

Rip-off Britain?

Our snapshot survey compares the cost of budget and luxury hotel rooms in popular city-break destinations

Whether it's two weeks in the sun or a long weekend in the country, we're taking more holidays than ever, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Short breaks (one to three nights) increased by more than a third between 2000 and 2005, so with this in mind, we checked the cost of a night's stay for two at budget and luxury hotels in popular city-break destinations.

Our report looks at hotels run by Accor – the biggest hotel chain in Europe and the fourth largest worldwide. The chain advertises that it has hotel brands to suit all budgets. Its Sofitel hotels are the premium option, while Ibis offers 'round-the-clock service at budget prices'.

We found that London was most expensive for the luxury hotel, at £254.98 a room – more than £36 above the next dearest (Dubai) and more than double the price of a night's stay in the Sofitel in Madrid. Sofitel told us that its London hotel was in a prime location and that its prices were consistent with competitors'.

London was the second most expensive choice, at £90, for an Ibis hotel. Only the Accor-owned Red Roof Inn, Manhattan, cost more. There is no Ibis in New York, so we chose the Red Roof because it is of a similar standard.

The nearest Ibis to the centre of Rome is 14km away, near the airport, so we looked instead at the three-star Mercure Roma Corso Trieste hotel, which is also part of the

THE COST OF A ROOM FOR TWO

We compare the cost of a room for two with breakfast in budget and luxury hotels in popular city-break locations

City	Budget (Ibis)	Luxury (Sofitel)
Berlin	£67.83	£131.71
Dubai	£47.07	£218.06
Lisbon	£54.63	£138.29
London	£90	£254.98
Madrid	£66.51	£116.97
New York	£105.68 ^a	£206.70
Paris	£58.61	£148.17
Rome	£63.22 ^a	£156.73

^a No city-centre Ibis, so we chose nearest equivalent. Prices checked 15 January 2007, inc taxes. Exchange rates (15 January) £1 = US\$1.96, € 1.52, AED 7.21

Accor chain and is much closer to the centre. Both the Ibis at £72.44 and Mercure at £63.22 were cheaper than London.

All prices are for a night's stay for two adults, with breakfast, in a city-centre hotel in peak season – Saturday, 21 July 2007. In each case we chose the best rate that would allow you to make changes before you travel, whether a promotional or best unrestricted rate, and prices include taxes.

London was also the most expensive place to stay with one of Ibis's competitors, the budget hotel Express by Holiday Inn. It charged £81.75 for a room for two in London, compared with £65.20 in Berlin £53.84 in Rome and £33.59 in Paris.

Websites such as www.tripadvisor.com show what others thought of a hotel.

A room for two in London was more than in the other European capitals

Our verdict

London is expensive, according to our snapshot survey of city-centre room prices. If you are planning a city break, book your accommodation as far ahead as possible, check the hotel chain's website before you look elsewhere and have a look at our '5 ways to save', right.



MAGAZINE OFFER

Holiday Which?

Holiday Which? gives you independent and unbiased advice, including tips on trips, the lowdown on tour operators, your rights on flights, holiday health, how to avoid rip-offs, and test results for travel products. As a subscriber, you get free holiday guides and free unlimited telephone holiday legal advice. To try two issues for only £3, call 01992 822800 or see www.which.co.uk/hwtrial



5 ways to save on the cost of a city-centre hotel room

1 If you're staying in a chain hotel, check the price on the company's website before you book it anywhere else.



These websites often claim to guarantee the lowest prices if you book direct.

2 Most hotel chains offer advance purchase promotional prices if you book more than 14 days in advance, so it certainly can pay to book ahead. Make sure, however, that you check the small print for the cancellation terms and conditions.

3 Have a look at the hotel's rates without breakfast. You may find a

local café that can offer you a similar breakfast at a cheaper price.



4 Don't forget to check websites such as www.laterooms.com, www.discount-hotels.com or www.lowcostbeds.com for cheap or short-notice rooms. A site such as www.quickbook.com may undercut the rates, particularly for US hotels.

5 To get the best deal, make sure you get an inclusive quote before booking. If you're booking online, the initial price doesn't always include taxes and service and it's not always clear what will be added.

