

Protecting Wisconsin Consumers for 75 Years

Lodging reservation guidelines

The lodging industry is becoming stricter with its reservation rules. Because of this you may encounter the following problems, especially in large tourist areas:

- Having to forfeit your deposit upon canceling a reservation.
- Being billed for a room even though you did not use it, due to minimum stay requirements.
- Not receiving the services or amenities that were advertised or represented.
- Being billed at higher room rates than the “special rate” advertised or quoted.

Complaints are often the result of lack of disclosure or miscommunication between the business and the consumer. Ask questions when making reservations, and request all your reservation information in writing.

Higher cancellation and no-show fees are likely to be charged by places that do not rent by the day. Resorts commonly rent by the week and lodges may rent by the week or blocks of days. Avoiding fees may require cancellation well in advance to keep the lodge from losing business. Request and understand the cancellation policy prior to making a commitment.

Payment

Prior to making a reservation or giving out payment information:

- Ask about the cancellation policy and request a written copy be mailed to you.
- Make sure you understand whether the room will be held or guaranteed.

If you do have to cancel be sure to ask for a cancellation number and the name of the person who gave it to you.

Confirmation

Always request the sending of a written confirmation that includes details of your arrangements:

- Check-in/check-out dates and times.
- Rates and special offerings – including meals, activities, entertainment, shuttle service, etc.
- Arrangements – number/type of beds, views/floor location, number of guests, non-smoking/smoking, pets, early/late check-in or check-out, adjoined/connected rooms, being located close to or away from activity areas, etc.

- Amenities – whirlpool, fireplace, suite, appliances, kitchenette, etc.
- Cancellation and change policies.

Many motels will assign a reservation confirmation number and follow up with a mailed or e-mailed confirmation. If the reservation is made a few days in advance, a mailing may not be possible. If this is not automatically done, ask the reservation clerk for a confirmation number and for a written confirmation.

Be sure to make a follow-up contact when a written confirmation is not available to reconfirm your reservation.

Room rates

Confirm the room rate you will be charged at the time you make the reservation to avoid potential misunderstandings at check-in/check-out. Ask for written confirmation verifying the rate once you make your reservation.

Miscellaneous fees

Before booking, make sure you know all of the charges associated with your room. Many hotels have extra charges other than the price of the room and

sales tax. Some hotels with extra amenities such as pools, spas, hiking trails, golf courses, or tennis courts charge an extra fee whether or not you use them. It is expensive to use items from a minibar and some hotels charge not only for the item, but also a replenishment fee. If you are arriving before check in, expect to be charged for temporary luggage storage. Make sure to review arrival and departure policies. Ask about fees before using any of the hotels amenities.

Coupons, special offers, gift certificates

When using a coupon, special offer, gift certificate or membership discount, be sure you tell the reservation clerk. Read the discount over carefully for special conditions or limitations on its use and application.

Credit card blocking

Be aware of account “blocking” when making a reservation. “Blocking” is how a business verifies that you are able to pay for potential charges. The credit card account you provided for payment will be sent an estimated total by the reservation clerk. This total includes known standard charges, like room rate and taxes, but also adds an estimated total for potential “extra” charges like meals, beverages, room service, movie rentals, etc. If the transaction is approved, your available credit is reduced by the estimated amount. That is a “block.” This may become a problem if you are near your credit limit. It is not only embarrassing to have your card declined, but if you have an emergency purchase to make,

you may not have enough available credit.

Be aware that a “block” can be placed on every card used – reservation, check-in, and check-out. To avoid this, use the same card for all transactions and ask the clerk how long any “block” will remain after you check-out. The reason for a “block” continuation after check-out is the same as for the initial “blocking” – unknown charges. An example would be having breakfast just prior to leaving and charging it to your room. That charge may not have made it to the check-out counter prior to leaving, but is still owed and will be charged against your account.

When a different card or cash is used at check-out, the “blocks” placed on other cards may remain up to 15 days afterwards. Be sure to ask the clerk to remove any unnecessary “blocking” should this occur.

Online travel sites

Using an online travel site can save you time and money. Make sure to shop different sites as prices can vary greatly. Always read all of the fine print. Print hard copies of charges, offers, or specials when you make reservations. Some sites will not let you cancel after booking. Know your responsibilities should your travel plans change prior to making a reservation. Print a hard copy of the site’s cancellation/change policy.

Beware of scams

As with any other consumer transaction, there are scam artists trying to steal your hard-earned money. Beware of cheap lodging advertised on sites such as

Craigslist or solicitations from companies you have not heard of.

Using a credit card is one of the safest methods of making a reservation payment. Common scams involve wiring money, giving checking or saving account information, using a Pay-pal type account, or money pack card. Smaller privately owned and operated locations, such as a resort, may not accept card payments.

Scammers have the same access to legitimate lodging sites as you do and are known to create legitimate looking information by copying it into the scam material. By checking with available area tourism locations you can verify you are dealing directly with a legitimate location. Remember, if it seems to be too good to be true, it usually is.

For more information

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

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