

# Hotel Updates



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**W**e were finally able to hold a quarterly meeting with management and the AFA on July 26. This meeting had been delayed for quite some time. All of us were guilty of not being able to coordinate our schedules. At the meeting, we received some good news and, of course, some bad news. I’ll focus mostly on the highlights of the meeting.

Last November, at management’s request, we submitted a list of 12 cities with unacceptable layover hotels. Both AFA and ALPA agreed that problems with these hotels were such that we wanted action taken before the expiration dates of their respective contracts. Unfortunately management’s response to our requests has ranged from very slow to nonexistent.

We were, however, able to secure a new long hotel in Detroit last winter. This was relatively easy, as the contract with the St. Regis was due to expire.

We have been able to move some crews out of the Holiday Inn Downtown in Tampa and are working to accommodate everyone at another hotel. During last year’s inspection, we found what ALPA considered a very good alternative to the Holiday Inn in town. Because of management’s delay, this hotel has raised its rates and reduced the number of rooms available to us. Therefore, we had to reinspect the Tampa area, and are now awaiting the final outcome. We should be housing our longest overnights at the Hilton in St. Petersburg. Hopefully, the duty break cutoff point will be about 16 to 17 hours. This high cutoff is due to the 25-minute travel time to and from the hotel. Our management and AFA then favor using the Holiday Inn near Busch Gardens for the remaining long overnights. We oppose this choice because of the traffic and travel time to

the Holiday Inn. While travel time to this hotel can vary widely, the time to St. Petersburg remains the same no matter the time of day or weather. True, the Holiday Inn has gone through a renovation, and the rooms are much better than when we left the hotel. During the renovation the hotel also put a children’s play area in the pool, and is trying to cater more to the families heading to Busch Gardens. Regardless of the renovation, our objection remains the travel time. If AFA still wants to use this hotel, we see no problem with splitting the crews for these overnights. Rarely do ALPA and AFA disagree on hotels. But when we do, ALPA feels that management should place the crews where their respective committees want. In any case, we have a few other hotels in the west shore area that are interested in some business from US Airways. For overnights under 16 hours, we feel they will be quite suitable for the pilots. As of this writing, a final decision has not been made.

Another problem that we successfully addressed involved the change in the Newark long hotel. In this instance, management took ALPA’s recommendation to move to the East Hanover Hotel. Although travel time is not significantly reduced, we eliminated the isolated location problem. No other location offered more to do within a shorter driving time. This change occurred without any action or inspection on the part of our management.

The last city to have any action taken before the meeting was the CAE short hotel. Management made a trip to CAE to look around, and came back with only one additional hotel to choose from. While not particularly happy with this choice, management was willing to change to this hotel if we agreed to it. One of our

inspectors visited CAE and didn't like this hotel, but found three other hotels that would be suitable for the short overnight. During the meeting we presented these alternatives, and management agreed to open discussions with these hotels. The timeline to make the change is October, and we will be watching this one very closely.

In almost one year's time, only two out of 12 problems were fixed, and one (TPA) was partially resolved. With an understaffed purchasing department that is trying to develop business plans for the entire airline's needs, the two buyers responsible for hotel contracts have been utilized for other purposes. Hotel selection cannot be done over the phone or by viewing a presentation in an office. Onsite inspections of both hotels, including their surrounding areas, are required, which is why your committee is so qualified to render an opinion. In addition to giving up our free time to perform these inspections, we ultimately have to stay in these hotels.

Since the meeting, the Company has taken on the remaining hotels on the list. In Indianapolis, we will no longer have long overnights at the Quality Inn South (now the Ramada Inn and Conference Center) as of September 3. All short overnights will be out by the end of September. The long overnights will all be in town at the Radisson Hotel. All short overnights will be at the airport Ramada in tower rooms. I was able to convince the hotel's management that only by guaranteeing tower rooms to our crews would the hotel be able to renew the contract. However, if noise from the FedEx night operation is still a problem in the tower rooms, we will have to leave the hotel. The Ramada is becoming a Radisson, which should result in upgraded rooms, new windows, and improved soundproofing. Before we gave our final OK to this plan, I tried to get some feedback from crews that have recently stayed in the tower rooms. Unfortunately, even with requests for input on our website and code-a-phone, responses were few. I had to rely mostly on OF-310 forms, most of which reported no noise problems in the tower rooms, but considerable noise in the low-rise section.

In addition, we have been able to replace the Ramada in Cleveland for short overnights. On this trip, I was able to train our new DCA-based committee member, Tim Anderson. Tim volunteered for the committee way back in March. It has been tough to coordinate our schedules, and also to find a city to inspect that would

cover a wide range of hotels. I'm happy to report that all short overnights will be out of the Ramada starting November 1, at which time everyone will be in the airport Sheraton. We were unable to secure enough rooms from the Sheraton any earlier than November. Due to the Sheraton's location and lack of noise, we felt that its selection would best serve our crews. We also visited the Sheraton Four Points, our long hotel. We haven't had any long overnights there over the summer and will finally see some in September. Because of the sporadic nature of these long overnights we have not been able to come to terms with a hotel in town. The Sheraton Four Points has been renovated and has committed to ensuring that our crews are not stuck at the hotel during their stay. Please let us know how it goes. If we can find a hotel in a better location to take our business, we will push quickly and vigorously for the change.

MCI is another problem city, and I am reviewing options for changing the short overnight hotel. We will concentrate on the short overnight, since this hotel has triggered the most complaints. Our crews seem to have a love/hate relationship with the MCI long overnight hotel. Some like the location of our current long hotel but are not thrilled with the noise from the bar in the parking lot. We have been working to keep our rooms away from the bar, and recent complaints have been few. The drive is another problem, especially for a 14:05 overnight. Should we find a better short overnight, an adjustment in the cutoff time could be forthcoming. If time permits, we will try to review other long hotels. While I am fairly certain the drive time will not change much, suggestions from someone who knows the area are always appreciated.

During the meeting, we also discussed problems in SFO. Somehow the large increase in room requirements slipped past our management, and they have been trying to play catch up all summer. Your committee was informed of this problem only two days prior to the need for additional hotel rooms. First up for discussion was the Richelieu Hotel. This hotel is used by United to house flight attendants. United will not use five rooms in the hotel due to elevator noise. Of course, these are the rooms our management contracted for our use. Rarely has anyone had anything nice to say about this hotel.

In August it was not used for any pilots, but it looks like the Company is trying to use it again in September. I learned this by reviewing the schedule sent to me on August 15. After discov-

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### *Disapproval List*

**CLE short (Ramada)**—Overall condition of hotel, plus location next to trucking company. No restaurant for breakfast.

**IND short (Quality)**—Poor quality of the hotel and location. Enough said.

**MYR (Landmark)**—We received only one comment this month, but problems exist due to its location and the noise generated by other guests. With summer winding down, an active search will be forthcoming.

### *Watch List*

**ABE long**—Condition of hotel and location at bottom of hill and next to freeway. No comments this month. Long overnights have been reduced, and we are not sure where else we could go. United is also looking, and inspected this hotel as a possibility for their long overnights.

**CHS long**—Same hotel for all overnights. Long overnights have again been reduced. No comments this month.

**LAX (both Culver City hotels)**—Use of these hotels for the longs, with not much around. We had problems placing everyone during the Democratic Convention. We will be moving this city up on the inspection list.

The OF-310 count was light this month, as we seem to have a drop off in the number of complaints submitted during the summer. In addition, my schedule didn't allow me as much time as I normally have to answer the forms. Total answered for the month was 48. Of those seven concerned crew meals, one was on an old hotel, and two contained positive comments. The disapproval list has not changed, but we have taken action on two hotels that will be changed in two months.

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ering the problems our crews have been facing in SFO, an inspector was sent to find better accommodations for our crews. Management then contracted with the Grosvenor Suite Hotel on Knob Hill. This hotel has been in use for our crews since July 12, and I have not received any comments. Although I've received no complaints, I have one major objection to the use of the Grosvenor Hotel: lack of air conditioning. While I wouldn't give ALPA's OK for long-term use, we recognized that rejecting this hotel out of hand might leave us with no other options within the city. Our inspector expected the lack of air conditioning to be a very big negative, but found the hotel to be very nice and quite acceptable. We have ruled out many hotels in Europe because they are not air conditioned. Despite this problem, our inspector still felt this was the best hotel for our crews. He spent three nights in the hotel, and never had

a problem with noise. During our discussions, the Grosvenor proposed to air condition at least 50 rooms for our use by next May. The hotel is planning to air condition the entire hotel by 2003, but would advance that date to secure our contract. Not receiving any complaints so far, and knowing that after August we should be out of the real heat of the summer, we determined that this hotel is a much better option for our crews. Using this hotel should also prevent our crews from being relocated out of the city. After this mess, our management assures us they have taken some steps to make sure they are not surprised again by large changes in room requirements. We will see.

#### **Smoking rooms . . . again**

Another sizable problem involves smoking and non-smoking rooms. Quite a few years ago, we started requesting that all of our rooms be

reserved non-smoking. We went this way for two reasons: (1) It seemed the majority of our crewmembers were non-smokers, and (2) Normally, hotels always had smoking rooms left in inventory whenever our crews checked in. Except in a few cities, our crews were always able to request a change to a smoking room. The exceptions were SDF and MSP, where, for long-term lease and tax issues, the hotels required us to be in the same rooms night after night. There is now a small problem in SEA at the long hotel, but it seems to be working toward a resolution. We are now finding out that some of our crews are not asking for smoking rooms at check in, but are just deciding to smoke in the non-smoking rooms. I'm not sure why this occurs. Perhaps these people don't want to be separated from the rest of the crew, or don't want others to know they smoke. Perhaps the hotel doesn't have a smoking room to switch them to. We are learning that many of our hotels are not happy with our crews smoking in non-smoking rooms, and want to charge the offending crewmembers to clean the room.

I have a problem with this, as it may not be our crewmember that has committed the offense. We all know the mistakes hotels have made when checking us into rooms: assigning rooms already occupied, writing down the wrong room number, insisting we are not there when someone calls for us, or not updating their records when we change rooms, and then checking someone else into the room. I'm sure there are other problems, but that is not the point right now. We have to help those smokers that are unable to get a smoking room. However, if a smoker is assigned a non-smoking room and doesn't ask to change, then that crewmember should not smoke in the room.

We are having a significant problem in PWM with crews smoking in non-smoking rooms. The hotel has started to charge crewmembers \$75 each time they find someone smoking in a non-smoking room. As the hotel is busy and sells out most weeknights, this problem occurs frequently. The hotel management has been in place for some time, and I believe them when they say they have a big problem with this issue. They have also taken a few other steps to ensure they are not making false accusations. I really don't want to lose this hotel, as there is very little else to choose from in PWM. I know United would love to get into this hotel. Again, to the hotel management's credit, they haven't played one airline against another by asking who will pay more to stay there. They have

honored our contract, and our crews need to start doing the same.

I suggest that if it's very important for you to have a smoking room, please call the hotel ahead of time, especially if you're checking in late, and ask them to set aside a smoking room for you. This will reduce the likelihood of finding that all the smoking rooms are gone from inventory. And when you call ahead, write down the name of the person with whom you spoke and the time of the call. They should be able to let you know right then and there if the request can be honored. I hope everyone understands that I'm not pushing for a no-smoking policy. I want everyone to have what he or she needs on an overnight. I also expect everyone to abide by the rules. If we can't police ourselves, the hotels will do it for us by either charging to clean the rooms or not renewing our contract. In some places that could be a blessing, but more likely it will not. As always, I welcome your suggestions.

### **Future activities**

What is coming up for the committee? I hope to attend the first annual meeting of international hotel committee chairmen to find out how other international carriers (not from North America) work to find and approve hotels and solve problems. I'm also interested in what contract language they have. The meeting is in September. Also scheduled in October is the annual hotel committee chairmen meeting in Atlanta.

Upcoming inspections from the problem hotel list include CHA, FAY, MYR, and PHX. There were a few problems reported at the Valley Ho again this summer concerning the air-conditioning system. The hotel has taken steps to correct it by buying a larger unit to cool the rooms. They have also made a pledge to us to have our crews only in the #300 and #400 rooms, with the drapes hung properly to block the light for red-eye crews. They also will flush the air conditioning system on a more regular basis to keep it working better. In addition, they have agreed to give us more rooms, hopefully eliminating the need for any long overnight crew to be sent to the downtown Ramada.

Also on the horizon is the return of service to Amsterdam next spring. Service to this city will begin again on April 11, 2001. Now is the time to voice an opinion if we should return to the Dorint Hotel in The Hague. I feel this hotel offers many advantages for our crews. The num-

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ber one advantage is that there will be no wait for rooms from regularly scheduled arrival time. They also have the seaside community nearby, which in the summer is quite nice. The city of The Hague is also close by in the other direction. The biggest negative is the drive time from the airport. While Amsterdam is much closer, waits for rooms there can exceed two hours. Aside from the Dorint Hotels, I know of no other European hotel chain that will put the “no wait” guarantee in a contract. That is their biggest selling point. I know that Northwest just moved a crew back to the Dorint from their own hotel because of two-hour waits for rooms. United has again started sending crews back to The Hague for the same reason. We want to try and provide the best overall accommodations for our crews in Europe and North America, so please let us hear from you. We are particularly interested in opinions regarding Amsterdam.

### **Final thoughts**

Let me wrap this article up with these thoughts. I have tried to point out that the OF-310 forms are very helpful to your committee. Our management may not pay much attention to them, but we sure do. We try to make decisions based on what is reported to us, both good and bad, through these forms and e-mail. I know there is a feeling that the forms are a waste of time. From my perspective, they are not. When I can't get a response to a special question I may post on the website, I review and rely on what has been reported on the OF-310 forms. I also rely on them for information on places I, or other committee members, have not visited for quite some time. We are not mind readers, and we do want to reflect what the pilots want. Absent of your input, we rely on our own judgment and experience.

I would like to share one other report with everyone. Our management keeps track of the bounced checks our crewmembers write around the system. This information enables us to preserve the policy of cashing checks with only a US Airways ID. For the year 2000, not one pilot bounced a check. There were 48 flight attendants who bounced checks through July, at a total cost of \$2,137.60. Of the 48 instances, seven were repeat offenders.

Due to the length of article and time constraints, I didn't talk at all about the crew meal program. It was a very busy summer, and I will have something to report on this matter in my next article.

That's it for this month. I hope the article was informative. Please give the committee your feedback. We do use it, even if our management seems to show a deaf ear. With your help, we can and will push to make a difference.

*Thanks and have a good overnight!*

