

CLHG adapts and delivers service excellence during lockdown

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Since the lockdown announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa took effect at midnight on 26 March 2020, all businesses relating to non-essential services have been closed. This temporary suspension of services has affected most of City Lodge Hotel Group's 56 properties around South Africa (it also has six hotels in Southern and East Africa). Five hotels have remained open to accommodate inbound and outbound travellers in quarantine, as well as essential workers. The group remains well positioned to reopen any of its hotels on very short notice.



Lindiwe Sangweni-Siddo

Hotels currently offering quarantine and essential services accommodation include City Lodge Hotel V&A Waterfront and City Lodge Hotel GrandWest in Cape Town, City Lodge Hotel Umhlanga Ridge just outside Durban, City Lodge Hotel OR Tambo International Airport, and City Lodge Hotel Bryanston in Johannesburg.

Guests being accommodated include international guests waiting for flights home, South Africans returning home needing quarantine for 14 days, and essential services personnel. The group does not allow initial access to anyone who has either tested positive for Covid-19 or who is displaying symptoms. In addition, should anyone who is in-house display symptoms, they will be tested and if found to be positive will be relocated and the rooms deep-cleaned under the supervision of the Department of Health. Staff and guests are screened daily for elevated temperatures and other symptoms.

"We were hurtled as a company into becoming a quarantine hotel. A guest checked into one of our hotels just before the lockdown period and unbeknown to all of us the individual was in isolation having tested positive. That made us really move at a speed faster than we ever had into developing quarantine protocols in terms of how to keep our staff safe and how to keep guests safe during this

period. The reality is these opportunities of guests coming in, wanting to self-isolate, were definitely on the increase at the beginning of covid-19 hitting our shores on 5 March," explains Lindiwe Sangweni-Siddo, chief operating officer of City Lodge Hotel Group.

The group immediately sprang into action, implementing strict Covid-19 cleaning and operating protocols at all of its hotels. Since then, hotels currently operating practise an even stricter regimen of guest and staff control, as determined by the Department of Health and experts in the field, and taking into account more known about the coronavirus and how it is spread. A full description of the cleaning protocol is available on the group's website at www.clhg.com.

When applying to become a quarantine hotel, the group submits its terms and conditions to the Department of Health, which, in turn, sends inspectors to inspect the hotels to ensure that they comply with all of its regulations. The Department of Health appoints resident nurses at the hotels and has doctors who visit on a specific schedule, as well as a member of the South Africa Police Service (SAPS) in-house to ensure strict compliance to the rules of quarantine and lockdown. Also involved are the Departments of Public Works and Tourism and provincial bodies dealing in disaster management.

The group has a strong association with tourism organisations such as the Tourism Business Council of South Africa, Fedhasa, Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA) and Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA), as well as large and small industry players. This has assisted in developing protocols for running quarantine

hotels, operating at cost, and supporting the efforts of government.

“We have also prepared ourselves by talking to healthcare workers, hospitals, and essential services working throughout this lockdown period. We are well-positioned as a group to play our role in supporting all of the efforts of government as they work to contain Covid-19,” explains Lindiwe.

City Lodge Hotel Group has arranged catering for guests from an experienced and capable food management and preparation service provider, thus ensuring that dietary and nutritional requirements are met, and this has been well received.

“Treating people with dignity and respect, as guests first and foremost, makes all the difference to their stay. These are people away from homes and families, having to practise social-distancing in their room, in uncertain times. It is really touching to see how our staff have stepped up – in some cases singing ‘Happy Birthday’ to guests marking their birthday in quarantine. We have received many letters of thanks and appreciation from our guests. When we emerge from this situation, our humanity will have been tested and we will re-emerge stronger than ever as South Africans and corporate citizens,” Lindiwe says.

“The group remains available to provide support to government and essential and critical business continuity services, as well as other enabling services in the form of either quarantine facilities or staff accommodation. Good discussions have taken place in this regard and we stand ready to support such initiatives as part of a coordinated response to this pandemic,” adds Andrew Widegger, chief executive officer of City Lodge Hotel Group.

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City Lodge Hotel

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