

Can you afford the real price of staying with relatives this Holiday Season?

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Everybody knows that there is no such thing as a free lunch, right? But somehow when it comes to Holiday Season planning and the offer of staying for free with a relative, suddenly we forget.

Disclosure alert: clearly, we at Hotelbeds benefit from the sale of every extra hotel room and this is an attempt at persuading you to book a hotel room for every trip....and a fun read!

Let's start with accommodation rule #1: always establish the terms and conditions well in advance of 'booking' your accommodation.

And this is where the problem starts. When you accept to stay with your in-laws or relatives over the Holiday Season, there's no terms & conditions agreement, no guarantee of quality, not even a star rating!

Please don't get me wrong, visiting family is always nice and even more over the holidays. Quality time together is where it's at, no doubt about it. But I would put forward an argument for quality over quantity - meaning, you don't actually have to stay at your in-laws' home, or anyone else's.

Firstly, consider that you can have too much of a good thing. Spending 24 hours a day together can turn into a stress-filled trip and cause you to evoke that cheesy-Monday-water-cooler-phrase 'I need a vacation from my vacation'. And no one wants to be 'that guy or girl'.

Secondly, consider all the benefits of having your own space. Some pleasures in life money cannot buy, but this, yes you can. Your hotel is judgement free zone. Leave your bed unmade, leave the toilet seat up, socks on the floor. It's your hotel room! If you stay at a relative's house, get mentally prepared to be on your best behavior until the day you leave. But when you stay at a hotel, leaving a pile of damp towels in the bathroom is not a problem.

Next, convenience and comfort benefits. Sleep better knowing you don't need to worry about Uncle Harry snoring next door. Much better than sleeping at an air mattress or a basement pullout - your very own hotel mattress! No need to worry about sharing a bathroom or waiting until your niece or nephew is done fighting over who gets to go first.

And then there are all the wonderful luxuries a hotel can offer you that it would be a bit unfair to ask of your relatives: "Hey Aunt Julie, can you overnight my dry cleaning?"; "Grandpa, I'll have my eggs over medium with a side of turkey bacon...sorry it's 3am but I'm hungry"; "Where's my warm cookie at check-in mom?!". Concierge services for tickets or transfers, and much more are all available in a good hotel.

Ultimately, by booking a hotel you remain the boss, in charge of your own agenda. Feeling the need to flee? No problem, your hotel will give you an escape route. Whether you need to get away from your super cute nieces all under the age of 4, or avoid that guilt trip, you will have a hotel room to call your own.

Worried about hidden costs or poor service? Don't worry, every Hotelbeds booking is part of a contract we have with our hotel partners. Plus, good luck complaining about your lumpy bed at

Uncle Joe's and Aunt Judy's on social media.

But when it comes to relatives, even if you are brave enough to speak up, often the ultimate court of appeal is the eldest member of the family, and their impartiality could be massively affected by what present you bought them, or even worse, didn't.

My colleagues in Spain often remind me of a great Spanish phrase when we are considering our budgets: if you buy cheap, it will cost you a lot. So if you're being offered a free room this year from relatives, ask yourself: can I really afford this? When you look at the real price, you may decide it's going to be a whole lot cheaper to pay out for a decent hotel.

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