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What Do Luxury Amenities in Buildings Look Like in the Social-Distancing Era?

Property managers are finding creative solutions to offer high-quality classes, events and entertainment in apartments while residents keep their distance

BY MAREESA NICOSIA | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MARCH 29, 2020 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)

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At the Akoya Boca West only one pool deck is open and social distancing is being reinforced.
COURTESY AKOYA BOCA WEST

As U.S. states and cities impose sweeping stay-at-home orders and social distancing rules to slow the spread of coronavirus, millions of apartment-dwellers are adapting to life without trips to the office, the gym, the golf course and the bar—even if those venues happen to be just a few steps down the hall.

Exclusive amenities in luxury apartment buildings—such as rooftop gyms equipped with Peloton bikes, indoor golf simulators, children’s play areas and five-star dining—are a big appeal for buyers. But property managers say they’ve locked the doors to most of these services, as directed by local and state governments, in order to keep staff and residents safe during the pandemic.

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High-end housing hubs in coastal cities like Seattle, San Francisco and New York have been hardest hit as the virus has spread throughout the country. There are at least 103,321 cases nationwide of [Covid-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus](#), and at least 1,668 deaths. New York state is the epicenter of the outbreak, with at least 38,977 known cases, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Meanwhile, property managers and amenities providers are working overtime, and mostly remotely, to help residents stay safe, active and entertained while they're hunkered down at home.

Making Sacrifices in a New World

"We're in a lot of uncharted waters here. No one in recent memory has faced something quite as serious and as disrupting as this, particularly for residents in multifamily housing," said Doug Weinstein, vice president of AKAM, an on-site property management company with offices in New York and Florida.

Akoya Boca West, an AKAM building that opened last spring in Boca Raton, Florida, has suspended social events such as monthly happy hours and removed chairs from communal gathering areas. Life guards and site staff are enforcing social distancing on the one pool deck that remains open, Mr. Weinstein said.

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Events normally held at Akoya Boca West's social room have been canceled.

Courtesy of Akoya Boca West

The 113-unit building is home to retirees, young couples with children, and single people, and property managers have to consider a wide range of needs as they follow guidance from health and elected officials, he said.

So far, “most people realize that there are certain sacrifices that have to be made to protect both themselves and their neighbors,” Mr. Weinstein said. “While some of these procedures may not be the easiest to follow or the most welcome, it’s incumbent on us as managing agents and associations to protect residents.”

Michael Fazio, chief creative officer of LIVunLtd, a New York-based experiential concierge company, said his team is trying to foster a sense of community in stressful times by curating virtual events that residents can tune into together from their living rooms.

A wine tasting, an executive coaching session, and a talk with a psychiatrist and relationship expert—all via Zoom video conference call—will replace regular in-person book club meetings, author lectures and emerging filmmaker screenings at some Manhattan luxury condo buildings that Mr. Fazio’s company works with.

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For many homeowners, the initial attraction of upscale building amenities naturally revolves around beautifully designed, often elaborate physical spaces. But what's lost when amenity spaces are temporarily off-limits is more than aesthetic value, Mr. Fazio said.

"The other part of it, which is probably proving to be more important right now, is the experience" they have, which is built around personalized service, high-quality offerings, and social interaction, he said.

Creating Virtual Experiences for Residents

Broadstone Arden, a new 335-unit luxury multifamily building in Orange County, California, closed its gym, pool and club room but is launching a virtual dance party with DJ Karma, of Las Vegas, for its residents.

The experience is meant to "bring some joy and light into this unconventional social landscape we're currently facing," said Lauren Blum, a marketing director at Alliance Residential.

The building is also running a giveaway series on Instagram to encourage social distancing. When residents post photos of life during quarantine, they are entered to win \$100 gift cards for services like Amazon, Disney+ streaming, Postmates food delivery and Stitch Fix.

How residents can access some cultural stimulation while museums, libraries and theaters are shuttered is also something property managers are addressing. Time Equities, the developer of 50 West, a luxury condo tower in New York City's Financial District, is putting together a narrated virtual art tour on Zoom for residents to highlight works currently displayed in the lobbies of its various buildings, according to Seth Coston, director of residential asset management and operations at Time Equities. The art is part of the personal collection of the company's chairman, he said.

"We are hoping to find ways to engage the residents and continue to provide a best-in-class experience, despite the limitations dictated by the current circumstances," Mr. Coston said.

The four floors of communal amenity space at 50 West are closed off, including an arts and crafts room, a curated library, and a fitness center and spa that serve the 186-unit building. Like most buildings, owners there have been in regular contact with residents to encourage social distancing in communal spaces like lobbies and mail rooms; and aggressive new cleaning schedules have been adopted, Mr. Coston said.

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The soaring glass tower's 64th-floor open-air observatory—with views of the Statue of Liberty—remained open as of Wednesday. Seating has been removed from the 2,700-square-foot observatory, but some residents are still enjoying it for solitary exercise in nice weather, Mr. Coston said.

Staff who are integral to keeping residential classes and events running smoothly have had to adapt quickly, as a cascade of local, state and federal policies, including bans on large social gatherings in many cities, have dramatically reshaped American lifestyles in the span of a few weeks.

Dozens of virtual fitness classes like 50 West's popular and long-running "baby boogie" dance class for toddlers, have been rolled out on Zoom in the last two weeks. The building is also providing residents free at-home fitness kits with an exercise mat, an ab roller and a resistance band.

At the twin Continuum towers in South Beach, Miami, fitness instructors have been using the live-streaming app Periscope to teach Zen stretch, power yoga and kickboxing since the day after the gym closed—and participation has been higher compared to average in-person attendance, managing director Rishi Idnani said.

"As long as we have the internet, we keep going with our passionate instructors," who are running four to five classes per day, he said, from the development's gym.

The oceanfront complex, with roughly 525 units in two high-rises, canceled annual beach and poolside parties that residents look forward to all year. And with temperatures rising into the 80s, it's been challenging to tell people they can't use the three pools on the property, Mr. Idnani said.

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One of three pools at the Continuum that's now closed.

Kike Flores Photo

But the 14-acre property's sprawling lawns are well-suited to family picnics, tanning, calisthenics and even strength-training, he said—all performed with appropriate social distancing, of course. The on-site restaurant is still serving daily specials, but for delivery or pickup only.

Mr. Idnani, who sends daily or sometimes twice-daily email updates to Continuum residents, said they're counting on guidance from building management in the same way they're following the news to stay up-to-date on the rapidly changing public health crisis.

Since their lifestyles have been totally interrupted, "the biggest thing is daily communication," he said. "You can't just send one memo and say it is what it is. Having that daily communication is integral ... for guidance, for leadership, for transparency."