

## Hotel Update



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I attended the annual Hotel Chairmen's Conference in September, hosted by Northwest Airlines. As always, we exchanged quite a bit of good information. Having so many pilots in one room who are familiar with cities is extremely helpful. However, I'm not sure if it is comforting or not to learn that the other pilot groups are also having the same problems with their respective hotels and managements.

There were more hotel companies represented this year than last. The word is getting out to the hotel industry that they need to talk to airline labor groups. No matter how good of an offer a hotel will make to our managements, if the end users are not happy we will do everything we can to get out of the hotel.

One of the more interesting points to come out of the meeting is how everyone is having problems with phone charges. Two hotel groups warned that the problem is spreading throughout their industry. United handles this by stating in their contract that they will not pay for any phone charges. Therefore, United will not consider any hotel that will not waive the phone charges. I'm not sure I would go in that direction: United has more clout in the industry because of their size. They also have the most defined contract language of any pilot group. I came away with many good ideas and hope I'll be able to implement them over time.

### Unpaid incidentals

Speaking of unpaid incidental charges/phone bills, we have a few of our own hotels contacting us about the problem; it seems to

be spreading. I try to keep the amenity list in the trip sheets up to date, but there are times when it is not accurate. Please refer to it first when you have a question about phone charges and/or if hotels offer discounts in the restaurant or for room service. With the rise in unpaid bills we are also seeing a shift from hotels letting us have phone privileges and the ability to charge food to our rooms without establishing credit first.

I had a long overnight in Albany and stopped to talk with the management of the hotel on this issue. They claim they are running about \$3,000 of unpaid bills a month from airline crews. To stop this they are now requiring all crewmembers to establish credit at the front desk before phones are turned on or accepting charges to your room. I have asked for them to send me some documentation of the problem.

The hotel hosts other airlines besides US Airways, so I'm trying to determine if it is our crews and not someone else's who are walking out on bills.

This hotel doesn't offer any discounts in the restaurant to our crews and their response to me was why should they offer discounts when we can't get bills paid now? If establishing credit at the desk reduces or eliminates the problem they would be very happy to look at extending a discount to our crewmembers. I never thought of tying these two areas together, but I can see the hotel's point. Another danger I see is when we have some of our hotels change flags and the new reservation system generates more traffic for the hotel. Our contract becomes less profitable with more retail guests. This, along with a couple thousand dollars of unpaid charges, could cause us to lose some of our favorite hotels.

*“ With the rise in unpaid bills we are also seeing a shift from hotels letting us have phone privileges and the ability to charge food to our rooms without establishing credit first. ”*

*“ Please when leaving your room, take some form of identification with you. It will speed up any response should something happen to you while out on your own. ”*

**Van service**

Another problem that has surfaced recently is van service to and from the airport and in the local area. Believe it or not, your committee tries to select hotels that are in locations where we will not have to rely on the hotel van to get anywhere. When we are not successful in this, we try to make sure the hotel van is available to transport crews to local restaurants, movies, and other attractions. Where we run into a problem is when a hotel has the van set up and insured to run only to and from the airport, and/or to transport only our crewmembers.

One hotel that does come to mind is the Doubletree in Ft. Lauderdale. This hotel only provides van service for our crews and no one else. Therefore, the hotel insures the van only for transporting our crewmembers working the trip. I have asked the hotel to look into changing this insurance but as of yet they have not gotten back to me. Not being an insurance expert, I have no idea what the additional cost might be. So for now please realize that the van in FLL is only able to transport our crewmembers. If you see them doing otherwise, please let me know so I may bring it to the attention of hotel management.

**Carry ID**

We also experienced the untimely death of one of our First Officers on an overnight. The gentleman was jogging on the overnight and collapsed while away from the hotel. The rest of the crew didn't discover this until departure time from the hotel when the First Officer didn't show up. The Captain went with hotel security to check the room and found all of his stuff there. The point: He didn't have any identification with him while jogging. The hotel received a call from the police letting them know a white male had been found, and after looking for him at departure, they put the two together. Please when leaving your room, take some form of identification with you. It will speed up any response should something happen to you while out on your own.

**Smoking/non-smoking rooms**

Regarding smoking and non-smoking rooms, hotels should be holding 100 percent non-smoking rooms. There was a time when AFA didn't want all non-smoking rooms and our management had the policy of holding two smoking rooms with crews of six or more. That is no

***Disapproval List***

**EWR long** — Long drive and poor location.

**DTW long** — The location offers nothing.

***Watch List***

**CLE short (Ramada)** — Hotel in very poor condition.

**IND (Quality South)** — Poor hotel condition and poor location

**MCI long** — Distance from the airport, room quality, and lack of food in the hotel. I received one positive comment on this hotel this month.

**LGA** — New to the list is Golden Touch Limo in New York—very poor service, especially airport pick up. Other airlines report better service from Golden Touch than Grey Line. We are trying to get it worked out.

The OF-310 count for the month was 64 forms, e-mails and notes. Six of the comments were positive, two were about training rooms, and one concerned crew meals.

Please continue to take the time to fill out the OF-310 forms, send e-mails or drop the committee a note. We need your input.

longer in effect. In some of our larger overnight cities I know hotels hold some smoking rooms because the probability is much higher that a smoker will check in sometime during the day. All of our hotels are supposed to switch a crewmember to a smoking room when asked if one is available. The smoking room may be on the first floor, in another building, or have an outside entrance. At that time the crewmember should be made aware of this change and it will then be their option to accept the smoking room or stay in the non-smoking room and NOT SMOKE in the room!

### **Training hotels**

We made a trip to MIA and looked around PIT at the current hotel training rooms and other options for our crews in training. A decision for MIA should be made very soon, as the Airbus 330 training will be getting into full swing shortly. It is my understanding that all ground school and the first five simulator periods will be in MIA. We will probably have at least two hotels to handle the load as the B-737-3/400, -200 and B-757 are also using simulators in MIA.

In Pittsburgh, the Candlewood can't handle all the rooms we are requesting and we will need to split off some rooms. We are still working on the change in TPA from our current long hotel. I have over 24 comments on the hotel in the one year we have been using it, which I believe proves that it is not an adequate hotel for our crews. Tampa could be heading for a grievance filing.

Our management is being very slow to react for two reasons: The contract has one more year on it and they don't want to break it, and the AFA and ALPA disagree on the best alternative hotel and management is reluctant to split us up. I don't see anywhere in our contract that we have to stay with the flight attendants, and when we have a situation like this and there is no additional cost, I believe they should give us what we want. Even if there is a cost differential involved, I still believe they should follow our wishes.

### **Hotel reviews**

I also did some looking around in MSP and met with our current hotel's management. They are losing NWA to another hotel. They feel that the van problem, which has been our biggest problem, will be solved. We are still monitoring the noise issue as there is supposed to be a

new runway being constructed in MSP. That could force a move because of changing flight paths or it might make our current hotel quieter. We are still doing some research on this.

In EWR we have identified a few other areas we need to look at, as other airlines have moved crews there and found things to be working out quite well. All of these places have shorter transportation time and offer much more within walking distance.

We are planing a trip to DTW since we are on a month-to-month contract with the current long hotel and, again, no one likes the area.

We also reviewed MCO for the long overnight and are still waiting for final bids from the hotels inspected.

Also in the works is a trip to IND to review all the hotels in use now.

***Have a good overnight!***



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