the environment, which she loved.

"Still, there are tech quirks. I dislike having to use a key card to activate the elevator after I've already checked in. It feels excessive. On the other side, I appreciate that some hotel key cards turn off the lights when you leave — smart and efficient," Born added.

A recent trip to Australia impressed the New York City-based writer. "Australia stood out for exceptional hospitality," she said. "A front desk worker drew me a map and stepped out from behind the counter to explain directions, above and beyond."

Casey and Born will both continue traveling, and don't see that changing, even as technology changes.

Born believes that the future of hotels is "about efficiency and speed: QR codes, digital check-ins and personalized codes." She concluded, "Tech and codes do not throw me off or online check-ins are fine, but I do appreciate simplicity."

As hotels evolve with AI and other technologies, perhaps "simplicity" for older adults and everyone else should be their mantra. No upgraded high-tech lighting system is helpful if guests can't find the switch.



Amy McVay Abbott is a retired healthcare executive whose work has appeared in USA Today, Business Insider, AARP publications, and Huff Post Arts and Culture. She is currently developing a memoir-in-essay about the intersection between history and Baby Boomer culture. Visit her free site "Late Boomer: Born After 1956" on [Substack](#). [Read More](#)

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