



Pic: Roger Casas-Alariste

Business hotels

Not that kind of Paris Hilton: you never know who you'll bump into in the lobby of a posh hotel

Back in the day a decent sauna, pool and restaurant were the essentials for a corporate hotel. Now that business travel is more about work, the must-haves seem to be complimentary Wi-Fi and a good mobile signal.

What should the discerning business traveller look for in their accommodation? And how do you get it at the right price?

1 What's it worth?

Global Expense estimates that 3.8 million UK employees made business travel claims in 2010 costing some £3.5bn.

According to the expense management firm, approximately 1.4 million people made accommodation claims, with an average of two nights away from home per claim, costing UK businesses around £1.7bn.

However, there was a slight drop in the number of accommodation claims – they were down two per cent on the previous year.

2 Isn't technology making business travel redundant?

A poll by private jet booking

website PrivateFly.com revealed that some 63 per cent of businesspeople now use webcams and 56 per cent regularly use internet telephony such as Skype.

However, despite these advances 95 per cent of those quizzed said that they felt that face-to-face meetings were either very important or important, while just five per cent claimed they had neutral feelings on the matter.

Stephen Less, owner of – among other things – lapdancing chain Secrets, says you can never get better than a face-to-face meeting. When we spoke to him he was at the five-star Hotel Fouquet's Barriere in Paris (superior rooms from €750.00) on a business trip.

He admits the internet does make it easier to speak to business contacts but says, "When it comes to solving serious problems, you have to sit around a table with as many people who are involved as possible."

Less says he can even get two or three months' worth of paperwork done in just a few hours if he is sitting right next to those involved.

3 Location, location, location

If the hotel you are staying in is miles away from a meeting you have to attend, it will cost both time and money to get to where you need to be.

Brian Hay, founder of freight forwarding firm Cardinal Maritime, says location is often more important than price, as, "There is no point saving a few pounds for a heap of misery in making the trip more complicated than it needs to be."

He adds that it's best to "get as close to where you need to be as possible".

Take India. Many an entrepreneur has told us that although doing business in India has many benefits, one

of the disadvantages is traffic congestion and that you can waste a huge amount of time sitting in the back of a taxi.

4 Is two-star a false economy?

Budgets for business travel vary, as do attitudes to luxury – both for oneself and one's staff. It's also worth considering the impression a hotel gives about how much money your company has.

No client would be worried if you turned up to a meeting in a nice Mercedes, but they'd ask questions if you pulled up in either a Ford Ka or a Bugatti Veyron. The same principle is true of hotels.

Less, who says he always opts for four or five-star hotels when on business, says comfort is top of his agenda because he works long hours.

"You have to have somewhere decent. The quality of how you recharge your batteries at night actually to a degree dictates your performance at meetings during the day," he adds.

Not every entrepreneur has Less's budget. But, he says, there are ways around this: you could just make it look like you are staying in a luxury hotel by arranging to meet business contacts in the lobby of a top hotel and let them draw their own conclusions.

However, Steve Lowy, founder of UMI Hotels, says this is not something he would do.

He says it depends on the type of business you run but that more often than not it doesn't matter where you stay and that some five-star hotel lobbies are "cold and unfriendly places".

He says most of his best business meetings have taken place in local cafes and even in pubs.

5 Rubbing shoulders

Staying in the best hotel you can afford not only looks good, but there is also the possibility of bumping into fellow business acquaintances or, in the case of Less, former Beatles. ▶