

# Major Hotels Shut Down

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The coronavirus epidemic is threatening to ruin the Korean hotel industry as even operators with deep pockets close down.

Occupancy rates have plummeted to around 10 percent in both budget and luxury hotels.

Korea's 1,983 hotels offered some 158,000 rooms as of the end of last year, and now 90 percent of them are empty. The damage is estimated at W580 billion (US\$1=



A notice of temporary closure is placed at an entrance of Park Hyatt Seoul in the capital on Tuesday.

The epidemic has dealt a far stronger blow than Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in 2015 because the ensuing global panic is much greater and the number of hotels here has doubled last five years.

Grand Walkerhill Seoul was the first to close temporarily on March 23 for the first time in its 57-year history. Other restaurants remain open. A hotel staffer said its mid-range sister Vista Walkerhill Seoul next door is also considering temporary closure.

The four-star President Hotel in downtown Seoul has also closed its rooms.

Smaller hotels have been hit even harder with bookings wiped out since late January, when the epidemic started. A 50-room budget hotel in central Seoul has shut down indefinitely.

Hotel operators are laying off staff as they are unable to pay their wages. Staff at Westin Chosun Hotel and Lot Hotel in central Seoul have been placed on paid or unpaid leave.