



The Issue with Resort Fees: A Call for Transparency and Fair Pricing

Description

“Wild ducks make a lot of noise, but they also have the sense to benefit from occasionally flying in formation.”

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For us, traveling is not just a pastime but a deep-seated passion that adds value to our lives. It allows us to immerse ourselves in new destinations, embrace diverse cultures, and create unforgettable memories. However, amidst the thrill of exploration, there's a pervasive issue that continues to trouble travelers globally, and that is the imposition of resort fees. Whether called facility fees, destination fees, or amenity fees, these additional charges levied by lodging providers have sparked widespread debate, dissatisfaction, and regulatory scrutiny within the hospitality industry. This has really started to become a pet peeve of ours, and it's becoming increasingly difficult to overlook. We are committed to

uncovering the roots, effects, regulations, and customer challenges related to these fees. We will present ways to avoid the fees and review the efforts being made to create a fairer pricing system.

Origins and Controversy about Resort Fees

Resort fees, a strategy that originated in North America for hotels to offset operational costs while appearing to offer competitive room rates, have now become a global issue. These fees have expanded to tourist destinations worldwide, including parts of Mexico, the Caribbean, and Canada. They are often not readily apparent at the time of booking. They have evolved into a significant revenue stream for hotels, amounting to a staggering \$2.47 billion in the hotel industry as of 2015. Typically presented as a mandatory charge separate from the advertised room rate, resort fees purport to cover various amenities such as Wi-Fi access, gym facilities, parking, and shuttle services.

Our Personal Experience

Do we believe that resort fees have their place? Historically, if we are at a hotel with extensive grounds and amenities, we rarely blink an eye. However, we still believe the resort fee should be included in the advertised price. What irritates us is being charged a resort fee when you are not, by any definition, at a resort but a standard hotel. That is something we take exception to.

Our personal experience at a hotel in downtown Honolulu, Hawaii, in 2023 vividly illustrates the frustration caused by misplaced resort fees just so the hotel can line their pockets. We were charged a daily resort fee of \$35 at what anyone would call a standard hotel, an average pool, and a small gym. To add salt to the wound, the hotel was very dated and in need of significant renovation. They state the resort fee pays for Wi-Fi, which we already had through our loyalty status and costs much less on its own, and tiny discounts on peripheral activities. This was incredibly disappointing because the hotel was a city hotel with no grounds, open spaces, beach access, or privileges as their nearby sister property on the beach. For example, it only offered a 10% discount at the small hotel restaurant that had minimal operating hours. That is often the case at many hotels, without the need for resort fees.

Keep in mind the front desk staff are not the bad guys.

We felt that the reasoning behind such fees was weak at best. It was a scam in the end to steal money for a property that is not a resort. Even after voicing our concerns to the management, who agreed they were not a resort, we were offered only a partial refund. This seemed like a band-aid solution to a deeper issue of transparency and fairness. Our experience sheds light on the need for change in the hospitality industry. Just because they can charge it doesn't mean they should, especially if what they offer is standard hotel services.

We never held the manager personally accountable in our interactions. He does not make the rules; he adheres to them. In our conversation, he told us that the company is considering removing these resort fees and making them part of the room cost. Sadly, 18 months later, nothing has changed.



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Frustrations and Transparency Issues with Resort Fees

One of the primary grievances against resort fees is their lack of transparency. Many travelers only discover these fees upon check-in or check-out, complicating their ability to compare total accommodation costs during the booking process. These fees are shown during the booking process at most properties but are often embedded and easy to miss. This undermines consumer trust but also leads to frustration over unexpected expenses. Moreover, the scope of what resort fees cover varies widely from one establishment to another, further complicating matters for consumers. While some fees include comprehensive services such as access to pools, spa facilities, and recreational activities,

others may encompass only minimal amenities, leaving guests feeling shortchanged and misled. This was precisely the case during our stay in Honolulu.

Impact on Customer Satisfaction

Beyond financial implications, resort fees significantly impact customer satisfaction and trust in the hospitality industry. Travelers who feel deceived or unfairly charged are less likely to return to the same hotel or recommend it to others, potentially damaging the hotel's reputation and profitability over the long term. This was the case for us. Our online reviews of the hotel were not favorable, and we will never return or recommend the hotel.

This dissatisfaction should underscore the need for hotels to adopt fair and transparent pricing practices that prioritize consumer trust and loyalty. At this time, as travel is at record numbers, that seems to be of little interest in the hotel industry.

Legal and Regulatory Landscape for Resort Fees

In response to mounting consumer complaints and advocacy efforts, regulatory bodies in various regions have begun to scrutinize the practice of resort fees. For instance, the European Union has taken a proactive stance by mandating that all mandatory fees must be included in the advertised price upfront, ensuring transparency and preventing surprise charges. In contrast, efforts in the United States have faced challenges, with accommodations required to disclose resort fees during booking but not necessarily include them in the initial price listing. This disparity highlights the ongoing debate and regulatory hurdles surrounding resort fees on a global scale.

The Way Forward: Strategies for Transparency and Fairness

Addressing resort fees necessitates concerted efforts from both the hospitality industry and regulatory bodies. More straightforward regulations and robust enforcement mechanisms can ensure that consumers are fully informed about the total cost of their stay from the outset. Moreover, hotels must strive for consistency and fairness in how resort fees are implemented, ensuring that they accurately reflect the value provided to guests. This includes standardizing what amenities are covered under resort fees and justifying these charges transparently to guests.



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Strategies for Consumers

There is some way around these fees. Several proactive strategies can be employed by travelers seeking to avoid resort fees. Booking through loyalty programs that waive these charges for elite members or utilizing travel credit cards that offer statement credits for travel-related expenses can help mitigate additional costs. In our case, as we are big fans of Hilton, when we use points to stay at a resort, the resort fee is waived, saving us even more money. Additionally, vigilance during the booking process and a thorough review of terms and conditions can empower travelers to make informed decisions about where to stay.

Another effective strategy is to research alternative accommodations that do not impose resort fees. Many smaller boutique hotels, bed and breakfasts, and vacation rentals may offer competitive rates without additional mandatory charges. Websites and apps specializing in accommodations often allow filtering options to exclude properties with resort fees.

Engaging with hotels directly through phone calls or emails before booking can also yield beneficial results. Inquiring about the specifics of resort fees, negotiating their removal, or requesting complimentary upgrades or amenities in lieu of paying the resort fee can sometimes be successful, especially for guests with loyalty status or those booking extended stays.

What can we do as consumers about resort fees?

For frequent travelers who prioritize transparency and fairness, supporting advocacy groups and initiatives that push for stricter regulations on resort fees can also make a difference. By participating in consumer feedback platforms, social media campaigns, or contacting lawmakers, travelers can contribute to shaping a hospitality industry that prioritizes honesty and consumer rights.

Maintaining awareness of evolving regulatory landscapes both domestically and internationally will provide insights into changes in resort fee practices and consumer protections. Staying informed allows travelers to adapt their booking strategies accordingly, ensuring they make choices aligned with their values and preferences.

Final Thoughts

As travelers, we must recognize that resort fees are now a standard practice in the hospitality industry. However, we can exercise our influence to push for increased transparency and equity in these charges. By implementing more straightforward regulations, educating consumers, and promoting best practices, hotels can build more vital trust, satisfaction, and loyalty with their customers. In the United States, it should be mandatory for hotels to include resort fees in the advertised price, just as it is in the EU.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that travelers get fair value for their money without unexpected and mandatory charges. As consumers become increasingly informed and demand greater transparency, the hospitality industry must respond with integrity and accountability to maintain its reputation and create positive travel experiences. Our personal experiences reflect broader consumer frustrations with resort fees, highlighting the need for fairness and transparency that resonates with travelers worldwide.

Advocating for an honest, transparent, and enjoyable travel experience will help us collectively work towards a future where travelers can explore the world confidently without fear of hidden costs.

Together, we can shape a hospitality industry that prioritizes fairness, integrity, and exceptional customer service. As a result, ensuring that every journey is memorable for all the right reasons.

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