



TRAVEL

How Luxury Hotels Are Dealing With the Coronavirus Pandemic

Leading properties around the world are giving back to their communities and taking those of us stuck at home on virtual trips

By [Laura Itzkowitz](#) | April 22, 2020

In the span of a week, the Wythe Hotel in Brooklyn went from half full to completely empty. “We ran the restaurant with 50% capacity for a couple of days and then we ran a take-out program for a couple of days, and then pretty collectively we just decided the right thing to do was to have as many people as possible not interacting. And so the restaurant got shut down; the hotel went onto a skeleton crew and stayed that way until we figured out a way to actually be helpful,” Peter Lawrence, the hotel’s co-owner and general manager, tells AD.

Like countless hoteliers around the world, he has been dealing with canceled reservations, lost revenue, and the anxiety of not knowing how long the coronavirus pandemic will wreak havoc on the world. Yet at a time when it would be easy to panic about his bottom line, Lawrence and his partners

decided to step up and do something to make a difference. When they heard about nurses sleeping in their cars after 18-hour shifts because home was too far or they were afraid to infect their families, they decided to help by offering rooms for free. The hotel is currently hosting about 30 doctors and nurses who need a safe place to self-isolate, and executive chef Aiden O’Neal and a small team are making 40 lunches per day for the medical professionals at Woodhull Hospital.

Hosting and Funding Medical Professionals



Palazzo Avino in Ravello is one of four hotels on Italy's Amalfi Coast that teamed up to raise €200,000 (\$217,000) for COVID-19 research. Photo: Roberto Vuilleumier / Courtesy of Leading Hotels of the World

The Wythe is far from the only hotel that has stepped forward to give back to the community. In an inspiring show of support, the Four Seasons Hotel New York on 57th Street and Claridge's in London are providing free rooms to health care workers on the front lines of fighting the pandemic. Brown TLV, the flagship of Brown Hotels, which has boutique hotels in Israel, Croatia, and Greece, is donating all 30 of its rooms to doctors who have been placed under quarantine. Hotel Adlon Kempinski Berlin, a member of Leading Hotels of the World located right next to the famous Brandenburg Gate, has set aside more than 1,000 overnight stays for Berlin's health care workers to take a pampering staycation after the crisis abates.

Big brands are getting involved too. Marriott pledged to donate \$10 million worth of hotel stays to health care professionals battling COVID-19 in hard-hit cities like New York, New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Washington, D.C., and Newark, New Jersey, with support from its partners at American Express and JPMorgan Chase. Hilton teamed up with American Express to provide up to 1 million hotel rooms to doctors, nurses, EMTs, and other medical personnel on the front lines through the end of May.

Meanwhile in Italy, a group of four iconic hotels on the Amalfi Coast—Le Sirenuse in Positano, Palazzo Avino in Ravello, Hotel Santa Caterina in Amalfi, and Il San Pietro di Positano—teamed up with Michelin-starred restaurant Don

Alfonso 1890 to raise €200,000 (\$217,000) for COVID-19 research. Each hotel awarded 10 vouchers worth €5,000 each toward future stays complete with gourmet meals and perks such as spa treatments, wine tastings, and martini-mixing lessons to the first people who donated that amount to the Fondazione Melanoma Onlus. “It’s been a tremendous success because I think people were looking for ideas to give their money for a purposeful cause and also think that they’ll be able to enjoy it in the next two years when they come by,” Antonio Sersale, owner of Le Sirenuse, tells AD, explaining that the hotel’s vouchers sold out in two days.

Feeding Their Communities



The Rosewood CordeValle in Northern California is donating food to vulnerable community members, including its furloughed employees. Photo: Don Riddle / Courtesy of Rosewood Hotels & Resorts

The number of hotels providing meals to their communities is even greater. From California to India, luxury hotels are donating the contents of their storerooms to doctors, nurses, the homeless, and even their own employees who have been laid off or furloughed. Morgan Stana, general manager of the new Riggs Washington, D.C., partnered with local bar managers to create Friends & Family Meal, a nonprofit dedicated to helping vulnerable D.C. hospitality workers by dropping off groceries. The hotel is also working with World Central Kitchen, the organization founded by Chef José Andrés that's currently serving nearly 100,000 meals per day across the country.

The team at boutique hotel Orania.Berlin immediately donated all of its food to homeless aid organizations and asked its two biggest grocery suppliers to give as much food as possible. The team is now cooking 800 meals per week for the homeless outreach organization Berliner Obdachlosenhilfe e.V. The Berkeley in London, which is part of the Maybourne Hotel Group along with Claridge's and the Connaught, has just launched a drive-through service for London Emergency Services. It will serve 250 meals per day available for pickup from 11:30 a.m. with tea and coffee available for pickup at 10 a.m.



The Hotel Eden Roc Ascona is among a group of hotels in the country delivering assistance to at-risk members of their communities. Photo: Courtesy of Tschuggen Hotels

Tshuggen Hotel Group, which runs Tshuggen Grand Hotel, the Carlton Hotel St. Moritz, Hotel Eden Roc Ascona, and Valsana Hotel in Switzerland, is delivering groceries and medicine to at-risk locals. Two of Rosewood's hotels in California —Rosewood Miramar Beach in Montecito and Rosewood CordeValle in the San Francisco Bay area—are donating food to vulnerable community members, including their furloughed employees as part of the brand's Rosewood Raise initiative to support the company's associates and communities affected by the pandemic. Miraval Austin is letting furloughed staff members pick up vegetables

and eggs from its own farm. UXUA Casa Hotel & Spa in Trancoso, Brazil, is preparing healthy meals, such as fish of the day with seven-grain salad and coconut vinaigrette, for local residents. Indian brand Oberoi is distributing healthy packed meals to hospital staff and other essential workers who are struggling to put food on the table.

Selling Gift Cards and Hotel Bonds



Gurney's Resorts is donating proceeds from gift cards to the Food Bank for NYC. Photo: Courtesy of Gurney's Resorts

Other hotels are selling gift cards whose proceeds will go to charity. Gurney's Resorts in Montauk and Newport, Rhode Island, is donating 25% from each gift

card to be used for future stays to the Food Bank for NYC. Bunkhouse Group—the brand behind Austin’s cult-favorite Hotel Saint Cecilia and Marfa’s El Cosmico—has released a special retail collection whose proceeds will go to an employee relief fund.

“Out of this catastrophe you have lots of moments of really amazing human kindness and generosity,” said Melissa Biggs Bradley, founder and CEO of Indagare, which partners with AD on design-focused trips. “And the hospitality industry attracts people who are by nature hospitable and tend to be incredibly generous, empathetic people, so it’s not surprising to me that they are reaching out and trying to have an impact in the community when they’re in their own pain.”

Bradley noted that a trend she has started seeing is hotels selling bonds as part of a “[Buy Now, Stay Later](#)” program. Participating hotels, such as [Le Barthélemy](#) in St. Barts and Greydon House in Nantucket, are offering \$100 gift cards whose value will mature to \$150 after 60 days. There are currently 27 hotels from Tulum to Cape Town enrolled in the program, which is looking to expand.

Taking Homebound Travelers on Virtual Trips



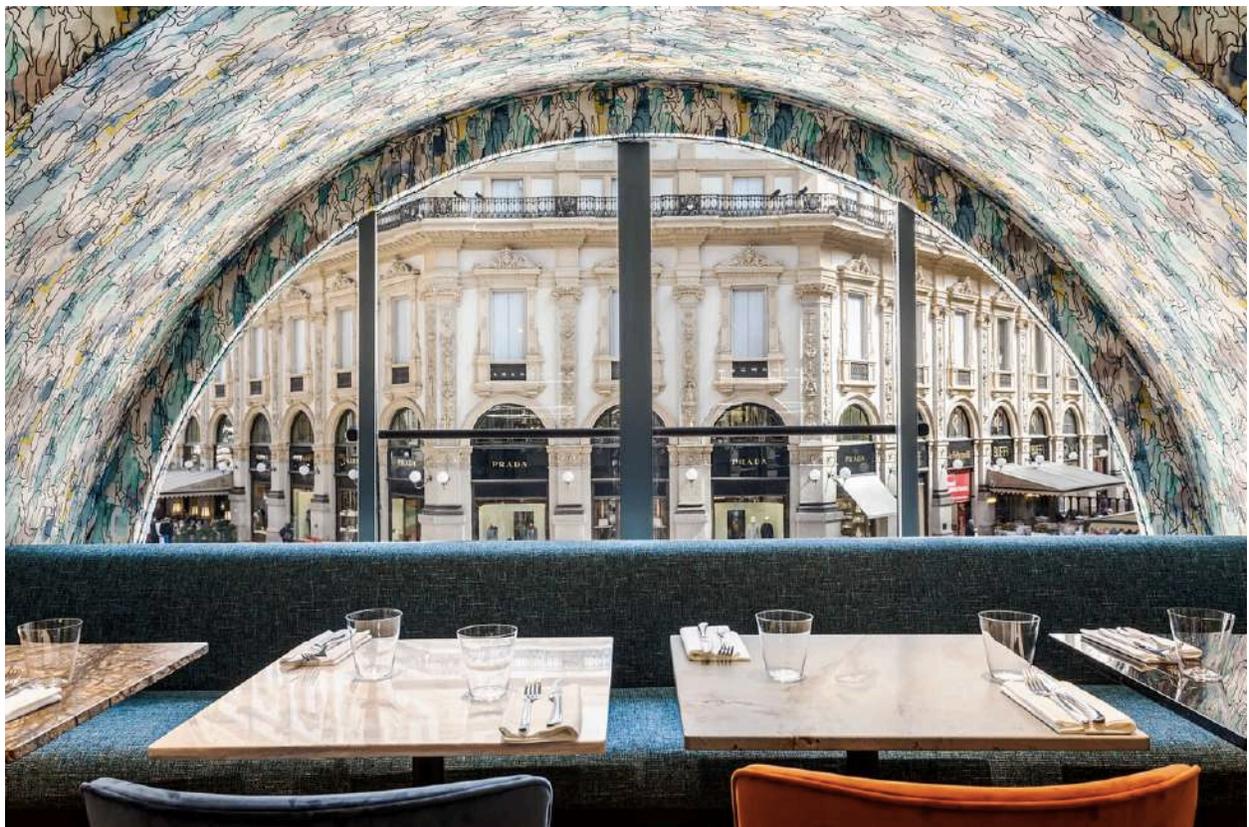
Singita in Africa is taking viewers on live-stream safari drives twice daily via its Instagram account. Photo: Courtesy of Singita

Until it's safe to travel again, many hotels around the world are posting virtual travel experiences to their social media accounts and websites as a way to keep people dreaming about their next trip. Singita, a leader in wildlife conservation in Africa, is taking people on live safari drives twice a day via its Instagram account @singita_. Within just a few days, its engagement rate increased by more than 400%. Safari operator andBeyond has created new “Bringing Africa Home” and “Bringing South America Home” pages on its

website with playlists, recipes, book and movie recommendations, live streams, and ideas for kids. Bangkok-based brand Anantara, which runs hotels in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, is promoting the hashtag #AnantaraEscapism and updating its blog with wellness tips and recipes as well as live streams of the elephants at Anantara Golden Triangle Elephant Camp & Resort in Chiang Rai.

Rocco Forte Hotels, the brand behind Rome's beloved Hotel de Russie, London's Brown's Hotel, Puglia's chic new Masseria Torre Maizza, and a handful of others, is interviewing key staff members for weekly newsletters.

Renowned chef Fulvio Pierangelini is sharing a series of culinary tales, while Irene Forte, the brand's director of wellness and creator of her own sustainable skin care line, is giving tips on beauty at home.



Vik Retreats is featuring videos by the artists whose work is exhibited at its new hotel Galleria Vik Milano via Instagram. Photo: Courtesy of Vik Retreats

Carrie and Alex Vik, the husband-and-wife team behind the art-focused Vik Retreats in Uruguay, Chile, and Milan, are featuring videos by the artists whose work is exhibited at their new hotel Galleria Vik Milano on the hotel's Instagram account. They're also offering free virtual yoga classes in collaboration with the Shack Yoga, which recently opened an outpost at Bahia Vik in José Ignacio. For those missing their spring break trip to the Magic City, EAST, Miami has created downloadable Zoom backgrounds that transport you to the hotel. Though some hotels, such as the Resort at Paws Up, a luxury dude ranch in Montana, are currently open, it's best to stick to virtual travel for now.