

12 Tips to Hotel Bliss: How to Make the Most of an Unfamiliar Hotel

by Justine Fellowes, PassPorter Guest Contributor

If you are heading to an unfamiliar hotel for business or pleasure there are some easy ways to make your stay more affordable and enjoyable. A little research, pre-planning, and the willingness to speak up can make a huge difference in assuring a comfortable, rewarding stay.

1. Location, location, location! Make sure to take the time researching the local attractions, transportation, and amenities. Use tools such as Google Maps and Google Earth to pinpoint the distance you will need to travel to the sites you want to see. If you are traveling by airplane or train make sure to check the cost of travel from the hotel.

2. Check added costs. Did you save \$30 per night only to find out that the hotel charges a mandatory \$35 per night for valet parking? Hotels such as Embassy Suites offer more space, free breakfast, and afternoon snacks and drinks. Will you use these amenities and is it worth a minimal added cost?

3. When comparing costs always check for specials. Hotels often offer buy three, get one free packages, romantic weekend getaways, and mid-week programs that may save you considerable money. Cities such as Washington D.C. often offer specials on the weekends or in August when congress is not in session. Orlando hotels tend to offer great deals during months while school is in session, such as October or the end of January. Also make sure to check for discounts such as AAA, government, or seniors rates.

4. Check for rewards programs. Omni Hotels offer a rewards program that kicks in on your first stay. A quick online sign up brings lots of rewards including free water your first night, drinks delivered each morning to your room, and two free pressed items per day! Not too shabby.

5. If you are traveling with the kids, look for kid-friendly hotels. Pools are a huge plus and are a great way to give everyone a break in the afternoon. Does the hotel offer a kid's menu or kids eat free options? How about a welcome package?

6. While ratings are helpful, take them with a grain of salt. Online hotel rating sites such as Trip Advisor are a wonderful resource offering buckets of information. Just remember that not all travelers have the same expectations. What are yours? Cheap rates? Don't care

about ambience? If so don't be bothered by the negative comments on how the hotel is "basic." Want peace and quiet? Look for ratings written specifically about the noise level. Also, keep an eye out for replies. If a patron has complained through an online service and the hotel has replied with answers, it shows that they are respectful of feedback and are obviously taking the time to address issues.

7. Ask, ask, ask. You are the customer and don't hesitate to ask for help, directions, or to have a problem fixed. I recently traveled with a friend who received the wrong drinks delivered to her room from room service. She was a bit frustrated but was willing to let it go. One quick call resolved the issue, came with a hearty apology, and the correct drinks were delivered in minutes.

8. Don't hesitate to ask to change rooms. If you requested easy access to an elevator but ended up miles away from one, call the front desk and see if they can resolve the issue. Room smells musty? Make a change. It's worth asking. Of course, busy hotels during crowded time may have a hard time meeting requests, but in general, the front desk will do anything they can to make you happy.

9. Be aware when using the concierge. I'll probably get hate mail for this one but by no means do I mean do not use the concierge. They are wonderful, helpful, and a great asset in hotels that have them. If they do a nice job for you, for instance procuring reservations for a great local restaurant, a tip is customary. That being said, use your best judgment on recommendations. If you have your heart set on going to a restaurant that you read a rave review about, but the concierge proclaims they "never heard of it," something may be up. If they insist their restaurant is better, and that you should listen to them, hmmm. I am by no means a concierge expert, and each and every hotel has different policies and standards, but it's good to be aware.

10. Wireless internet is often free in the lobby or a nearby coffee shop, but may incur a charge if you use it in your room. If you can take advantage of this it can save you a bundle.

11. Tip the cleaning staff daily. If you have a multiple night stay make sure to tip daily. Leave your tip on the pillow. How much? That depends -- how messy are you? What is the local economy of the city you are in? Usually between \$5-\$10 is appropriate per day. Why per day? Staff changes daily and let's be honest, extra touches are probably more frequent when someone knows you care.

12. Take time at check in to ask questions. Where is the pool? How late is it open? Also, take five minutes to review the hotel book (often on

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a desk or tucked in a drawer) that tells you about amenities, restaurants, room service, and more. I recently discovered that a hotel offered a free in-room fitness kit for the length of my stay, only because I opened the hotel guide.

Happy travels!

About The Author: Justine, the author of [PassPorter's Disney Speed Planner: The Easy Ten-Step Program](#), works in education in Connecticut. She is also the host of [Travel Girl's\(TM\) Tips for Disney World](#) podcasts.

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