### Tips on How to Book a Hotel Room

Booking a hotel room is a little like buying a big-screen television. If you don’t do your homework beforehand to find the best combination of features, quality, and price, you’re likely to feel burned when you find out after buying it that another store had a better TV for less money. Getting burned with a hotel room is arguably worse because not only do you have to live there, the better deals are staring you right in the face, because they’re probably the next hotel over. To avoid this situation, use some of the following tips on how best to book a hotel room.

#### Before Booking

To book a hotel room with the best chance of satisfying your wallet and your needs, you’ll spend almost all of your time searching for the right place. To maximize these efforts you should take advantage of internet travel sites, consumer reviews, and travel agents. Follow these steps and you should be in good shape:

- **Browse travel websites.** Many trips and hotel bookings are now purchased through commercial websites such as Expedia.com, Travelocity.com, Orbitz.com, and Hotels.com. Be sure to shop around sites for the best deal and don’t forget to visit the hotel website itself. Individual hotel websites often have deals that don’t appear on commercial sites. And be sure to read reviews of the hotel on these commercial booking sites.

- **Take a look at cancellation policies.** If you do book on a commercial website, be sure to research their cancellation policy. While most sites have stopped charging steep cancellation fees (sometimes the entire cost of the booking), you need to make sure that you can book on the site and cancel without a fee the hotel reservation if you have to.

- **Read the reviews.** Check out consumer review sites like TripAdvisor.com, which gathers and aggregates reviews of hotels by former patrons. TripAdvisor.com is a good resource because it organizes reviews by the type of stay (e.g., couples, business trip, young travelers, etc.) so that you can search for people most like yourself and see what they had to say about the hotel. Often, the reviews will speak to whatever attributes you’re looking for in a hotel and you can make better decisions based upon them.

- **Dig deeper on deals that are too good to be true.** If a deal seems substantially lower than surrounding hotels, check to make sure the hotel isn’t being renovated or there’s not another reason for the low price (e.g., it’s in a high crime area or is very old and run down).

- **Look up the location.** If you have a target geographic area, punch in the address into Google maps. You can zoom in to see exactly where it is as well as the surrounding area (the map will tell you surrounding stores, restaurants, etc.), and you can take advantage of Google’s street view feature to see exactly what your hotel and surround area look like.

- **Call ahead.** Once you’ve targeted a hotel or whittled your list to several hotels, be sure to call them and ask about your needs or concerns. For example, if you’ll want to make a lot of phone calls, you’ll want to ask if they have free local calling and how much they charge for long distance calls. Or you want to know how big the pool is and whether they have a lifeguard on duty. Whatever your concerns, ask the concierge on the phone so you can book with confidence.

- **Contact a travel agent for exotic or remote destinations.** If your trip involves a more exotic or remote location, you should probably consult a travel agent who knows the area, the culture, and the businesses in the area. Travel agents can be very useful in avoiding the pitfalls that come with booking exotic travel online.

#### Booking and Arrival

Once you’re ready to book a hotel room, there are still a few more questions that you should confirm before committing and certain actions you should take to preemptively avoid hassles and headaches upon arrival.
• **Check for these before.** Before committing to book your room, find out:

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• The amount of the deposit.

• The cutoff date for cancelling your reservation with incurring a penalty (for most hotels it is 24-48 hours before arrival, or else you will be charged the first night's stay on your credit card).

• Any discounts the hotel offers (senior discount, government discount, military, etc.)

• Check-in and check-out times. If you’re going to be checking in very late, be sure to inform them so they don’t give your room to another patron. Hotels have a custom of overbooking rooms, and have been known to bump very late arriving guests.

• If they charge any extra fees for your stay (resort fee, parking, etc.)

• **Request the type of room.** When you make the reservation, be sure to request the type of room you want. For example, if noise is an issue, you’ll want to be placed away from elevators, ice machines, and in a room not facing the street. If it’s a resort and they have a night club at the pool, you’ll want to be on a side not facing the pool. Whatever your needs, communicate them clearly to the concierge.

• **Book with a credit card.** Book your hotel with a credit card rather than a debit card. Credit cards offer consumers far more protection in the event of fraud. If there is a fraudulent transaction, you’ll only be on the hook for $50 and the credit card will fight the wrongdoer on your behalf and cover expenses incurred on the card over $50. With a debit card, however, you will likely to have fight the entire charge on your own.

• **Confirm the reservation.** Call the hotel a few weeks before your stay to confirm they have your reservation and to confirm they have your special requests (e.g., room away from noise).

• **Get it in writing.** Ask for written confirmation for all reservations. Almost all hotels will send you an email confirmation of your reservation or will fax you confirmation if you don’t have email access. Be sure to bring a copy of your reservation when checking in, just in case the hotel loses you in their system.
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