

Insider Secrets to Cheap Hotel Reservations

2011 Edition

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Introduction

This guide will teach you how to save money every time you need to book a hotel room and every time you stay in a hotel. It will help you save money when you travel. If you are a seasoned traveler you probably already know many of the tips that I have compiled here. Nevertheless, please look through them in case there is a tip or secret you have never used or seen before, so you can pick it up for your next trip.

The hotel industry always tries to throw fees and hidden charges at their guests with the purpose of squeezing out more money. At times, hotels try to take advantage of travelers who are unaware of their rights or their interests. This guide will teach you how to elegantly avoid paying for these unnecessary extras.

The hotel is one of the larger expenses in your travel budget. Please read on to learn how to save substantially on your hotel stay. I hope you enjoy reading this guide and make good use of the tips and strategies listed.

Tip 1 Book early and do some independent online research

Book your hotel room as early as possible. The rates will most probably go up as the time for your stay gets closer. If you wait too long the hotel may sell out. You need to familiarize yourself with doing independent online research so that you know everything you need to know about your hotel before you book a room. The best place to read reviews of hotels is tripadvisor.com. Some hotels have a few reviews and some have hundreds. You especially need to look for negative reviews, or reviews that explain why a 5 star hotel is suddenly so cheap (major renovation taking place with a lot of noise, major construction across the street, no air conditioning in the middle of the summer etc.) The hotel itself usually does not divulge such precious information, to be unfortunately discovered when checking in. Look for patterns in the reviews, such as repeat comments on the quality of service, the bedding, better floors that were more recently renovated, rooms with no view or rooms with much noise etc.

Tip 2 Book online or call?

Once you have decided in which hotel you wish to stay, there are several ways to book your room: online via the best website dedicated to hotels: tripadvisor.com or any other online booking service. Simply Google the word “hotel” or “hotel + your destination” and you will be directed to dozens of different hotel reservation websites. Shop around and try to find the best rate for your dates. Then, try to look up the website of the individual hotel you have selected. Sometimes, you will find the best deal on the hotel website, rather than on the larger resellers and hotel booking websites. Most people really don’t know this but often, the best deals are available only to those who call the hotel directly at the local number. Call that number, ask to speak to the manager on duty or the director of sales. These managers have the authority to negotiate a room rate. The best time to call a hotel to make a last minute booking is to call the same day late rather than early. If you make that call in the morning you will get the highest rate possible. However, if you call after 6pm you may get a room for a discount as other guests may have canceled. This is a tricky strategy and it is not good for those who need to know early that they secured a room for the night, but it does work and can save a lot of money.

Tip 3 Ask about local taxes

Sometimes local taxes are not included in the quoted rate. In many cases, such local taxes are substantial (up to 20%!) and can make a great room rate look bad once you figure them in. The way to know the local tax rate is to call the hotel reservations and ask.

Tip 4 Cancellation policy

Some hotels allow a generous cancellation time period and others do not. You should fully understand the cancellation policy of the hotel of your choice at the time you make your reservation. This way there will not be any surprises in case of cancellation.

Tip 5 Early arrival and late departure

If you have a chance to ask about the fees and policies concerning early arrival and late departure, by all means do so. This way you are prepared for this common situation. Some hotels allow early check in free of charge, especially if you call in advance. Also, many hotels will allow a late departure where others will charge a fee for staying past check out.

Tip 6 Try to avoid peak business or convention days

Your hotel costs will go up significantly if you book your room during a large convention or in a business district during business week. If the hotel of your choice charges exorbitant rates for a room in a given date, there may be an event or other activity that locks in a large number of guests. Watch out for major sporting or other events. These would be the most expensive times to stay. Instead, if your dates are not flexible, try to find a different hotel that does not cater for business people, does not host conventions or is located outside the area that business people find the most attractive. A bit of independent research online can really save you a lot of money.

Tip 7 Association discounts

Some hotels offer discounts to members of certain associations. If you are a member of the AAA, CAA or AARP and the like, you may receive such discounts. Also, many hotels offer discounts to senior citizens. It is always good to ask in advance what associations receive discounts at the hotel of your choice and keep in mind that you will have to show proof of membership at check in. It is also a good idea to check the website of the association and see which hotel chains are listed that offer discounts to members of your association.

Tip 8 Preferences

Make sure you advise the hotel at reservations if you would like a non-smoking room. Let them know your bedding preference. Some hotels guarantee these preferences and will compensate you if they cannot meet your needs, provided it was explicitly stated when reservations were made.

Tip 9 Theft

Watch out for credit card thieves. The best way to get away with stealing from a hotel room is to lift only one credit card out of your purse or wallet, rather than taking the entire wallet. This way you may not notice the missing card whereas if your entire wallet or purse were stolen, you would notice it right away. This way, the thief has more time to use the card until you cancel it, and it could even take several days for you to discover that a single credit card is missing. One good way to protect yourself from this crime is to leave at home any credit cards you know for sure you will not use during your trip.

Tip 10 Hidden charges

Here is a list of extra charges you want to make sure will not be added to your hotel bill at check out, especially if you did not make use of these services associated with these charges.

1. Parking
2. Wireless Internet
3. Fitness Area
4. Mandatory resort fees

Tip 11 Location Exaggeration

Beware of location exaggerations. Some hotels exaggerate their proximity to attractions. Others claim to be in a desired and fashionable area but when you get there you see that the hotel is only adjacent to the desired neighborhood. For example, this happens quite often in Paris, the world's number one tourist destination. This exaggeration may explain the lower price. Still, it should be up to you to decide whether you want to pay less for a distant location or pay more and be in the place where you want to be. At the age of the internet it is easier than ever to do some research and look up a map with the hotel location on it. The best site to do this is tripadvisor.com

Tip12 Continue to check the price

You should keep checking the prices for your hotel room even after you reserved it. If you see that the rate for the room has gone down, call the hotel and ask for the new, lower rate. They will give you the lower rate rather than have you cancel and go elsewhere. Be sure to check the hotel's cancellation policy though.

Tip13 Loyalty programs

Some hotels belong to loyalty programs, similar to airline frequent flier programs. If you are not a member and you sign up at check in, you may receive a bonus.

Tip 14 Fight junk fees

You should question any fee that is added to your bill. If they can't explain what the fee is for, ask the manager to remove it.

Tip 15 Manage your room charges

The best way to go while staying at the hotel is not to charge extras to your room but rather pay cash or with a credit card immediately. This will allow you to manage your spending a little better. Also, it will unclutter your bill at check out so it will be easier for you to spot mistakes and bogus fees.

Tip 16 Off peak

If you know you travel in extreme off peak season, it is best to reserve the cheapest room available. Often, if the hotel is almost completely empty, you will be upgraded to a better room free of charge. If that does not occur, you could always ask to see the better rooms and pay more, it is going to be up to you.

Tip 17 Check out trick

To skip the long lines at check out, simply do your check out early in the day, if the hotel allows you to keep your key and leave a bit later. This is a good way to avoid the long lines at the official check out hour, but you need to first ask if this is possible.

Tip 18 No vacancy, no problem

If you arrive at the hotel unplanned and at the end of the day, you may learn that there are no vacancies. Most people don't know that in many hotels, especially in the larger ones, there will be at least a few rooms listed as "out of service." The problem with these rooms could be serious, but they could also be as minor as a piece of furniture that needs repair or a broken mirror.

Tip 19 Watch out for hotel germs

This is an odd tip but it is important, at least to some of us. Your hotel room may look clean and well kept to you but certain objects in the room rarely if ever get cleaned. These include:

1. The TV remote control
2. Telephone
3. Clock radio
4. Hair dryer
5. Hangers
6. Door knobs

Some of us bring antibacterial wipes to quickly clean these objects before using them.

Another item to watch out for are the drinking glasses as they are rarely if ever washed properly with soap. It is best not to use them for drinking, many use the sealed plastic cups instead. Also, as opposed to the bed linens which are well maintained, the bedspreads rarely get washed so it is advised to pull them off instead of using them as an extra blanket.

Tip 20 Lost and found

One of the most common things people forget to bring with them on a trip is their cell phone charger. It also happens that one of the most left behind items at hotels are, you guessed right – cell phone chargers. If you forgot to bring your charger, ask at reception if they have a matching one in their lost and found box that you could borrow.

Conclusion

I hope you enjoyed reading this guide to hotel rooms and that you found it useful. You may have known already some of the tips but I hope you have picked up a few new ones.

I would love to read your comments, feedback and travel stories at Nordheimer@gmail.com

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