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Hotels: The Inns and Outs

Introduction

After the 1998 double bombing of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, U.S. diplomatic missions across the globe began hardening their facilities as a way to deter and protect against future attacks. Terrorists took note and began shifting their focus to so-called softer targets where they could more easily inflict damage. Hotels unfortunately became an attractive target. Because of this, many Western hotels in high risk areas have also been “hardened.”

Yet to understand hotel security, there are a number of different issues worthy of consideration, and guarding against terrorism is only one of them. This report will address some of the most common issues of concern with regard to hotel security, and will also provide a list of best practices for travelers to consider.

Western vs. Non-Western Hotel Chains

There is a debate that asks whether or not travelers are at risk by staying at Western hotel chains in volatile parts of the world. U.S.-affiliated hotel chains can sometimes be seen as symbols of the country and what it represents, which has led to threats and deadly attacks in the past. It is important to note, however, that non-Western hotels have also been victims of attacks. In fact, over the last ten years, non-Western hotels made up the majority of attacks where 10 or more people were killed. For example, in June 2009, militants attacked the five-star Pearl Continental in Peshawar, Pakistan, killing 17 people. The previous year, militants from the Pakistani terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba attacked the Taj Mahal and Trident-Oberoi hotels in Mumbai as part of a larger terror attack, leaving a total of 62 people dead. In both Mumbai and Peshawar, the hotels were targeted due, in part, to their popularity among Western travelers, which leads to an important point; extremists do their homework. If Westerners are congregating at a particular location, hotel or otherwise, that location can be singled out, whether it's Western-owned or not.

To reduce the risk to travelers in high-risk locations, many Western-brand hotel chains have implemented rigorous physical and procedural security measures which are not present at local hotels. So while one side of the debate might advocate that the Western “brand” might potentially make a particular hotel an attractive target, the other side of the debate might advocate that the physical and procedural security measures effectively mitigate this risk. Additionally, there are other safety considerations beyond just security --- such as fire safety, food safety, and hygiene which should also be considered in deciding the most appropriate hotels to use.

Limited Service Versus Full Service

When choosing a hotel overseas, there can be a temptation to make the choice based primarily on the hotel's room rate. In the U.S., hotel patrons expect and usually receive a basic level of security, even at Limited-Service hotels (e.g. minimal staff, facilities, and services). Therefore, your security concerns may be less of a factor in considering where you stay. Overseas however, government fire and life-safety standards may be less rigorous or may be loosely enforced. In such environments, most Western hotel chains use comprehensive brand standards and other guidelines to ensure the integrity of the hotel's security, life-safety, and hygiene operations, as well as the comfort, safety and well-being of guests. This often translates to qualified security staff, tested contingency and evacuation plans, fire safety arrangements, and buildings that are built to good specification.

Host Government Involvement

In some countries, guests will be monitored by the host government, be it person-to-person, electronically, or by some other means. This can also be done in their hotel. Where some travelers are mistaken is thinking that if a hotel is a Western-brand, it will not allow any such government activities. Most often, the hotel doesn't have a choice. To operate in that country, or at least operate without running into government trouble, the hotel must comply with local law. In China, for example, it is legal for the government to conduct surveillance on citizens and foreigners alike; it is also illegal for you to try and stop it. Therefore, all hotel rooms, regardless of brand, are considered to be

subject to on-site or remote technical monitoring at all times. Hotel rooms may also be accessed at any time without the occupants’ consent or knowledge. Visitors should have no expectation of privacy, and should conduct themselves accordingly. If travelers have questions about particular countries, OSAC’s Crime and Safety Reports are a great resource.

Best Practices

There are a number of best practices that travelers should consider when selecting an appropriately safe and secure hotel.

In Selecting a Hotel...

Research the area you are travelling to understand its threat environment

If you have one, seek advice from your company security team

Look for hotels with a large perimeter; the more space between the hotel and the road, the better

Verify that that there are vehicle barriers in place

Look to see that there are additional checkpoints beyond just vehicle barriers

Hotels with shatter-proof glass are a plus as well

Inform your company security team of your travel plans - where you are going, staying, and activities in country

Finally, you should consider contacting OSAC’s Regional Analyst, who may be able to provide additional information on where other constituents report staying

During Your Stay...

Walk the hotel to orientate yourself so you know what your options might be if a security incident occurs; have also a mental plan in place of how to respond to an incident

Remain alert

Do not ‘advertise’ your nationality

Always keep hotel doors locked, and store valuables in secure areas

Do not open the door for anybody you don’t recognize; if you have a concern or are seeking verification of a staff member, call the front desk

Do not invite strangers into your room

If possible, choose hotel rooms on the 2nd through the 6th floors; a room on the 1st floor of a hotel may provide easier access for criminals; rooms on the 7th floor and above may be difficult to escape in the event of a fire

Take a few moments to locate the nearest exit that may be used in the event of an emergency

Be careful when talking about which hotel room you are staying; while non-guests are usually denied access to patron floors, they can find ways to get around this

If you see anything suspicious, report it immediately and directly to a member of staff, preferably to a manager and/or the front desk staff

For Further Information

Please direct any questions regarding this report to OSAC’s [Cross Regional Analyst](#) .



Attachments

 [Hotel security.pdf](#) 

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