

# 8 Hotel Booking Hacks Every Traveler Needs to Know

By Meagan Drilling

Sure, you know how to book a hotel on your own because you've got a credit card and the Internet. But chances are you're not booking a hotel as well or as cheaply as you could. Don't feel bad about your amateur mistakes. All you need is a little instruction, and well, a credit card and the Internet.

To turn you from hotel amateur to hotel pro, we've probed the minds of lodging experts to hear their tips on saving the most money and maximizing every hotel stay you book. These are their essential hotel hacks.

## **Set up price alerts**

You've actually decided to go on vacation. Congratulations! You're one of the Americans who actually take time off.

Now you're scouring the web for the best hotel deals. Usually this entails visiting every booking site under the search bar, possibly multiple times a day, just to see if you can squeak out some chunk of savings. According to travel adviser Katelyn O'Shaughnessy, CEO and founder of TripScope, each time you visit a travel site, the prices will go up. So don't do that.

Start by deleting your browser cookies before you buy hotel rooms. This goes for airline tickets, too, and is part of this entire process called "dynamic pricing." That's a fancy way of saying prices will go up. The good people over at Kayak suggest setting up price alerts to keep track of low prices. This means deals in your price range, to your desired destination, will come straight to your inbox on either a daily or weekly basis. Other sites with similar functions include Hipmunk and Airfarewatchdog.

## **Book at magic hour, six weeks out**

O'Shaughnessy also recommends booking airline tickets and hotel rooms on Tuesdays after 3 p.m., six weeks out. This, she says, is the "magic hour." Additionally, she says waiting until after midnight to book flights or hotels means there will be more inventory (industry-speak for available rooms and seats) and better rates because many of the rooms and seats are put on a 24-hour hold. At midnight, much like for Cinderella, the spell is broken and the hold is lifted. No glass slippers or pumpkins in this one, though.

## **Avoid cancellation fees by switching dates**

Of course, your college roommate decided to get married on the exact dates you booked your dream trip to Bangkok. Now you've gotta cancel your trip or miss out on all the joys of being in a wedding party. But all is not lost.

Most hotels give you a window after which they'll charge for canceling your reservation. But so long as you haven't paid in advance, which is sometimes an option, you can keep your money. O'Shaughnessy says if you've got a reservation and need to cancel, but you're already past the drop-dead date, just reschedule for a future date – there's usually no penalty for that. Then, call the hotel back and get a different representative and cancel the room free of charge. She's so sly!

Of course, your mileage may vary on this one, depending on the property. But it's worth a shot.

## **Visit hot climates in hot months**

Yes, it's August and Mexico is hotter than a set of twin babies in a Mercedes Benz with the windows up, when the temp goes up to the mid-80s... anyway. Many destinations that're hot year-round are not ideal during summer months. But that's probably the best time to book hotels in said hot climates, as they'll be in low season, which will translate to lower prices, thanks to higher inventory (there's that term again!), according to the folks at Kayak. They have no opinion on the Real Slim Shady, however.

## **Bundle all your necessities**

You know how the cable company harasses you about lowering your monthly bill by combining their cell phone, land line, TV, DSL, ISP, LOL, fax, smoke signal, cave-painting, and Morse code services? Seriously, I DON'T NEED A LAND LINE, IT'S NOT 1997.

Well, bundling travel can be one of the biggest cost cutters, and is way less spammy. The folks at Orbitz say combining airfare, hotel, and car rental can lead to bigger savings, without giving up control over choices like airline, flight times, hotel brands, and location. In the same vein, never book your hotel or package without first checking to see if there's a promotion code. Coupons are out there for a reason, people. It's to save money. And to make sure there are more episodes of "Extreme Couponing."

### **Get pay-for-play WiFi for free**

Let's say your hotel doesn't offer free WiFi (but please, why are you staying there? You can do better.). O'Shaughnessy says at certain hotels and many airports, adding ".jpg" at the end of any URL will allow you to bypass the blocked WiFi and access the internet for free. Another tip? Try checking the comments section of FourSquare. People tend to leave WiFi passwords for hotels here. This may be the most important thing you read. Ever.

### **Book in business districts**

You want to stay in the "SoHos" or the "Shoreditches" or the "whatever number Arrondissement is cool" of any city, because, well, you're obviously of discerning taste. Otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this article.

But while the trendiest neighborhoods mean the shortest walks to hot restaurants, bars, nightlife and anything else you can Instagram, staying in cities' financial districts will be much easier on your wallet. Orbitz says booking a hotel room in the financial district over weekends can mean big savings, since their main clientele clear out by Friday. While filled with business travelers during the week, these properties often become ghost towns on the weekends. And they're often four- and five-star hotels, which are totally Instagrammable.

### **Look and ask for "value adds"**

The path to a perfect vacation is lined with incidentals, which seem small at first, but add up quickly. Plus, you don't actually have to drive around them. You just enjoy them. It's a metaphor. Search for hotels and resorts that offer added incentives. In the biz, they're called "value-adds," and include free breakfast, free WiFi, free parking, free shuttle service... basically you wanna see that word "free" in front of a thing you'd want, and then hop on it.

Kayak also suggests leaving comments directly on your reservation. Asking for things like "room at top floor," or "room with a view," will often be honored and at no extra cost to you. And even just asking when you check in if upgrades are available can score you what you want. It's as simple as that.

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