



STARSTRUCK

## The Dirty Truth About Hotel Ratings

Think you know what a five-star hotel looks like? Think again. With no standardized system across the globe, hotel ratings can be confusing, not to mention totally unreliable. We investigated the four major systems out there—and ranked them in order of trustworthiness.

By Nicole Frehsee, Thursday, Aug 11, 2011, 4:00 AM | [Subscribe to the magazine](#)

### No. 3: User-Generated Rating Systems

**VERDICT:** *User ratings are more valuable en masse. The key is to focus on what the majority of reports seem to indicate about a property and to ignore extremely positive or negative reviews, which may be biased. Use these sites as a reference but not your sole reference.*

User-generated sites are built on feedback from the masses: TripAdvisor, for example, features more than 50 million traveler reviews sounding off on nearly 495,000 hotels worldwide. While the company, which launched in 2000, bills itself as having "World's most trusted travel advice," the sheer volume of sources—and TripAdvisor's inability to vet them all for accuracy—make these reviews something to take with a grain of salt. (A general rule is to ignore the ecstatically positive and totally negative reviews in favor of those in the middle.) While the site has stringent guidelines ("reviews should contain only original content and no quoted material from other sources...we do not allow quoted material from personal email correspondence with a property manager") and even has moderators to flag posts that seem fishy (like a hotelier giving his property rave reviews, for example), there's no way to catch every questionable review. Even with the caveat, peer reviews can be helpful, as they're often more detailed ("the room smelled of moldy hotel carpeting") and straightforward ("the check-in staff was great, but the hotel was on a yucky street") than those from third-party organizations or tourism boards.

### No. 4: Government-Run Ratings Systems

**VERDICT:** *Government-run ratings systems may be self-interested—the better a destination's hotels, the more tourists it'll draw—and unregulated by a third party. Proceed with caution, and always refer to at least one or two other sources.*

Most European countries have their own government-produced ratings, as well as countries in Asia, South America, and Africa. (There's no standardized system across Europe, but in 2009, an organization called the Hotelstars Union launched a drive to establish a common system across the EU. So far, 11 countries, including Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, are participating.) In Europe, reliability varies by country—the U.K.'s system is uniform across Great Britain and fairly trustworthy, though tourist authorities have toyed with the idea of including user reviews. In France, on the other hand, ratings aren't based on quality but on the presence of certain features (air-conditioning and bathroom facilities, for example). In Italy, a hotel can earn a single star just for changing the sheets on the beds once a week (don't let the bedbugs bite!). Also low on the reliability scale: Asia, South America, and Africa, where national tourism boards have no standardized criteria or oversight.

SEE MORE POPULAR CONTENT:

[10 Gorgeous Pools You Won't Believe Are Public](#)

[4 Most Common Reasons Airlines Lose Luggage](#)

[Secret Hotels of Paris](#)

[15 Places Every Kid Should See Before 15](#)

[10 New Wonders of the World](#)

**Note:** *This story was accurate when it was published. Please be sure to confirm all rates and details directly with the companies in question before planning your trip.*



#### CHECK CURRENT PRICES

HOTELS	FLIGHTS	CARS	CRUISES
--------	---------	------	---------

Your Destination

Check In  Check Out  Rooms

Choose Sites

- Choice Hotels  Travelocity  Trip Advisor
- Orbitz  Expedia  Hotwire
- Travel Ticker  Trip.com  Booking Buddy

#### Follow Us

- Newsletter
- Twitter
- Facebook
- RSS Feed

#### From Our Users

Loading .....



Comment on this article

Empty text box for comments with character count indicators (5 and 6).

(Limit 5000 characters / 5000 characters remaining)

SUBMIT COMMENT

Overall Rating:

Subscribe to Deal Alerts!

You missed a trip to Paris for \$599!

Subscribe to our Deal Alerts! newsletters right now, and never miss out again.

E-mail: [input field]

Zip code: [input field]

SIGN UP



Subscribe to Budget Travel

The world's most useful travel magazine costs just \$12 for 10 issues--or \$20 for 20 issues!

SUBSCRIBE

GIVE BUDGET TRAVEL AS A GIFT!



Recent Real Deals

Egypt, Air/6 Nights/Cruise, From \$1,299



Sail past the splendors of an ancient civilization on this weeklong stay and cruise.

- Ireland, Air/Car/6 nights, from \$899
India, Air/7 Nights, From \$1,599
Thailand, Air/7 Nights, From \$1,349
Palm Beach, Air/Car/3 Nights, From \$799
Copenhagen & Stockholm, Air/6 Nights, From \$1,187
China, Air/9 Nights, From \$1,299
Orlando, Air/3 Nights/Disney, From \$479
Borneo & Bangkok, Air/8 Nights, From \$1,999

Recent Features

10 Coolest Small Towns in America 2011



The winners in our sixth annual celebration of great hometown escapes may be short on people, but they're long on personality. Small wonder—the 437,480 votes from Budget Travel readers cheering on their favorites can't be wrong.

- 5 Classic American Drives
5 Credit Cards Every Traveler Should Consider
12 Restaurants With Spectacular Views
10 Popular Travel Scams Around the World
The Dirty Truth About Hotel Ratings
Beautiful Lakeside Drives
10 Gorgeous Pools You Won't Believe Are Public
Nonstop Caribbean Map: Fly Right to the Beach

PRIVACY | USER AGREEMENT | ONLINE FEEDBACK | CONTACT US | my BUDGET TRAVEL | E-MAIL NEWSLETTER

Budget Travel Magazine | Subscribe | Give a Gift | Subscriber Services | About Us | Media & Press Information | Advertising Sales | Free Travel Info

Copyright © 2011 Intellitravel Media, Inc., all rights reserved. "BudgetTravel ®," "BudgetTravelOnline ®," "Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Online," "Vacations for Real People ®" and the related logos are trademarks and service marks of Intellitravel Media, Inc.