



## CAN YOU REALLY BELIEVE WHAT YOU SEE?

When it comes to selecting hotels, resorts, and temporary living properties for business, leisure, or relocation-related travel, taking a closer, second look may go a long way to avoiding disappointment.



Hotels and other lodging providers use photographs to give potential guests a taste of amenities, accommodations, and ambiance. But in today's world of photo manipulation, sometimes those glossy photos tell a slightly misleading story. Unfortunately, these false expectations can ruin a vacation – and increase the stress felt by already stressed out relocating employees and their families.

When things do not go perfectly, relocating employees may lose focus and become less productive, or in the worst case, second-guess their decision to accept the new assignment. To help ensure there are no surprises concerning lodging, Graebel offers the following information.

### HOW DO PHOTOS MISLEAD POTENTIAL GUESTS?

- > Cropping can make items in photos appear larger than they actually are.

- > Some photos may be taken early in the morning to avoid showing crowds.<sup>1</sup>
- > Facilities may be staged to appear more inviting.<sup>2</sup>
- > Photoshop may be used to remove buildings, people, signs, etc.<sup>3</sup>

### AVOIDING PHOTO DECEPTION

When reviewing hotel-provided photographs, keep these tips in mind to put the images in the proper perspective:<sup>4</sup>

- > Look past the fresh flowers, room service, and other staged items – as these will not be included with the room.
- > Close-up shots of room details and exteriors avert eyes from the actual size of the room or amenity.
- > Images that emphasize the interior while showcasing views are often doctored, as proper lighting for these types of shots are hard to achieve.

<sup>1</sup> Scott Mayerowitz. "Paradise Lost? Your Hotel Doesn't Quite Look Like That." ABCNews.com, October 27, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Canning. "Hotel Photo Fakeouts: Web Images Show Different Version of Reality." ABC News, October 7, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Venessa Wong. "Beware: Your Hotel May Not Be as Nice as You Think." Bloomberg Businessweek, April 27, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Stone. "Hotel Photo Secrets: Why Doesn't My Room Look Like the Hotel's Photos?" PeterGreenberg.com.

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- > Hotels that show more images of guestrooms are likely giving a good representation of the different room types – not just focusing on the most expensive rooms.
- > Pay attention to the décor, as it can indicate outdated furnishings.
- > If something is not shown in a picture, assume the hotel didn't want to showcase it, and do your own research.

### CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Before booking reservations, take some time to investigate what others are saying about the properties being considered. Don't simply take the property's word for what they offer. These websites can provide valuable travel information:

- > Oyster.com – Search for reviews and photos of hotels provided by a team of undercover journalists.
- > TripAdvisor.com – Find photos taken by actual guests, along with their reviews, for hotels, resorts, and other vacation properties throughout the world.
- > TVtrip.com – Watch videos of hotel rooms and lobbies, as well as surrounding amenities, from more than 134,000 destinations – however, most are not located in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

- > Hotels.com – Read reviews for more than 120,000 hotels in over 60 countries.

Compare the photos provided by the property with images taken by former guests and reviewers found on the above listed websites. This process should help provide an accurate depiction of what the property is really like.

By using Google Maps to identify what is in the vicinity of the property, you can see if the photos may have been altered to remove eyesore buildings, as well as determine the proximity of parking facilities, transportation options, and activities.<sup>6</sup>

### PUTTING ONLINE REVIEWS TO USE<sup>7</sup>

- > Narrow down the list of possible properties before looking up reviews.
- > Only look at the most recent reviews.
- > Do not focus on individuals' star ratings, as they vary greatly, but instead look at why they assigned the rating.
- > Watch for recurring comments – noise, bad location, poor service, etc.
- > Understand that numerical ratings are based on the number of reviews and compilations of individuals' star ratings, and therefore, should be carefully considered.

- > Be careful about trusting every review – some people may have had ulterior motives for posting.
- > Watch for properties that respond to posts – even the negative ones – as that shows they are listening.

### HOW RELOCATION COMPANIES CAN HELP

Employers and their relocation companies should work together to identify the needs and requirements of relocating employees and their families. Additionally, a relocation company should be able to secure best pricing, provide the employee's policy and pre-approved requirements to the venue in advance of his/her arrival, and assist with any issue – including displeasure with temporary living or hotel accommodations – the relocating employee may have. Be sure to ask your relocation provider about their process for evaluating destination suppliers and if it includes seeing these suppliers, including temporary living resources, firsthand.

Thinking ahead. Moving You Forward. Graebel will keep your relocation program ahead of the curve.

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### WHAT DO YOU NEED? HOW CAN WE HELP?

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Greenberg. "Travel Tip: Look Before You Book Travel Web Sites." PeterGreenberg.com, August 5, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Stone. "Hotel Photo Secrets: Why Doesn't My Room Look Like the Hotel's Photos?" PeterGreenberg.com.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Stone. "How to Decipher Online Hotel Reviews." PeterGreenberg.com