

Understanding the Importance of Guest Washrooms in the Luxury Hospitality Industry

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Abstract: *The ability of the physical environment to influence behaviors and satisfy customers is the most important metric for service businesses such as the hospitality industry. The guestroom experience has the potential to determine the satisfaction levels of a customer by at least meeting or exceeding their expectations. Detail, creativity, and customization are some key aspects of a guestroom that the industry lives and dies for intending to satisfy their customers. One important yet often neglected part of the guestroom is its washrooms. This study focuses on the design and planning of washrooms in luxury hotels in India and how they have evolved over the years. The developing trends were studied from literature sources, and various layouts were analyzed. The outcome outlines accumulative analysis of the design practices, and it provides a reference for creating a high – quality washroom space within luxury hotels.*

Keywords: Washroom design, hospitality, user experience

1. Introduction

India stands unmatched with its rich culture and tradition in hospitality, which millions of international and local travelers have experienced over the years. Today's travelers know what they want and are seekers of authentic, immersive experiences. Hotels are at the center of it all. The hospitality industry is expanding every passing day, thanks to the rise in leisure and corporate tourism. Hotel owners recognize that if they want their customers to choose them over their competitors, they will have to go the extra mile and provide something other than what the guests usually expect. Research suggests that the physical setting may influence the customer's ultimate satisfaction with the service (Bitner1990).

Luxury hotels recognize the importance of hospitality and take the opportunity to provide unique personalized experiences. They go over and above the standard room layout to give a sense of comfort and opulence. One of the recent trends in these hotels is seeking to turn the guest bathroom - what has long been a predominantly functional space into an oasis, a mini spa, or even an escape. A hotel bathroom is more than just a place to freshen up. It is considered as an indicator of how upscale, current, and clean a hotel is. The evolution from yesterday's functional and straight forward bathroom to today's open and extravagant retreat continues to open new frontiers. The designs and technology in creating bathrooms have been changing from time to time.

In India, the concept of a modern bathroom has evolved only over the past few years, and it is now that hoteliers have taken up its significance. In the past, one would not see a bathroom in a commercial advertisement or a website. Now marketers are showing off their bathrooms. They have their selling point.

2. Materials & Methods

2.1 Aim

To explore the growing importance of bathroom planning and design in the luxury hospitality industry.

2.2 Objectives

- To study how the guest bathroom has evolved over the years, forming an integral part of the space.
- To explore various layouts within the guestroom and how they help improve the function.
- To identify the current trends and practices in luxury hotel bathroom design.

2.3 Scope and limitations

This paper explores the current trends and practices for bathroom design in luxury 5 - star business hotels in India. Case studies with varied room layouts were chosen to help understand different configurations. This paper, however, doesn't consider the aspect of universal design.

3. Literature Review

Great design does not stop at the conceptual and finish selection process in guest rooms' sleeping and living spaces. The bathroom's design details and brand cohesiveness are often equally if not even more essential in some cases than the guest - room space itself. (Rutes et al., 2001) point out that many hotel operators believe the guestroom with its bathroom makes a more lasting impression on the guest than the exterior architecture, lobby, or other single interior space. One of the critical factors that can significantly influence a hotel's customer experience and satisfaction is how well - designed and functional the bathroom is. Bathrooms often come in hindsight, but travelers expect this amenity to provide comfort and a better experience than what they have in their own homes. Wong (2001) asserts:

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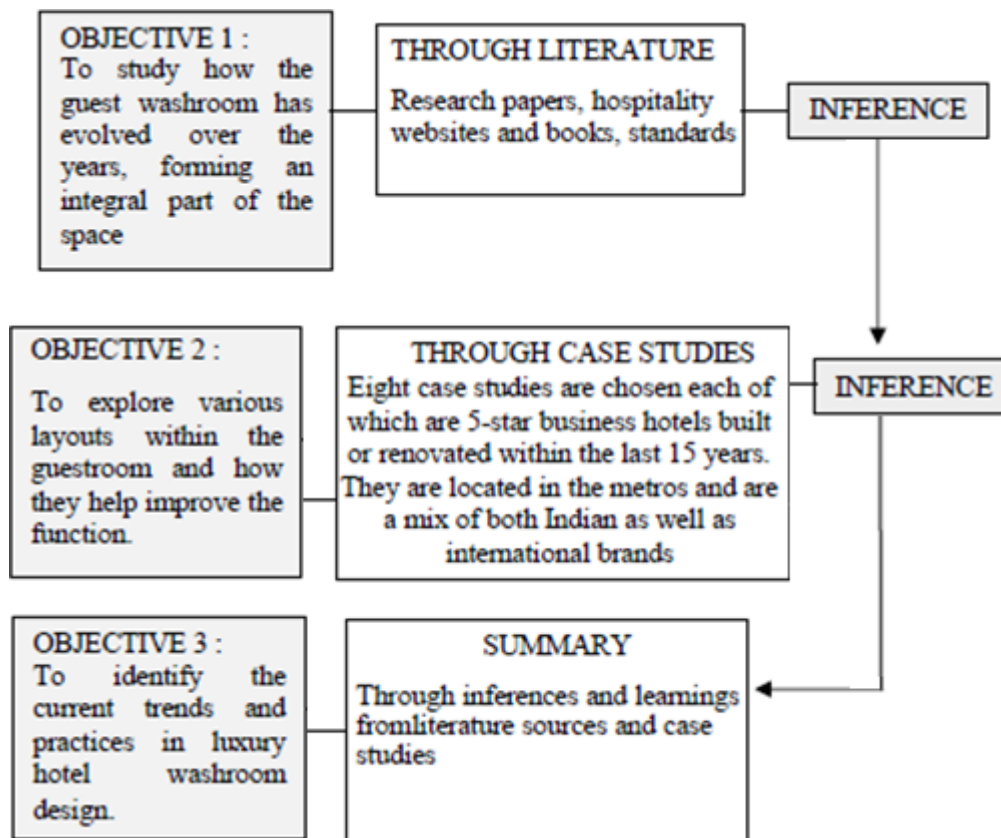
'the bathroom is more important than the room itself.' This shows the importance of bathrooms in contemporary hotel design and why their design should be taken seriously.

Many of today's designs are not just luxury - driven but depend on the ease of operation for guests. 'Guests prefer timeless designs to have a great experience as they soak in luxury. The well - traveled, discerning guest needs a contemporary, minimalistic bathroom in terms of design, high on functionality and ergonomic usage, and most importantly, a hygienic, hassle - free, low on maintenance bathroom, which delivers every day; in the same way. 'Says A. Sharma (2013). It is important to note that business hotel bathrooms are different from leisure ones. They are more functional in nature and minimalist in style. Leisure hotels experiment a lot are more elaborate. But this should not limit

designers from trying out new things and breaking out from the stigma of the age - old designs.

The glamorization of the bathroom has been a long time coming. The guest bathroom is often considered a needs - only space and not a big focal point. Guests are expecting more from luxury hotels, and hoteliers must consider this to maintain their brand. This is especially true these days, with more customers spreading what they like about the hotel rooms and hotels in general online. Technology has changed the industry's demographics and has had a tremendous impact in designing contemporary luxurious bathrooms.

4. Methodology



Data Collection and Analysis

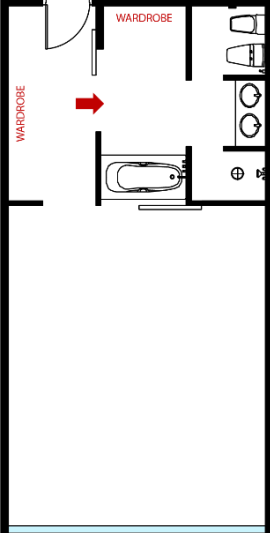
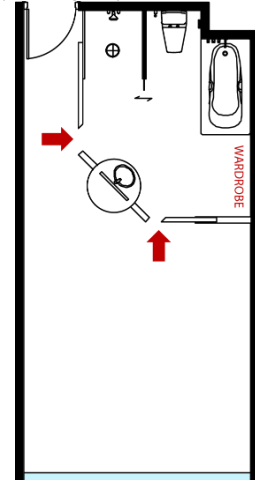
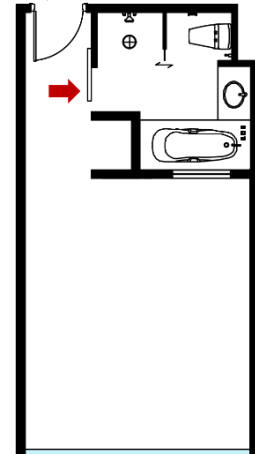
Primary and secondary data required for the research was collected with the help of live and literature case studies of luxury hotels in India and articles published in hospitality journals, books, and the internet.

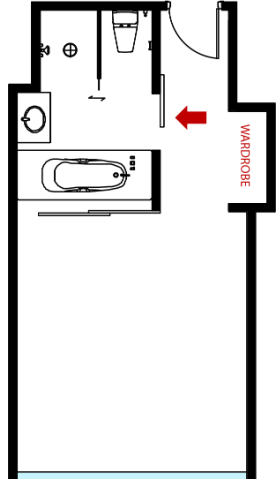
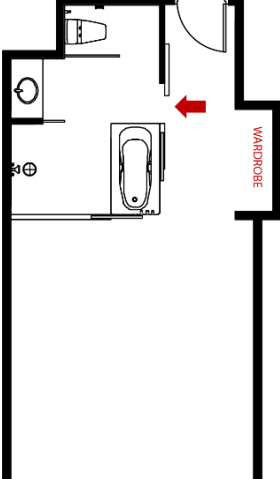
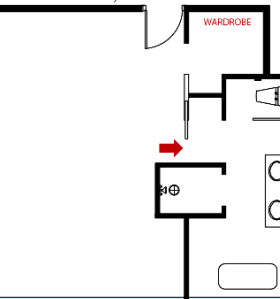
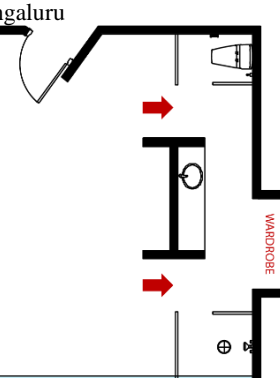

Eight case studies were chosen to help understand luxury hotels' layout, functionality, and current bathroom trends.

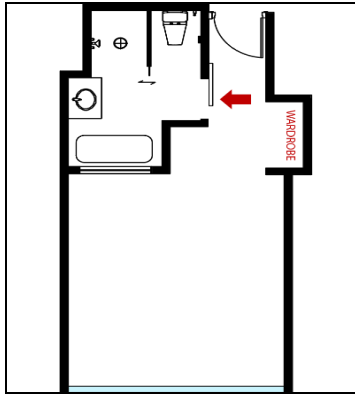
Each of them is a 5 – star business hotel located in the metros, built or renovated in 10 - 15 years. They are also a mix of both Indian and international hospitality brands, which helps the dynamic better.

The data collected from the case studies are tabulated as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Observations from case studies

Layout	Observations
<p>1. ITC Grand Chola</p> 	<p>This configuration is observed in the ITC One and towers rooms of the hotel. The area of the room is 57 sqm, and the bathroom takes up 24% of the room area. This is a five – fixture bathroom with a water closet, bidet, bathtub, shower, and double vanity.</p> <p>Designated wet and dry areas separated by frosted glass swing doors. A sliding door next to the bathtub opens the bathroom to the bedroom.</p> <p>A combination of direct and indirect lighting is used throughout, and the vanity zone is well illuminated with sidelights. Additional lighting in this space was a chandelier which gave the entire space a more luxurious effect.</p> <p>Italian marble was used for the entire room and wood was used for the vanity area to create a contrast. Further mirrors were used in various spaces such as the sliding door next to the bathtub and the dressing area making the space look bigger.</p>
<p>2. Hyatt Regency, Chennai</p> 	<p>This is the executive room which has an area of 40 sq. m. The bathroom takes up of 25% the room. It is a four – fixture bathroom with a water closet, shower, vanity, and bathtub. Even though the shower and the closet space are separated by a frosted glass sliding door, the bathtub is placed right next to the closet which could be positioned better to keep both wet areas separate from the dry. The striking feature in this bathroom was the vanity that acted as the corner point of the bathroom. Pocket sliding doors on either side closed the space when required, creating two entrances for the bathroom. The sink rests on a circular counter; it occupies half of the counter and faces the bathroom, and the other half acts as a tabletop for the bedroom. The mirror separates both the areas and electronic blinds are provided to conceal the bathroom area completely.</p>
<p>3. Hilton, Chennai</p> 	<p>The executive room has an area of 32sq. m. The bathroom takes up 22% of the room. This is a four - fixture bathroom with a water closet, vanity, shower and, bathtub.</p> <p>The bathroom is a closed unit with only a glass window next to the bathtub. A wooden sliding door next to the entrance area acts as the access point to the bathroom. Electronic blinds are provided for privacy. Here, the shower area is placed right at the entrance which can be avoided as this is a wet area and wouldn't be ideal.</p> <p>Lighting in this room was mostly direct and the temperature was too cold which made the bathroom look dull.</p>

<p>5. ITC Sonar, Kolkata</p> 	<p>The Executive Club rooms have an area of 38 sq. m. Here, the bathroom takes up 23% of the room area. It is a four – fixture bathroom with a water closet, shower, vanity and, bathtub.</p> <p>The layout is like what is seen in Hilton, Chennai. Designated wet and dry areas separated by a frosted glass sliding door.</p> <p>Sliding doors were provided next to the bathtub which completely opened the bathroom to the bedroom when not in use.</p> <p>Well - designed false ceilings for concealing lighting fixtures along with other direct lighting sources were observed</p>
<p>4. JW Marriott, NewDelhi</p> 	<p>The Deluxe guestroom occupies an area of 42 sqm. The bathroom occupies 24% of the room. This is a four – fixture bathroom with a water closet, bathtub, vanity, and shower area.</p> <p>Both the wet areas, i.e., the bathtub and the shower area are kept together away from the water closet area. The vanity is positioned in the middle separating them.</p> <p>There are openable pocket doors next to the bathtub which open the bathroom to the bedroom when not in use</p> <p>Other than Italian marble, granite is also used for the vanity</p>
<p>6. FourSeasons, Mumbai</p> 	<p>The deluxe sea view room has an area of 49sq. m and the bathroom covers 26% of the overall space. This is a four - fixture bathroom with double vanity, water closet, shower area and, bathtub</p> <p>Four seasons, Mumbai faces the Arabian Sea. The bathroom is placed against the exterior wall rather than next to the corridor. This acts as a selling point as the bathroom can also share the room's magnificent views of the sea.</p> <p>A sliding pocket door separates the bathroom from the bedroom. The bathroom is very well light during the day and has ample lighting for the nighttime.</p>
<p>7. Taj Vivanta Whitefield, Bengaluru</p> 	<p>The superior room has an area of 30 sq. m. The bathroom takes up 28% of the room area. This is a three – fixture bathroom with a vanity, shower area and, a water closet. The wardrobe is also included within the bathroom space</p> <p>Here, the spatial layout of the room is different from what is usually observed in hotel rooms of this size. The bathroom has the same length as the room and is more linear. This allows the bathroom to have both access to the shaft from the hotel corridor and also a view of the outdoors.</p> <p>There isn't a main door to the bathroom. The shower and water closet are separated using frosted glass. The bathroom receives ample daylight during the day and is well lit for the night.</p>
<p>8. Hyatt Regency, Chandigarh</p> 	<p>This is the executive room which has an area of 36 sq. m. The bathroom takes up 22% of the room. It is a four – fixture bathroom with a water closet, shower, vanity, and bathtub.</p> <p>The layout is similar to what is seen in Hilton, Chennai. Designated wet and dry areas separated by a frosted glass sliding door. The bathroom is a closed unit with only a glass window next to the bathtub. Electronic blinds are provided for privacy.</p>



Unlike Hilton, both direct and indirect light in a warm tone is used, thereby lighting up the place better

The size of the bathroom is equally essential as the size of the guestroom. After comparing the bathroom sizes in each of the hotels, it was seen that they usually take up anywhere between 20 - 30 percent of the overall room space. This number is regardless of the fact of whether the room is a standard room or a suite. The additional areas in a suite are the living or dining room and an extra powder. The Hotel and Restaurant Classification Approval and Classification Committee (HRACC) guidelines state that the minimum size of a standard room of a 5 - star hotel should be 22.8 sq. m and the bathroom 4.1 sq. m. Thus, the minimum bathroom to room percentage provided is 18%.

However, as seen in the case studies, the areas provided are quite larger. The minimum area provided might not be enough to provide the designated spaces and accommodate the proper fixtures a guest would normally expect in a 5 – star hotel these days. Typically, luxury hotels have four fixture bathrooms—sink, shower, water closet, and bathtub. The areas and clearances for each space are deduced with the help of the case studies observed.

Table 2: Area Program

Space	Area
Water Closet Recommended 30" clearance in front of the toilet and 18" on either side	1.5sq. m
Shower	1.8sq. m
Counter top with sink Should be placed 30" away from any obstruction	0.9–1sq. m
Bathtub	1.8sq. m
Circulation	20%

From the area program, it is seen that a comfortable bathroom is about 7.3sq. m. Since the average bedroom space in all types of rooms is 35 - 37 sq. m, this shows that

the bathroom should occupy about 21% of the area. This result tallies with case studies as well. The right – sized bathroom helps in the proper division of dry, semidry, and wet areas for guest convenience. Allocating more space is a luxury and is often off - limits for most hotels. Hence hoteliers have to make use of alternate techniques to give the illusion of a bigger space.

Perhaps one of the most sought – after trends coming up in hotel bathrooms is removing the walls and installing a transparent or adjustable partition separating the bedroom and bathroom space. The absence of walls means natural lighting can enter the room, and the panoramic views can be fully appreciated. This gives the illusion of a bigger space. However, there are additional concerns, such as privacy, that must be met. As seen in the case studies, the transparent partitions used were either frosted or stained, and if not, electronic blinds were provided. Pocket sliding doors can also be used, as seen in Hyatt Regency, Chennai. These can be made using glass or any material such as wood. These doors are an excellent way to save a lot of space as the door goes into the wall once opened fully, essentially making it look invisible. Sliding barn doors can be used as an alternative since constructing pocket doors is very expensive as the wall has to be hollow. Swing doors are hardly seen in luxury hotels these days as they take up extra space. Whether the partitions are opaque or transparent, it is good to have an option to open them up when desired. If space is a concern for any particular hotel, techniques like these can help overcome that.

The position of a bathroom within the room should be flexible. The eight case studies saw two spatial arrangements – peripheral (indoor or outdoor transition point) and around (connected to the exterior).

Table 3: Location of bathroom with in the room

Location	Graphic	Advantages	Disadvanges
Peripheral		Close connections to the exterior if kept adjacent to the facade. Lighting and ventilation if kept adjacent to the lobby, easy access to the shaft	Other functional spaces may not get the best position.
Around		Indoor – outdoor transition.	The bedroom privacy is broken

Bathroom area Room area

In most cases, the bathroom was seen placed between the corridor and the guestroom, acting as a sound barrier and insulator for the sleeping area. This layout also allows access from the corridor to the services so that maintenance issues can be sorted without accessing the bedroom directly. As seen in Taj Vivanta, Whitefield, Bangalore, and the Four Seasons Mumbai, the bathroom occupied the same length as the guestroom itself, creating a narrow lender space. This gave the bathroom access to the exterior wall and thus a view.

According to a study of environmental attitudes and behaviour (Lankinen M, 2005), the following items are perceived as very important: enjoying the beauty of nature (92.8%) and experiencing both the quietness and sounds of nature (83.1%). These environmental – related attitudes of people from different countries and hotel guests have been studied quite extensively. It was derived that a direct or indirect connection to nature can add value to a hotel bathroom as luxury hotels aim to provide a relaxing atmosphere.

One tends to use the bathroom first thing after waking up - it would add to a person's positive experience if they could look outside while brushing their teeth or while taking a bath. Apart from just the view, the installation of windows allows natural light to spread into the space, making it look large and airy and giving the room a spa appeal. Windows need not be precisely located on the walls – depending on the availability of space, skylights or clerestory windows can be provided as well.

Colour and lighting go hand in hand as one complements the other. Colour has the power to influence how consumers think and behave in an environment. The colours for bathrooms in hotels are preferred to be subtle. Natural shades are encouraged as they provide a rustic setting and give the guests a relaxed feeling. One must avoid using artificial pigments as it causes increased repression of tension. As a rule of thumb, light colours are perceived as airy and make the bathroom feel brighter and more spacious. It is a known fact that cleanliness is critical in the hospitality industry, especially in bathrooms. Light colours high light even the smallest area of dirt, so areas decorated in these colours require regular upkeep - and for this reason, hotel guests associate light colours with cleanliness. Hence, even if it is challenging to maintain light colours, hotels need to show their customers that they will provide them with the utmost cleanliness.

If used properly, lighting can enhance the luxury and high-end feel of a hotel's design. Lighting design emphasizes and beautifies the role of the material and its texture to make the atmosphere harmonious, and it unifies the whole system.

All the hotels observed employed both direct and indirect lighting for their bathrooms. The mirror area was well lit in almost all the bathrooms except for a few. Lighting, especially in the vanity, is exceptionally vital for any hotel bathroom. Many standards, including the IS Codes, ask to provide higher levels of illumination in this area. It is not just about aesthetics; indirect lighting is always a better option in the vanity areas reflects off the surface and spreads

over a much larger area. If not, the mirror must be illuminated by a top or side light for the easy performance of activities involving concentration and precision. As per the guidelines prescribed in IS3646 (Part1): 1992, the illuminance range within a hotel bathroom should be 50 – 100 – 150 lux. The ideal colour temperature for the lights should be below 2500 k. If the color temperature is too 'cold' (over 3000K), the room will look more like a hospital than a hospitality room.

Table 4: Commonly used methods of illumination in hotel bathrooms

Methods	Illuminance	Colour
Conceal	Diffused, soft lighting by using either the floor, ceiling, or walls as a diffuser. Moderate illumination	Usually warm golden, golden yellow
Emphasis	Bright light, high illumination, imitation of natural daylight	Warm golden, golden yellow, white
Guidance	Decorative lighting, Low illumination	Can be warm or cool catering to the space

Material is considered one of the most natural and practical elements to shape the artistic conception of a bathroom. Simple lines and subtle materials give people a quiet environment like they are at home, a sense of belonging to the space. Materials can also be decided based on the hotel's location and the materials the place is known for. It adds to the culture and value.

It is seen from the case studies that the bathroom usually has the same flooring as the room itself. This is generally done to ensure a seamless transition between both spaces. Since most bathrooms open up when needed, it is essential to make sure of this; otherwise, it may look odd. The bedroom and living room space can further be carpeted as per the designer's instructions. All eight hotels used engineered marble for the flooring. Most luxury hotels in India opt for natural stone, such as marble, for the flooring and walls. Marble ennobles and brings added and tangible value to the space. It symbolizes elegance, versatility, and exclusivity - a timeless stone that will never go out of fashion.

Granite can also be used, but a lighter shade of granite must be chosen. Porcelain or vitrified tiles that mimic the same effect can also be chosen. A contrast can be created by using different types of marble or by using any other material such as wood or concrete in spaces such as the counters. Raw materials such as steel and aluminium are also prevalent. The idea is not just to make the area look aesthetically pleasing but also to make it functional and durable.

Sometimes is nice to see the design inspired from the local context as well. Guests choose to visit a location for a reason, whether it's business or pleasure. Designers can try to make them feel like a part of the local community by bringing in local touches. This can be in the form of material, colour scheme, period styles that directly reference the destination

Bathrooms are usually the place where one starts and finishes their day. They are one of the most critical areas within the room. With great design, hoteliers can accentuate the individuality and uniqueness of their property and use

bathroom design to set themselves apart from the rest of the competition.

5. Conclusion

The information collected from various literature sources and the case studies helped summarize a few of today's luxury hotel bathroom trends. They will keep evolving as time passes, and hoteliers should keep themselves updated and implement those whenever possible.

It has been established that guest bathrooms are considered an indicator in determining a hotel's luxury scale. It is an extension of a brand's identity to customers; accordingly, it is imperative to periodically revamp bathrooms to meet today's travelers' changing needs and expectations. However, interior design can be a considerable capital expenditure, and every one may not have the opportunity to refurbish guest rooms constantly. Hence, it is vital to make the design last by adding elements that will age well and are durable. In general, most well - designed hotel bathrooms have a similar foundation of fixtures – a water closet, a shower, a bathtub, and a vanity. The material options and customization capabilities are nearly endless today. Once the basic foundation is set, it's then all about the little details. These unique design elements establish a well – designed hotel bathroom from one that just addressed the essentials with little attention to ensuring that the space is unique to the property, luxurious, and sustainable.

Competition in the hospitality industry is fierce, and hotels continue to struggle to connect with their audiences. Whether guests realize it or not, they choose properties that match their aesthetics, aspirations, and views on what a hotel should be. Due to the COVID – 19 pandemic, the hospitality industry has been amongst the worst - hit. To overcome and deal with the competition, hotels should start looking at ways to provide their customers with more facilities to choose them over their competitors. Bathrooms have always been a neglected aspect, and hotels can try and look into this.

There is always scope for further research, as the trends mentioned in this study are limited to those observed in the case studies. With the advancement of technology, new and innovative systems are coming up to replace the existing system in place.

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