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What to consider when booking business and holiday accommodation

By Sarah Manners

When you want to make a reservation at a hotel, guest house, B&B or resort you surely want to get the best possible accommodation at the most reasonable rate. This article outlines some tips for achieving this.

Booking accommodation - how to get the best room rates

What you need to keep in mind when you make your reservations is how much of your money the accommodation establishment is going to actually receive. If you book directly with the establishment then they get all of it. The more intermediaries you use, the less the hotel receives. The less the hotel receives the less likely you are to get a room upgrade for what you have paid.

It is necessary to differentiate between the booking methods for hotels versus smaller establishments. Let's start with hotels.

Booking Accommodation through a Travel Agent

To a greater extent hotels are part of large chains and when you book such a hotel you have great convenience. Any travel agent can book it; the chain no doubt has a central reservations office, maybe per country, certainly a central reservations web site. Travel agents no longer earn most of their revenue from commissions on airline bookings. Their main sources of revenue are commissions on hotel bookings and car hire apart from service fees. The rate which a hotel publishes in its brochure and on its website is its rack rate. Travel agents normally earn a commission of 10% of the published rack rate. The central reservations office of a chain also takes commission or a fee on the booking.

The situation gets worse when you are booking a hotel in a different country. When you contact your local travel agent that agent may well deal with a wholesale travel agent in your home country. Both the retail travel agent that you talk to and the wholesaler take 10%. The worst situation of all is when the wholesaler in your country deals with an inbound operator in the same country as the hotel - all of them take commission. The situation is similar when your booking is via the airline that you are travelling on. Most airlines get commission on the accommodation that they package. So you should not be surprised if booking through your local travel agent for a hotel in a foreign country gets you the worst room in the hotel at the most expensive rate.

Booking Accommodation on the Internet

When you book on the internet you need to be careful of what channel you are booking through. If you are on the website of the actual hotel then you may have a choice of a real time booking or sending an email. The real time booking engine on the site may well offer commission to a third party or possibly only a fee. Check out the email option and make sure it is being sent directly to the hotel and not some other third party. That way you are reaching the hotel directly without any third parties involved to get commission on the deal. The chances are that if the website is for the actual hotel all the contact details as well as the address for the hotel will be shown.

Booking Accommodation Directly

Once you are contacting the hotel directly with no third parties involved you are in a much stronger position to ask for their best rate which may well be lower to you in place of the commissions they would have paid to the third parties.

Next you have to look at when you are visiting. Is it high season? The hotel can sell the rooms 5 times over. Then forget it. However if you are contacting them very early when they are not yet sure if they will have the kind of season where they will be able to sell the rooms several times over you have a better chance. It is not only the main holiday seasons that fill up hotels. If you are going to a large conference then that is an opportunity time too for the hotel to make some extra profit. Don't expect any discounts.

Getting the Best Accommodation Rate

So to sum up: your best chances are to contact a hotel directly, and if you are going to the place out of season, if you book very early or arrive very last minute and fill a room that would otherwise have been empty, those circumstances supply the greatest opportunities for you to get your accommodation at the best rates.

With independent hotels and the larger guest houses and self-catering resorts the situation is similar but of course you do not have a central reservations office.

Guest houses, self-catering and B&Bs do their pricing differently. Many of them set rack rates that do not include travel agents commission. If a travel agent makes a booking then the travel agent has to add on his commission. For a once off booking the seasonality factors apply and it is always worth asking but their rates do not allow for a lot of discounting. Of course repeat customers and long stays are often given discounted rates so once again, do ask.

Accommodation Options

It is impossible to generalise when it come to accommodation because there are so many different types of hotel experience and so many different types of guest houses and B&Bs. It depends on your reasons for travel, how many of you there are, the location of the available accommodation in relation to where you want to be and what price the accommodation is offered at.

Accommodation for Business Travellers

If you are a business traveller you may need a business centre and meeting rooms. In this case a hotel is more likely to be best for you. You are also likely to be booking through a travel agent who can

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spend 5 minutes at her computer and the booking is confirmed. Travel agents in general find it much more time consuming and hence expensive to book guest houses and B&Bs - they are unlikely to have an online booking system which means you have to fax and wait or phone. Phoning the first time may not result in a confirmed booking which adds to the travel agent's costs.

Many business travellers do opt for guest houses and B&Bs. Smaller places are more personal. You will be recognised by someone who remembers when you were last there and can pick up on the conversation with you. Price wise it is now no longer that much cheaper in some guest houses than in hotels but the personalised service and flexibility make it the desired experience. Of course really good hotels strive for the same level of personalised service but you need good record keeping and technological back up for staff members just to be able to call every guest by name and remember which rooms they prefer, not to mention your particular breakfast order.

A Hotel - A Destination

A hotel which has a lot of facilities is a destination in itself. It is an experience just to be in the space. That you won't find with a guest house or B&B. It is a place to sleep and eat but the destination is the area around you. Good guest house and B&B owners and managers (only the larger ones have managers) know about the area in which they are located and take the trouble to help you find your

way around or even to take you around.

The distinction between top of the range guest houses and hotels blurs in the case of boutique hotels. Many boutique hotels do not have a lot of facilities and they may not be very large. But the experience of staying there is special.

Essential Travel Info is the largest online travel database in South Africa. When you make a reservation enquiry via

it goes directly to the establishment and is free of any

commission. No matter where you are travelling, Easy Travel Info will provide you with a host of destinations as well as quality information backed by the AA.

Lower Your Travel Costs

By Tony Brings

Many of us choose to travel on a regular basis, and whether we are going away on a business trip or a family vacation, the costs can soon add up. In an ideal world, we wouldn't need to watch the finances when we are going on the annual vacation but we do usually have to stick to a budget somewhere in proceedings. By saving money on the travel and the accommodation without compromising comfort and quality, though, it is possible to ensure you have more money for the vacation itself.

Booking time is a difficult factor to judge. If you're planning a family vacation for you, your partner and

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three kids then it is unlikely you will want to risk a last minute deal. There is no guarantee you can find the vacation you want and readying so many people in such a short space of time would prove difficult even for the army. Booking well in advance can save you a good amount of money. When you return from one holiday, start thinking about your next. Even if the accommodation is no cheaper, booking flights and other travel expenses will invariably cost you less.

Only book what you need. If you intend to be sight seeing and traveling surrounding areas a lot then you don't necessarily need a five star hotel with all your meals included. Self-catering apartments can be much more affordable than luxurious hotels and allow you the level of freedom you require from your vacation.

Remember that a vacation is still a vacation even without luxury. Camping trips can be true family adventure and if you're really short of vacation budget then they are the best option. Caravans offer slightly more in the way of luxury and usually cost slightly less in the way of cash. Camping parks also tend to have entertainment, pools and parks for you and your kids to enjoy for free or very little money.

Tony Brings is the owner of Budget Vacation Finder. Helpful tips and links for travelers dealing with airlines, rental cars, hotels, restaurants and theme parks.

Lower Your Travel Costs

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