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New direction for airport hotels



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The past decade has seen the rise of a new style of airport hotel. A luxurious, resort-style haven that takes the weary academic traveller from airport scramble to an unexpected sanctuary in a matter of steps. These uber convenient hotels are in growing demand as time-poor travellers from across the academic sector find they can be both productive and relaxed, without leaving the airport.

Step inside the new-look airport hotel

With the heightened focus on airport security over the past 10 years, 'transit' has taken on a new meaning. Academic travellers, at the mercy of airline schedules, can find themselves having to fill anything from two to 10 hours between connecting flights.

Spurred by this trend, the airport hotel has undergone a dramatic transformation in look, feel and function. No longer located near airports – these modern and unique properties are inside the terminal.

What characterises the new airport hotel?

Many of the world's major airports have hotel properties located next to them or in close proximity. However, the new airport hotel sits within the physical boundary of the airport. Connected or located adjacent to an airport terminal, it allows travellers to step directly from their arrivals gate, in some cases via immigration, into a different world.

The majority of these hotels are five-star properties that blend luxury with convenience. In contrast to the sterile airport hotels of old, these newer properties exude the local culture, beauty and style throughout their design. They acknowledge that they are providing the traveller's first experience of a country. From room furnishings, to artwork, and even panoramic views or plane spotting advantages, the new airport hotel design immediately reminds the

traveller of which country they are visiting.

Rooms are of a high quality with an emphasis on comfort, and noise levels associated with airports are minimised through effective sound proofing.

Airport hotels offer excellent facilities for academics who need to work, including in-room Wi-Fi, meeting rooms, business and conference facilities and ambient lobbies. Travellers from academic organisations can meet face-to-face with their industry colleagues based in the city through which they are transiting, away from the hustle of the airport terminal. Leisure facilities also abound in these properties.

What's on offer at major airports?

According to Peter Hook, General Manager Communications at Accor, the airport hotel product has changed dramatically and helped create a new market. "They are now meeting centres, places to enjoy fine dining, and places to relax in indulgent spas you would expect at a luxury resort. Airport hotels have never been more popular because they offer so much more," he said.

Mr Hook refers to Accor's Sofitel London Heathrow, which provides direct access to Terminal 5 via a covered walkway and to Terminals 1, 2, 3 and 4 via the courtesy Heathrow Express/Connect train. It offers the largest meeting capacity in the Heathrow area, as well as spa and relaxation facilities, a hair salon, and

an on-site car park with 'Park & Fly' packages. The Sofitel also features a range of quality dining options.

"In Bangkok, our Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport has packages such as '24 hours occupancy from the time you arrive', recognising that guests can arrive at any hour of the day or night," Mr Hook said.

Tom Rosepick, General Manager of the Marriott Houston Airport Hotel, believes one of the biggest changes in airport hotels over the past decade has been technology.

"At Marriott Houston Airport we're providing more free and reliable wireless access in the hotel lobby and upgrading the capacity of our network to allow for several devices per guest to connect," he said. "We're also providing more outlets in the lobby for charging devices, as well as boarding pass printers and flight boards so guests can check their gate and departure information."

Michael Johnson, General Manager of the PARKROYAL Melbourne Airport, says that as a hotel located next to a 24-hour airport, the PARKROYAL understands that guests have travelled from around the world and are on different time zones.

"We aim to be a 'trusted local companion' for our guests, so we have implemented a flexible service culture. This includes a 4am in-room dining start time for our early departures, staggered rostering in front office and housekeeping to cater for early and late arrivals, plus the ability to service the needs of any delayed flights," he said.

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The services and facilities offered by modern airport hotels around the world vary depending on the airport to which they are linked. For example:

- In Singapore, the Crowne Plaza Changi Airport allows travellers to link to Terminal 3 via a cutting-edge bridge, while Terminals 1 and 2 are accessible by Skytrain. A distinguishing feature is the tropical resort hidden inside this hotel, with courtyard gardens and a landscaped pool area. Guests can host a tropical garden conference in any of the seven meeting rooms or ballroom.
- In Europe, the Hilton Frankfurt Airport is situated directly above the InterCity Express (ICE) railway station with direct pedestrian access via skywalk to Terminal 1. Located in the iconic 'The Squire' building, the hotel features 10 meeting rooms and a grand ballroom, a 24-hour business centre, 24-hour fitness centre, sauna, lounge and bar, and a restaurant. All guestrooms and suites feature sound-proof windows, LCD TV and dedicated work space.
- In Canada, the Fairmont Vancouver Airport is located 99 steps from the US departures terminal. Features include total soundproofing of guestrooms, a noise-free zone and 'quiet rooms' where there are no bellmen, housekeeping or room services to keep guests awake. The hotel also offers unique Learn to Fly packages in a motion simulator.

Why airport hotel accommodation can be smartest choice for academic travellers:

- Convenient – academics have access to an array of meeting, dining, leisure and accommodation facilities, just steps away from the terminal. They can use the airport hotel almost like a more comfortable airport lounge, by checking in online then simply walking to their gate an hour before departure.
- Time saving – with no need for on-the-ground travel, academics have more time to arrive for their next flight, and have their boarding passes printed and baggage checked. Some of the newer airport hotels will do this for their guests while also displaying departure/arrival boards.
- Improve productivity – academics can get on with work in close proximity to the airport.
- Extensive meeting facilities – with their ideal location and first-class facilities, academics can host formal or informal meetings and conferences.
- Fast access to transport – by being connected to the terminals, these hotels provide direct access to public transport services.
- Relax between flights – Academic travellers can relax more easily and arrived refreshed and ready to teach.

Key benefits for academic organisations

One of the major benefits for universities is the reduced travel and entertainment (T&E) expense. Without having to leave the airport or travel to a local campus, academic travellers are saving on a whole range of T&E related costs. This is especially the case for universities with campuses overseas that are hosting conferences for academics and researchers travelling from different countries and regions. While room rates at airport hotels may be higher than those at city properties, the rate difference is often more than offset by the T&E savings.

Airport hotels also give the academic sector the benefit of higher staff productivity, with less time wasted on the road and more time available to conference or keep on top of their work from the comfort of their hotel.

Future outlook

The major hotel companies agree that where the busy academic traveller is concerned, hotels directly linked to an airport terminal will be preferred over those located further away.

Michael Johnson of the PARKROYAL Melbourne Airport says current trends in Australia and New Zealand suggest the demand for airport hotels is growing substantially with new hotels recently opened in Brisbane, Auckland and Sydney.

Campus Travel

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Campus Travel provides Australia's most complete service in academic travel management. Our trained consultants understand the distinctive world of academia and are educated in your domestic and international needs. Drawing on our vast experience in travel and our knowledge of your sector, we deliver savvy and flexible solutions, as well as global choice.

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