



tips to score early check-in at hotels

By Janice Hough

It's happened to most travelers at one time or another. A flight, often a redeye, gets in early in the morning and hotel check-in isn't until 2 or 3 p.m. What everyone wants in that situation is an early check-in to their room. Even if there's no time to really sleep, it's nice to be able to drop off stuff, freshen up and just relax a bit.

Travel agents and hotels get the “early check-in” request all the time. The problem is, it's not something that can generally be guaranteed. Here's an explanation, along with some tips to help score an early check-in.

If a hotel is not full, most of the time there's no problem giving an early-arriving guest a room. On the other hand, as I tell clients regularly, if they are full, there is no way another guest will be told they need to vacate a room early in the morning so someone else can have it.

With yield-management (basically rates that vary based on occupancy), it's easier and easier for hotels to put heads in beds. Even at the last minute with all the discount apps and booking sites like “Roomtonight” or “Hoteltonight” etc.

So a hotel which at time of booking looks wide open for the night before an arrival might indeed end up full.

Nonetheless, here are some tips for travelers who really really want to be able to get into a room early.

1. *Let the hotel know in advance you will be there early.* This won't guarantee a room, but if you are a regular guest or your travel agent has clout this might help. In some cases, if you ask nicely, they may try to hold something and at least give you priority over another early arrival.

Note, telling a hotel you **MUST** have a room early, for no additional charge, because you are tired and/or important doesn't work. They've heard it before.

2. *Be flexible.* A traveler who says they will take anything that is available has a much better chance of getting a room early than someone who says they have to have a room on a certain floor with a certain view etc.

Sometimes, say traveling with a family, a room with a king vs. two beds just won't work. But if it's just a question of preference, it may be worth a compromise.

And worst case, if you're staying several days, you might be able to move later from a less-than-ideal first room.

3. *Ask about day rates.* Some hotels do offer a rate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. I've noticed this particularly near airports, but also, for example, at several hotels in India and Australia, where flights often arrive in the middle of the night or early in the morning.

4. *Ask about public facilities — fitness center or pool for a shower.* If a room is not available, ask about using the hotel's fitness center or a nearby gym for a shower, at least. Many hotels will be accommodating. At a resort location, most places will let you relax by the pool and store most of your luggage until the room is available.

(If you plan to take advantage of this option, remember to pack a change of clothes and/or your swimsuit in the



top of your suitcase, or in your carry-on bag. It's no fun to root through a suitcase in the hotel lobby.)

5. *Store luggage.* If it's just a matter of getting your luggage stowed, hotels will let you leave your bags with the porter or front desk even if a room isn't ready. At least you can head out sightseeing or to work without carrying all your stuff around.

6. *Check business centers.* If you need a room for work-related reasons, most hotels will also let you sit in the lobby area, where there is generally free WiFi. Both in New York and Washington, D.C. last year, hotels not only let me work in a comfortable corner, they went out of



their way to be helpful in offering coffee, water, etc.

7. *Book the room a day early with a last-minute app.* If it's important, consider using a last-minute booking app and actually booking the night before if available. Or, call the hotel directly the day before and ask what it would cost to book the room.

8. *Pay for the extra day.* If it's REALLY important, just bite the bullet and reserve the night before your early arrival; make sure the hotel knows what you are doing so you don't lose your reservation as a no-show. I realize that this option may not be open if you are on a really tight budget. But, on the other hand, even a few hundred dollars may be worth it if it's the difference between being in decent shape the first day and a walking zombie.

Know yourself. Some people function well on minimal sleep. Others recover quickly from just one sleepless night. If you are not one of them, then averaging the cost of one additional night over a whole trip may be a very worthwhile splurge.

If you do splurge, however, go one more step and either call or have your travel agent call to explain you are booking the night before for an early arrival. The worst of all possible worlds is paying for the room, and then arriving to find out it's been given away because they think you were a no-show.