

How to book cheap hotel rooms

Hotels are going to be a mainstay of your travels. There are a lot of different puzzle pieces and everyone is different about what they want in a hotel and hopefully my tips can help you get the best deal on a hotel. Hotels will charge the highest rates Friday and Saturday night so expect to pay more on these nights. Also expect to pay more in peak tourist times. It's all a matter of supply and demand – if a lot of people are travelling to a location, there will be fewer rooms so the rooms that are available will be more expensive.

A few words about hotels

Hotels are rated in stars, typically 1 to 5. A one star hotel is your entry level amenities and a 5 star hotel will have the most amenities along with services not found elsewhere. I typically try to look for 3 or 4 star properties but there are many 1 star and 2 star places that are perfectly fine but you just have to know how to find them and we'll go over that. 5 star properties are very special places that most of us will only stay at once or twice in our lifetimes. I suspect if you're reading a book on saving money while travelling that 5 star hotels are not your usual lodging choice but it's OK if they are or are not.

Today we have lots of tools to judge a hotel such as online reviews. The problem is that most places know this and they try and skew the reviews by paying people to write great reviews of their properties and you need to know

how to spot these. I do read reviews of target hotels so I can make sure that I'm spending my money wisely and I mostly look at the negative reviews. I start there because of most of the issues that people report are petty or out of the hotels control and all the other reviews are mostly OK, I know that the property is OK. You want a place that has a healthy mix of reviews. If they are all glowing reviews, take caution.

When checking into a hotel, they will typically ask for an ID and a credit card. I like to ask the clerk how much they need to pre-authorize on the credit card because it will put a hold on those funds. Some places put a very large hold so it's a good idea to ask. Most clerks are very accommodating. If the amount is very large and I've already pre-paid for the room, I'll always ask for a lower rate or ask that it be removed upon check out.

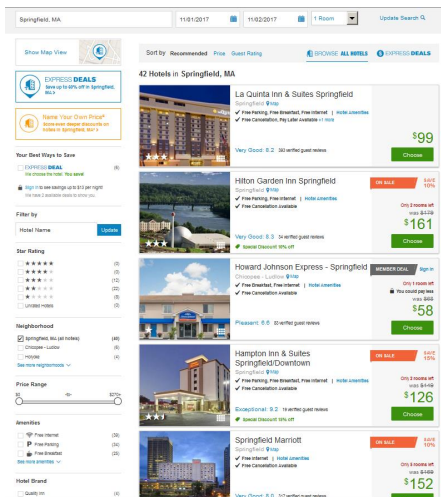
So, how do you book cheap hotel rooms?

Now I'm going to go through the tools that I use to find and book hotels at a discount. I typically save about 10-50% off the advertised rate but that savings does come at cost. First, I typically don't choose the exact hotel that I'll be staying at. Second, if I pre-pay for the room, sometimes I lose the ability to choose what bed types I have. However, if I book things far enough in advance, it's nice to know that my hotels are already paid for an it's one less expense that I need to worry about while on the actual trip.

Priceline

My main booking tool for hotels is Priceline. Priceline allows me to look at hotel prices from a couple of different perspectives. First, it lets me see the hotels regular rate. This lets me see the names of the hotels, their ratings along with their rates. This allows me to see how a 3 star hotel lines up with another 3 star hotel. Second, it allows me to see “Express Deals” which are hotels in a particular area at a certain star rating for a set price. These are typically 10-40% less than the regular rates displayed. Finally, it allows me to make a bid or set my own price which can be up to 50% off the regular rate.

Priceline Express Deals

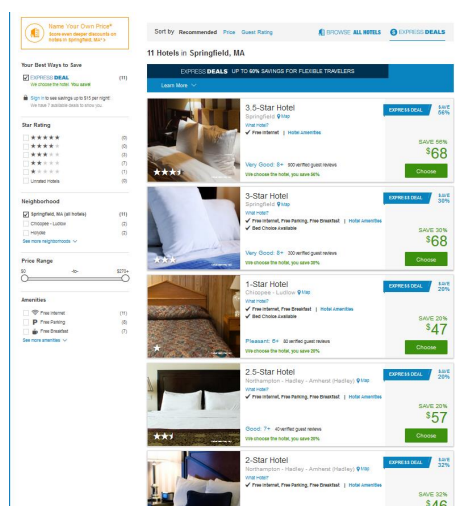


I typically start by looking at the regular rates, then the Express Deals. The Express Deal is going to tell me what area and what star rating the hotel is. It will also tell me approximately how many reviews the hotel has and what that rating is. You typically want a 7+ rating but 8 or 9 is better. This Express Deal is going to tell you what the lowest price that is available to you without bidding.

The Express Deal is not going to tell you what the name of the

hotel is, but you can usually make an educated guess by going back to the regular rates and displaying only hotels that are in the area that the deal is in along with hotels that are at the same star rating. Then looking at those results, look for one that has a similar review rating. So if it tells you that you can get a 3 star hotel which has rating of 8+, look only for hotels that 3 star properties and have 8+ review ratings with a similar review count. Further, the Express Deal will tell you what percentage off the regular rate the deal is so you can guess from there. Using all of those criteria, you usually can make an educated guess and figure which hotel or narrow it down to one or two.

Bidding for Hotel Rooms



If the Express Deal meets all of your criteria, you can pay for it right then and there. If you have time though, you can also make a bid a little lower than that and see if you can get the hotel for the lower rate. You have nothing to lose because you know you can always get the hotel at the Express Deal price.

We're going to do the same process that I suggested for bidding on a rental car. So once you know your lowest

possible nightly rate, we can usually get up to 40% off of that rate if things align right but it will probably be less than that. Priceline allows you to bid once every 24 hours so that's what we will do. I like to increase my bid about 5-10% every day, so you'll need at least 4 days before you need a hotel to allow for maximum savings. I like to start about a month out which will give me the best regular rates and enough time to put in daily bids. However, if you need a room for that night, you can always bid about 5-10% less than the Express Deal to see if you can save a little more off that deal.

Making your bid

If the regular rate was \$140/day, we'll start by bidding \$84/day. That's 40% lower than \$140/day and I got that number by multiplying $\$140 \times 0.60$. If I wanted to get 30% less I would multiply \$140 by 0.70 and if I wanted 20% I would multiply it by 0.80. I'm basically taking 100 and subtracting whatever percentage I want off.

So on day 1 I'll bid \$84 and if I'm denied, I will wait 24 hours and then bid another 5% more or $\$140 \times 0.65$. I'll keep going up 5% every day knowing that I can always get it at the daily rate if needed. Just remember to wait 24 hours between bids and check the daily rate every day. They may initially tell you that there is a small chance of it being accepted and I've even seen counter bids that are higher than the daily rate on an Express Bid! So ignore those and just keep trying.

Also, if you are bidding in a place that has multiple "zones" or areas, and you are bidding for a three/four star hotel in one zone

and know that there are no three/four star hotels in another zone, go ahead and add that that zone and you can do a second bid right then and there. It's safe because you know there are no three/four star hotels in that zone and you are only looking for three/four star hotels. The way you can tell is to check the box for each zone before you bid and it will tell you what the maximum hotel star rating is available in that zone. Once you start bidding, you won't be able to tell.

Keep in mind that things can change day to day so the Express Deal might be higher or lower each day so you take a look at that to give you extra guidance on what you should bid or if you should just take the Express Deal.

Final thoughts on booking cheap hotel rooms

One word of caution about Priceline's Express Deal or Name your Price bookings. They are not for everyone. If you are someone that needs to be in a specific hotel or you have special room needs (handicapped, bed types, etc.) some properties may not honor those requests or make you pay the difference in rooms to accommodate them. Also, some properties will have special fees like valet parking or "Resort" fees that you have to pay even if you are not using those facilities. Don't get me wrong, I love Priceline and sometimes not being able to get a room with two beds is an issue and sometimes it's not. If you're willing to work with that you can save a lot of money. I just wanted to make sure you knew about that limitation.

RV Newbie Buyers Guide

Are you considering buying an RV but have no idea where to start? This RV Newbie Buyers Guide is designed to help walk someone who have never owned or maybe never even been in an RV into the process of selecting, buying and operating an RV for the first time.

When we first thought about buying an RV we soon discovered a world that we never knew existed. It had its own language and protocols and it took a little while to orient ourselves and figure out what would work for us. Then we needed to understand how the pricing worked and then once we were in the RV, how all the systems worked. Everything was different than we expected so hopefully this RV Newbie Buyers Guide will help walk you through the process.

Understanding Classes | Layout Considerations | Purchasing an RV | Operating an RV for the First Time

Understanding Classes

RV's are divided into different classes and it's important to have an understanding of the classes so you can know which one fits what you're looking for.

Class A

Class A RV's are the ones that look like buses. They feature a flat front with the largest windshield. They are the largest RV's and often the most luxurious. They are the most expensive to purchase and operate but they will have the most automation and amenities.

Class A's generally do not have air bags and very little motor

in front of them like a class c. However, this also offers a better view out the front.

These units are mostly diesels or “diesel pushers” (DP’s) and get about 8-10 MPG.

Class A’s generally have the most amount of storage space, be that in the unit and outside, below the living space in what is known as the “basement”.

Class B

Class B Rv’s are the the smallest, most compact. They are vans converted to have camper amenities. Due to their size and complexity, they can be expensive but offer the most portability and can fit in places that other classes cannot.

Class C

Class C RV’s typically feature an over the cab design and can be up to 32-33’ long. They feature most of the amenities of class A but in a smaller space.

Expect about 8-9 MPG from this drive train. Class c’s also have air bags for the front passengers and other passengers can be seated at the dinette or on the sofa.

Class c’s can also tow vehicles (known as “toad’s”).

Super C

A Super C is a Class C RV built on a larger truck frame so that the body of the RV can be larger than a typical class C. It basically combines the added amenities and luxuries found in a class A in a Class C form factor.

Travel Trailer

Travel Trailers are tow behind vehicles. They are connected to the the rear hitch and can be up to 40’ in length.

Travel trailers can be anything from a pop-up which has a hard bottom and a tent like structure that “pop’s up” out of it. These are great for families on a budget and looking for something better than a tent. The next model up from a pop-up is a hard sided travel travel.

Fifth Wheel

A fifth wheel trailer is also towed behind a truck but the hitch is located in the bed of the truck. These are the largest towable RV’s and are comparable to Class A RV’s.

Class Considerations

Every class has its pluses and minuses. The RV is where you will stay and so you’ll need a vehicle to get around once you reach your destination with the exception of a class B RV. Class B RV’s are small enough that you can take them into town and easily find parking. You can sometimes do that with a smaller class c but don’t count on it.

A class A & C will need to tow a vehicle that can be driven at the destination. These are affectionately call “toads” by the RV community.

RV Considerations for larger travelers

If you are heavy, overweight, perhaps obese and are looking to buy an RV, there are a number of things that you should look for in an RV. To help with that, I’ve put together separate discussion on RV considerations for larger travelers. In that discussion I’ve also put together a list of RV models that would work well for larger travelers.

National Park Passport Program



The National Park Passport Program can be a great tool to remember your visits.

Welcome! This is the Web's only guide dedicated to those wishing to visit all of the National Park Service sites in the U.S. and record their visits using the NPS Passport. Our focus is on the parks and where stamps may be obtained and not the other way around.

This guide is designed to help you find not only the sites that are easy to find, but also those which are out of the way or very little information about the site is available. Here you will find comprehensive information, forums to talk about your visits with other users, and links to where you can learn more.

Passport Basics <i>Information for Newbies about the program</i>	NPS Sites <i>Sites and where you can find the passport cancellations</i>
Links <i>Links of interest for those in the hunt</i>	Weather <i>Check on the weather before you travel!</i>

Tips for Travels

*Tips for travelling to and visiting
NPS sites*

Gas Prices

Gas Prices **provided by** GasBuddy.com

[Click here to add this map to your website.](#)

Use the links below to find the lowest gas prices in the following metropolitan areas:

Akron, OH	Albany, NY	Albuquerque, NM	Allentown, PA
Anchorage, AK	Atlanta, GA	Austin, TX	Bakersfield, CA
Baltimore, MD	Birmingham, AL	Boise, ID	Boston, MA
Bridgeport, CT	Buffalo, NY	Charleston, SC	Charlotte, NC
Chicago, IL	Cincinnati, OH	Cleveland, OH	Colorado Springs, CO
Columbia, SC	Columbus, OH	Corpus Christi, TX	Dallas, TX
Dayton, OH	Denver, CO	Des Moines, IA	Detroit, MI
Durham, NC	El Paso, TX	Fort Worth, TX	Fresno, CA
Gary, IN	Grand Rapids, MI	Greensboro, NC	Hartford, CT

Honolulu, HI	Houston, TX	Huntsville, AL	Indianapolis, IN
Jackson, MS	Jacksonville, FL	Kalamazoo, MI	Kansas City, MO/KS
Knoxville, TN	Lansing, MI	Las Vegas, NV	Lexington, KY
Lincoln, NE	Little Rock, AR	Long Island, NY	Los Angeles, CA
Louisville, KY	Lubbock, TX	Macon, GA	Madison, WI
Memphis, TN	Miami, FL	Milwaukee, WI	Mobile, AL
Modesto, CA	Montgomery, AL	New Haven, CT	New Orleans, LA
New York City, NY	Oakland, CA	Oklahoma City, OK	Omaha, NE
Orange County, CA	Orlando, FL	Peoria, IL	Philadelphia, PA
Phoenix, AZ	Pittsburgh, PA	Portland, OR	Providence, RI
Quad Cities, IA/IL	Raleigh, NC	Richmond, VA	Riverside, CA
Rochester, NY	Sacramento, CA	Salt Lake City, UT	San Antonio, TX
San Bernadino, CA	San Diego, CA	San Francisco, CA	San Jose, CA
Savannah, GA	Scranton, PA	Seattle, WA	Shreveport, LA
Spokane, WA	Springfield, MA	St. Louis, MO	Stockton, CA
Syracuse, NY	Tacoma, WA	Tallahassee, FL	Tampa, FL
Toledo, OH	Trenton, NJ	Tucson, AZ	

Use the chart below to chart gas prices over time in different metropolitan areas: