

Choosing a Hotel

What are the hotel options?

- Contact the local visitor/convention bureau. They cannot negotiate rates, but can coordinate list of hotels based on your needs and can suggest hotels to stay away from. They can also help find local transportation.
- Contact local teams and ask where they would stay if visiting their local competition.
- Contact other teams who may be traveling to the competition to try and get group rates.
- An alternate to a standard hotel is to use corporate apartment short-term rentals - you get all the comforts of home and can put a lot of people into a townhouse apartment!

Location

- How far from the venue is the hotel? (If you have a charter bus, it is often less expensive to stay an extra 20 minutes away.)
- Does the city where the venue is located have free or public transportation that also goes to your hotel? If you don't have transportation, can the hotel provide transportation to and from the airport, and to and from the venue?
- Are there activities for chaperoned student groups to do at night nearby? (malls, cinemas, bowling)
- Where is the closest medical facility?
- Get clear directions including full street names (Street, Road, Avenue)
- Will there be construction in the area which may slow down timely departures, arrivals? Are the directions on the website still valid? If the construction is near the hotel, will they be working at night?

Facilities

- How many people are allowed to bunk in one room?
- Can the hotel book all your rooms adjacent in one area, or will you be on different floors, or different wings (a chaperone's nightmare)?
- Consider suite hotels with bedroom, living rooms (may have sofa beds) and kitchens. Be sure to clarify what the suite layout is. If the bedroom can be closed off, early-to-bed people can get their rest while late-nighters can still use the living area.
- Are Smoking/non-smoking rooms available? Keep in mind any asthmatics on the team who cannot tolerate a smoking room.
- Do they have a spare conference room where the team can meet socially? Price the hotel charge for a catered group ice cream social or pizza party. Do they allow outside food to be brought in or must it be catered by the hotel?
- Do they have a fax machine/office equipment that you can use if needed?
- Does the hotel have a pool? Indoor or outdoor? What are the hotel policies on its use? What are your school board/insurance policies on using a pool while on a field trip? Consider pool open hours to see how much time the group will get outside of competition.
- Does the hotel have an exercise room that the team may use? Check rules and times.
- Can the hotel store your luggage if you arrive before check-in time or leave after check-out? If the hotel isn't convenient for storing luggage try the venue.
- Ask for refrigerator availability when booking rooms. Are microwaves available?
- Ask to have stocked refrigerator items removed; explain to team members about charges for food and water found in room. Will the hotel staff restock each day?

- Will the hotel disable long distance, internet access, and other services in the student rooms without separate credit card coverage or adult authorization?
- Are snack and soda machines located on each floor or all in one central area?
- Be aware of handicap accessibilities for parking/buses and the hotel itself.
- Does the hotel have washer/dryers?
- Noises: ice machines in the hallway, dumpsters, highway traffic, trains.
- Is there adequate hotel parking for busses and other oversized vehicles (robot trailers)? Is the parking free or are you assessed a fee? Also, can the trailer be left/stored safely if necessary?

Security

- Do you access the rooms internally or externally (outside walkways)?
- Fire escapes/exits – Your team Safety Captain should have a plan for meeting in emergencies and communicate it to the team upon arrival.
- Contact the local police dept who can tell you how safe the area is for walking after dark with students (going to restaurants, etc.); and how many thefts have been reported at that hotel.
- Are there lighted parking lots?
- Are there any bars near the hotel? Are any big events going on, like a concert or a prom, in the area on that same weekend? What is the make up of hotel security?
- Are there safes in each room? Bolted to the floor? If not, is there a charge for using the Office safe for things like iPods and cameras?

Food

- Is a continental breakfast included with the room rate, or can you negotiate a breakfast deal with the on-site restaurant? What does the continental breakfast consist of (will it accommodate any special dietary needs on our team?); Can they open early? Can they accommodate our size team at an early hour? Will they have enough staff on-hand?
- Are there restaurant selections nearby (your hotel concierge is great for giving suggestions) that you can call in advance and book a group reservation?
- Contact local teams and ask if they'd be interested in catering a dinner for your team as a fundraiser while you are there and then see if the hotel has a room you can use.

Necessary Paperwork

- What is the hotel's preferred method of payment and when is the deposit due?
- Create a roommate list in advance and then upon arrival note which room has been assigned to each group. Ask the hotel to run off copies for you – they may require one; each chaperone should get one; and if each room has a copy then calling rooms will be easier. The Safety Captain and Team Leader should also have copies for emergency purposes.
- Send an advance group to check-in the group prior to the whole group arriving. Avoids standing around in the lobby while the staff processes check-in to 20 rooms. It also gives you time to deal with and negotiate the unexpected, such as, the rooms promised for one floor ending up spread all over the hotel.
- Create a business card with hotel name, complete address, phone number and cellphone numbers of team leader and chaperones. Each traveler should get a copy to leave with family at home as well as a copy for their wallet. This will help if someone gets separated from the group and only knows that they are staying at XYZ hotel, but not the address (there could be several of them in a city); also helps family to reach the group if necessary.

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