

Maximising your hotel accommodation dollar

Brian Ralph

Please note: This article is about using hotel comparison websites and online hotel rewards programs.

Introduction

There are many reasons why people book accommodation via online websites. Sometimes you've decided that you'd like to get away somewhere and then this deal pops up on a website or in an email you've just received. Alternatively you may need to book accommodation as a result of a stopover on a trip, or perhaps you've decided to attend an event or join a tour but also stay a couple of days either side of it.

The solution to the first situation is to simply subscribe to any number of travel and accommodation websites and then sit back and wait (please see our 'Top travel deals' webpage for more information). The answer to the second situation is that you are going to have to go looking for an accommodation deal yourself. There are three options to support this strategy:

- Open your favourite internet search engine, type in your destination plus "best accommodation deals" and see what pops up
- Go straight to your favourite online accommodation booking site and book there, e.g. [Booking.com](#), [Expedia](#), [Hotels.com](#), [Wotif](#), [Airbnb](#) or some similar site
- Use a hotel comparison website plus a rewards incentive scheme to possibly maximise your dollars.

Hotel comparison websites


If we put Airbnb and similar sites aside for the moment and just concentrate on hotel-type booking sites, although some people just go straight to their one favourite accommodation website and book online without thinking any more about it, *I always visit my favourite hotel comparison website first.*

Despite what various other websites claim, it seems to me that the following three websites are your best option for comparing prices for various types of accommodation across many different booking sites worldwide:

1. [HotelsCombined](#)

A search on HotelsCombined will bring up a list of all its hotels etc that meet your search criteria. For each venue it will display the 4-5 cheapest room prices it has found, plus the best price highlighted in blue on the RHS. To see more room and price options matching your search criteria you will need to click on "Compare xx websites" (shown in blue at the bottom of each hotel listing).

Have a look at this example:



Hotel Dubrovnik ★★ ★★
Dubrovnik, Croatia [Show map](#)

Double Room With Balcony - Non-Refundable... Breakfast included Booking.com	AUD \$135
Double Or Twin Room Breakfast included Agoda.com	AUD \$140
Double Room Breakfast included Amoma.com	AUD \$139 3 rooms left
Double Room With Balcony - Non-Refundable... Breakfast included Priceline.com	AUD \$135
Double 1 Or 2 Beds Standard Breakfast included HotelQuickly.com	AUD \$155

[Compare 11 websites](#)

6.9
Based on 645 reviews

~~AUD \$155~~
AUD \$135
For 1 night

[View Deal](#)

Booking.com

HotelsCombined has an extensive search facility allowing you to search by property type (hotel, apartment, B&B etc), star rating, guest rating, price, best deals, city district, hotel name contains (word), hotel features, theme (beach, boutique, budget etc) and hotel chain.

This website only offers searches for 'best price' accommodation.

2. Skyscanner

A search on Skyscanner will bring up a list of all its hotels etc that meet your search criteria. For each venue it will display the three cheapest room prices it has found. To see more room and price options matching your search criteria you will need to click on "Show more prices" (shown in blue at the bottom of each hotel listing).

Have a look at this example:



Hotel Dubrovnik ★★ ★

3.18 km. to the centre of Dubrovnik (map)

Wi-Fi Parking

Hotels.com Double room ~~\$184~~ **\$131** Breakfast included Non refundable [View deal →](#)

wotif Double room ~~\$184~~ **\$131** Breakfast included Non refundable [View deal →](#)

Expedia Double room ~~\$184~~ **\$131** Breakfast included Non refundable [View deal →](#)

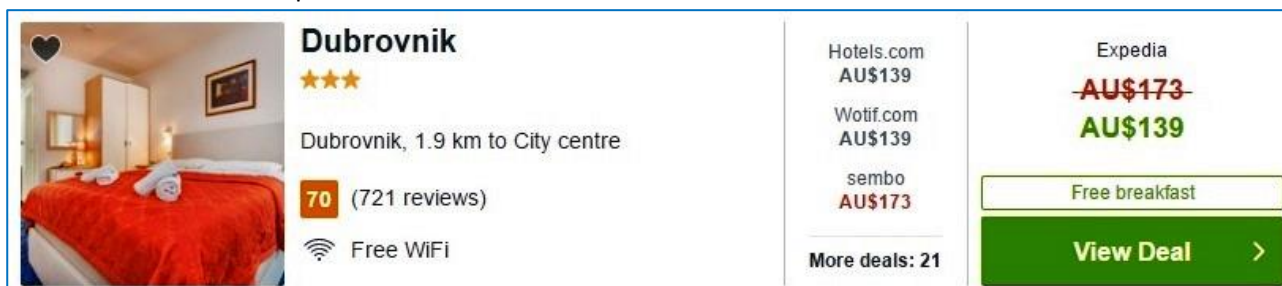
[Show more prices](#)

Skyscanner has an extensive search facility allowing you to search by price, star rating, city district, meal plan, cancellation policy, facilities, accommodation type (hotel, apartment, B&B etc) and hotel chain. This website also offers searches on 'best price' flights and car hire.

3. Trivago

A search on Trivago will bring up a list of all its hotels etc that meet your search criteria. For each hotel it will display the four cheapest room prices it has found, with the best price highlighted in green on the RHS. To see more room and price options matching your search criteria you will need to click on "More deals" (shown in black underneath the list of prices).

Have a look at this example:



Dubrovnik ★★ ★

Dubrovnik, 1.9 km to City centre

70 (721 reviews)

Free WiFi

Hotels.com AU\$139

Wotif.com AU\$139

sembo ~~AU\$173~~

More deals: 21

Expedia ~~AU\$173~~ **AU\$139**

Free breakfast

[View Deal >](#)

Trivago has the most extensive search facility. It allows you to search by star rating, guest rating, price, distance from the city centre, address and hotel name. Additional filters are provided for hotel facilities, type of lodging (hotel, apartment, B&B etc), food and beverage options (kosher etc), children's facilities, wellness/spa facilities, quantity of rooms, hotel chain, room facilities, sport facilities, theme (beachfront,

boutique, eco-friendly etc), suitable for (groups, singles, honeymooners etc) and accessibility (wheelchair accessible etc).

This website only offers searches for 'best price' accommodation.

* Interestingly, all three of these screenshots were taken within 60 seconds of each other, showing slightly different prices for all three sites. Sorry but I can't explain why.

Online accommodation websites offering incentive schemes

While many websites offer 'special offer' emails and newsletters if you sign up with them, often giving discounted prices on various selected hotels, it would seem that only a limited number of booking websites offering accommodation have their own incentive scheme as well. The two main ones in Australia appear to be:

[Expedia](#)

By signing up with Expedia you can receive special deals and exclusive offers by email, plus access to Expedia's '[collect and redeem' points system](#) which can be used to pay for some or all of a hotel booking or holiday package.

This is how it works:

- You need to sign into Expedia before you make your booking through them
- You earn 2 points for every AU\$1 spent on hotels and packages that include a hotel, activities and select hire car.
- Flights earn 1 point per AU\$5 spent, plus airline points.
- You can get AU\$25 off your next hotel with as few as 3,500 Expedia+ points.
- You can get twice the value for your points when you redeem for a +VIP Access hotel.
- You can use your points to book travel for others.

While it's a complex task to determine the actual value of Expedia points, one [website article](#) in 2015 calculated that **the effective return on Expedia points for hotels was 1.42%**.

[Hotels.com](#)

By signing up with Hotels.com you not only gain access to its 'secret prices' (giving up to 50-60% off selected hotels) but you can also access its '[collect and redeem' rewards system](#) where you can "collect ten nights to get one free".

This is how it works:

- You need to sign into Hotels.com before you make your booking through them
- When making your booking, you need to select hotels identified on their website as 'collect' properties (i.e. properties through which you can collect reward dollars)
- For every night you stay at a 'collect' property they credit you with 10% of the money you paid as reward dollars.
- Once you have stayed for a total of ten nights at 'collect' properties, you can use all the reward dollars you have collected as full or part payment for a night at a 'redeem' property (i.e. a property that will allow you to redeem your reward dollars there), i.e. you could get an 11th night totally free – except for any taxes and fees that must be paid.
- How much you have to pay for your 11th night depends on the value of the reward dollars you have earned, plus the price of the 11th property at which you want to stay. If you book an 11th night either less than or equal to the value of your redeem dollars, you pay nothing. If you book a more expensive place on that 11th night, you will have to pay the difference between the reward dollars and the room cost.
- Your accumulated nights don't expire provided you book and stay at a Hotels.com property within 12 months of your last stay at one of their properties. (You can pay for this new booking using money or by redeeming one or more free nights you may have earned already, i.e. as long as there is some sort of

activity on your account every 12 months your free nights and accumulated reward dollars will not expire.)

- Those properties that are 'collect' and/or 'redeem' properties are clearly labelled on their website. Calculating the effective return on Hotels.com rewards dollars is quite simple. The same [website article](#) from 2015 showed that **the effective return on Hotels.com rewards for hotels was 10%**! In addition, if you search for "online hotel rewards programs in Australia" you will constantly get articles that state that Hotels.com is the best and most simple hotel rewards program for *casual* travellers booking hotels and other related accommodation online (please see 'Other useful reading' below).

Putting them both together

In summary, if you're the sort of person who prefers to book into a hotel or one of the other types of accommodation offered via an online hotel booking site then your best solution is to:

1. Join the Hotels.com rewards scheme with its 10% return
2. Use a hotel price comparison website to search for the best deals
3. If the Hotels.com price for the room you want is *less than 10% higher* than the best price shown on the comparison website *and* the hotel is a Hotels.com 'collect rewards' property, then sign in and book via Hotels.com – you're going to be saving money.
4. If the hotel you've found is not a Hotels.com 'collect' property, and you're not absolutely tied or devoted to this particular hotel, then I suggest you go look for another nearby hotel that satisfies all your criteria, including being a Hotels.com 'collect' property. 😊

If you'd like to read more on how to actually do this, please see [Part 2 of this same article](#).

Other useful reading

[Hotel rewards demystified – everything you need to know to get started earning points from your hotel stays](#)

[Which Online Travel Agency Has the Best Rewards Program?](#)

[Which travel site rewards program is best for you?](#)

[Comparing the Best Online Travel Agency Reward Programs](#)

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Brian was Principal of Auburn GHS from 1992-2002, NSWSPC Futures Principal (2003), Principal in the Secondary Education Directorate (2004-05) and a Principal Liaison Officer (2006-09). He is a Life Member of the NSWSPC. In his spare time these days he plays with his grandkids, plans trips abroad and among other things works on the new Principal Futures website.