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## Hotels go for splashy new bathrooms

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By Barbara De Lollis, USA TODAY



Enlarge Hyatt

A bathroom at the Hyatt Key West Resort and Marina shows off a raised sink and back-lit shower. Showers — rather than baths — can help hotels save water, space and money spent on insurance premiums.

After spending billions revamping bedding, bars and lobbies, U.S. hotels are starting to tackle guest bathrooms.

The bathroom upgrades — either part of a broad improvement program or new construction designs — come as hotels enjoy record rates and occupancy levels. In the past two years, rates jumped on average 11%, says lodging consultant Bjorn Hanson of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Spiffier bathrooms can justify or speed up rate increases, he says. They also can distinguish a hotel from rivals and please guests accustomed to showcase bathrooms at home, he says.

The bathroom is so key, says Embassy Suites brand manager Jim Holthouser, that it can "make or break" a

guest's stay.

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Many luxury hotels are making bathrooms bigger, replacing bathtubs with tiled, walk-in showers, adding body spray fixtures and providing double vanities. Less-expensive hotels are replacing man-made countertops with granite, installing curved shower rods and upgrading showerheads in existing bathtub showers.

Hoteliers recently realized the need to invest in bathrooms because guests had "a better experience at home than what we were delivering in the hotel room," says John Wallis, a Hyatt executive.

How hotels are changing the equation:

•**Supersizing.** Trendy boutique hotel Gansevoort, under construction in Miami's South Beach, will open in April with 9-by-10-foot bathrooms, twice the size of the common 5-by-8-foot hotel bath, says hotel architect Stephen Jacobs. The upscale Park Hyatt in Washington doubled the size of its bathrooms during a year-long revamp to create large, tiled spaces. They're so big that a guest can shower without door or curtain enclosures.

•**Revamping.** New walk-in showers are a hit at the Shoreham in Manhattan, says John Yoon, president of Willow Hotels. Customers now request the suites that have them, he says. Extended-stay chain Staybridge Suites and all-suites chain Embassy Suites plan walk-in showers in new hotels. Marriott has replaced old showerheads with rain-like or high-end, multistreaming showerheads.

•**Surprising.** As part of a major redesign, the St. Regis in Washington is investing in mirrors with a built-in TV screen. Bathrooms at the new Renaissance Schaumburg near Chicago have a similar setup. Guests at the San Francisco St. Regis can soak in a tub with a city vista.

Renovating bathrooms can be costly. Wallis says that installing a tiled, walk-in shower costs about \$5,000. So moderately priced chains are moving cautiously. Staybridge Suites next year will require most bathrooms in new hotels to have a walk-in shower and granite vanity, says Robert Radomski, brand vice president.

Greater use of showers saves hotels money, Hanson says. They use less water, can require less space and cost less in terms of insurance premiums.

Posted 9/18/2006 10:38 PM ET

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