Hotels.com Purchase Funnel Case Studies

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Background and Overview

Hotels.com is a site owned by Expedia that specializes in hotel purchases. Alaska selected this site because of interest in its responsive booking path and one page checkout.

Scope

The focus of this case study is only on the purchase path of Hotels.com for only the main product of the site, hotels, with an emphasis on the full desktop view. The mobile site as well as the responsive version viewed by resizing the browser were reviewed briefly as well.

Entry Points into Purchase Funnel

- Homepage
- Hotel Deals Finder
- Packages & Flights (these paths are not included in this report, as they don't seem to be as wellrefined)

Steps to Complete a Hotel Purchase



Booking Form

The homepage formlet is very simple, with only 5 fields. Features include:

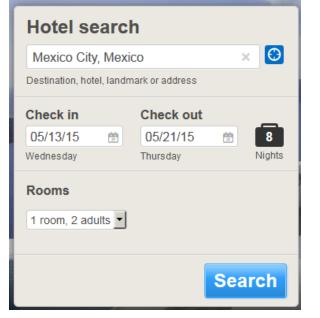
- Geolocation button next to location field
- Robust autocomplete sorted by type of destination/landmark
- Display of number of nights (also displays on hover in date picker)
- Display of day of week under the selected dates
- "More options" in 2 adults, 1 room dropdown reveals more fields for number of rooms, adults and children

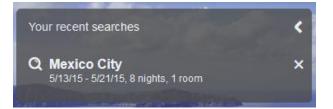


- Unremarkable two month date picker
- To the right of the booking form, recent searches appear when you return to the site after having completed a search
- Large Search button

<u>Insight:</u> Displaying the day of week under the date fields is likely to reduce user error.

<u>Insight:</u> Displaying recent searches is becoming a common feature on travel websites and makes it easier to redo a recent search without prepopulating a form with potentially confusing defaults.





<u>Insight:</u> Because the form is so simple, there is plenty of room to clearly label the fields in large legible print.

Insight: By assuming smart defaults, they removed two fields from their form.

Search Results

The search results page is rather complex, and can be broken into three basic areas:

- Recap and sorting
- Filters
- Results

They also employ a technique to allow continuous scrolling to load more results, as well as several slide up notifications to notify the user of a recent booking or how many people are looking at hotels in that market.

Recap and sorting

This area contains:

- Destination as a large heading
- Dates, nights, room and people
- Change search button
- Show recent searches link
- Sort buttons for Price, Guest rating, Distance, and Our favorites (defaulted to Our favorites)
- View on Map feature

<u>Insight:</u> By having a custom sort and choosing it as the default, hotels.com can gain a revenue advantage by putting the hotels they want to sell first.

Filters

This area contains extensive filtering, with 12 kinds of filters. For the complete list, see the appendix.

<u>Insight:</u> The filters are very long and I can't imagine using some of them. However, when a customer can't find what they are looking for, the ability to drill down and filter on exactly what they want is very powerful.

Results

This area contains a list of hotels, with each hotel result containing:

- Name (linked)
- Address
- Photo
- Star rating
- Neighborhood
- Distance to city center
- Guest ratings and number of reviews
- Pricing (with strikethrough if applicable)
- Continue button

The following sometimes display:

- (Last booked 1 day ago)
- Collect Nights
- Special Deal
- Great Rate
- Free cancellation
- Pay now or at hotel
- Sponsored listing
- Compare price vs. other sites
- 1 room left
- Limited time promo

• Just added

<u>Insight:</u> Hotels.com appears to be A/B testing a variety of treatments for things like Great Rate, Sponsored listing, Comparing prices with other sites, and more, so it is hard to gather any significant insights, however one thing of note is that there is very little actual content about the hotels; the info focuses entirely upon location, price or what a good deal it is, urgency, and overall quality. If users are particular about things like amenities, they must use the filters or drill into the specific hotels.

Hotel Details

This page contains several sections:

- Hotel overview
- Rooms and rates
- Other popular hotels
- Additional details like amenities

This page also includes slide up notifications. They say how many times the hotel has been booked in the last 24 hours.

For the full list of contents on this page, see the appendix.

<u>Insight:</u> There is no actual paragraph description of the hotel anywhere. Although the page is by no means succinct, it focuses, presumably, on what's most important to customers first, only including detailed amenity lists at the end. There is again a focus on emphasizing the value to the customer through mentions of the loyalty program, best price guarantee, and promotions.

Checkout

The one-page checkout basically includes two sections:

- Form for booking information
- Right sidebar recap of selected hotel and price

Form for booking info

- "Secure booking (it only takes 2 minutes)"
- Welcome Rewards reminder with projected earnings.
- Optional sign in
- Fields for name and number of beds preference
- Link for special requests
- Urgency messaging: "If you don't book now, this amazing deal could be gone"
- Payment info (defaulted to credit card)
- Billing address
- Email & phone number
- Join Welcome Rewards (by just entering a password twice)
- Terms of booking
- Book button (with Best Price Guarantee reminder)

Right sidebar recap of selected hotel and price

- Contact us phone number
- Reservation summary
 - o Hotel
 - Check in & check out
 - "Includes special offer: Book early and save 35%"
 - Price breakdown
 - Apply discount code field
- "Why sign up with Hotels.com?" section

<u>Insight:</u> There are a total of 5 security reinforcing messages on this page, 4 instances of promoting Welcome Rewards as a faster/easier/better way to book, plus 3 mentions of the great deal. It would be interesting to A/B test additional instances of security reinforcement, benefits of Mileage Plan/signing in, and emphasis of the temporary nature of flight price/deal availability to see if repeating things multiple times does make messages more clear to consumers without overwhelming them.

<u>Insight:</u> Very little information is required to complete their purchase path. Only zip code for billing address, for instance. Alaska could learn from their minimal approach.

Mobile Experience

On the mobile site, the homepage included "Local deals for tonight".

<u>Insight:</u> The context of use on mobile devices drives some assumptions about user needs that can be used to display appropriate functionality.

On the mobile site, certain hotels had an indication that they were discounted specifically for mobile, again emphasizing deals and value to customers.

The hotel results page on mobile has the filters collapsed under a button, and reduces the information displayed in each result (i.e. just neighborhood instead of address and distance from city center). There are other subtle changes to simplify the display on mobile throughout the path.

Overall Purchase Funnel Themes and Observations

In addition to several themes outlined below, I had two other observations throughout the booking path:

- Throughout the purchase funnel there is the ability to change the currency and language.
- There is clear visual feedback when you click on a button to go to the next step (a spinner appears within the button).

Loyalty Program

"Welcome Rewards" is featured throughout the booking path. The booking path clearly describes the perks (stay 10 nights and get a night free) and also lets you sign up for an account by simply providing a password.

<u>Insight:</u> Bringing visibility to the program and its perks in the context of a purchase and offering easy sign up likely increases customer loyalty program adoption.

Urgency Indicators

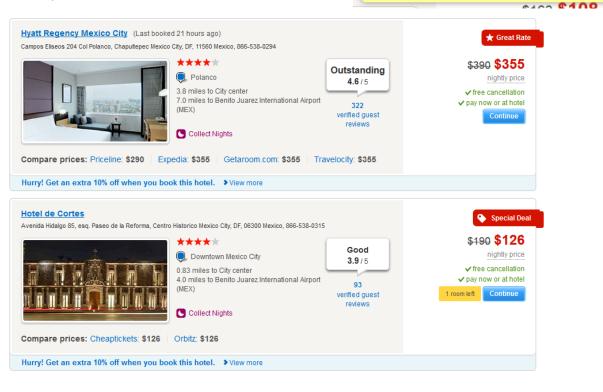
Urgency indicators include the following:

- 4 rooms left
- Last booked 1 hour/day ago
- Slide up notification: recent booking
- Slide up notification: how many people are looking at hotels in that market
- Promotion: "Hurry! Get an extra 10% off when you book this hotel."

14 people are currently looking at hotels in Mexico City

Just booked in Mexico City, Distrito Federal, Mexico: Riazor Hotel Mexico City

Booked less than 1 minute ago from Mexico



<u>Insight:</u> While the almost excessive use of cues to push the user through booking with a sense of urgency seem like noise in some cases, they also lend a sense of credibility, reputation, and popularity to the site.

Value Indicators

Hotels.com emphasizes how everything is a deal, almost to the extreme.

Straight to the point

If you ignore all of the value propositions described in the above three sections, you see that the Hotels.com purchase funnel is in fact relatively succinct and straight to the point. It has only 4 steps total to select and purchase a hotel, and only one of those steps is for checking out. The checkout page itself has only about a dozen fields and claims to take only 2 minutes. There are no cross-sells or add-ons offered.

<u>Insight:</u> The more fields and choices that can be eliminated from the purchase path, the faster a customer can complete a purchase and the less chance they will have to get distracted or get hung up on making decisions.

Hover effects

On a great number of items in the booking path, there is a hover effect to explain more about the item in question. For instance, "nightly price" and Best Price Guarantee.

<u>Insight:</u> This feature allows customers who are newer users to get familiar with the features of the site without having to click off to an explanation, while keeping the page cleaner for return customers.

Overall Design

Overall, the page's visual design is fairly lightweight with neutrals backgrounds and this lines used to visually divide sections. The red brand color is used somewhat sparingly to draw attention to pricing, urgency messaging, and section headings. There is consistency in overall look and feel across desktop and mobile as well, with the red header bar being consistent across devices.

<u>Insight:</u> The lightweight aesthetic helps the complex info on the page not be as overwhelming as it might otherwise be, while the use of similar coloring across pages and devices lends to an overall brand feeling.

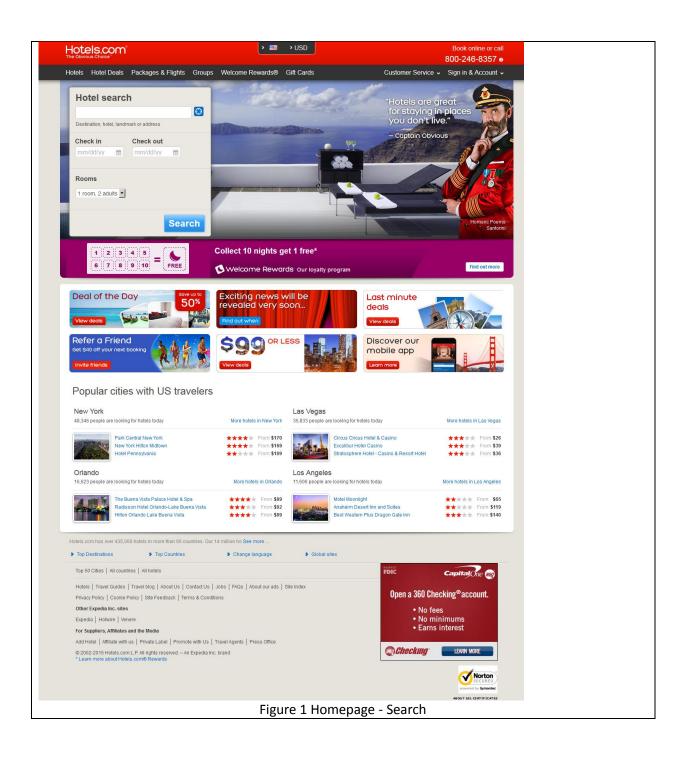
Recommendations

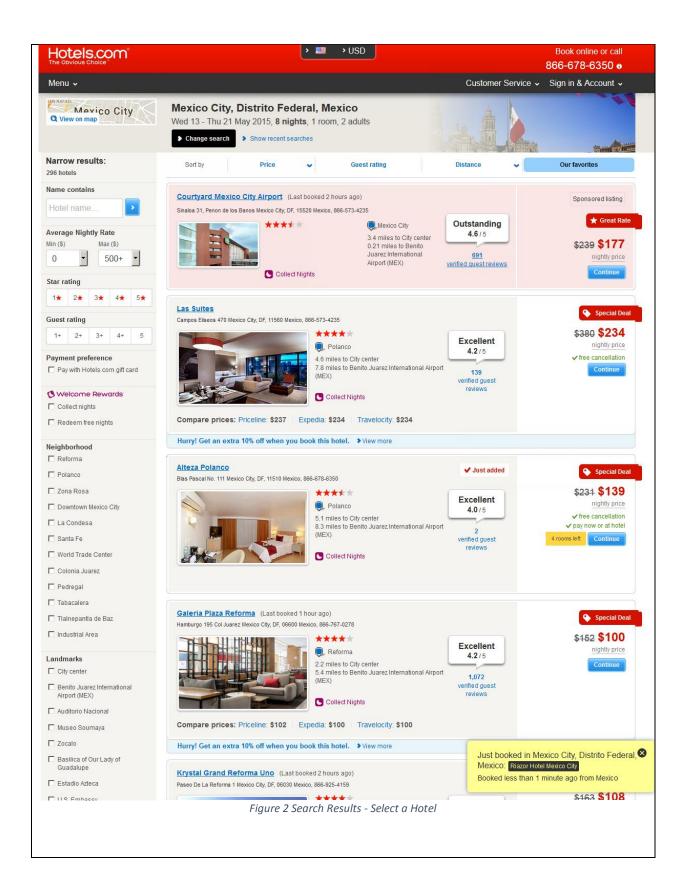
From reviewing the Hotels.com site, I am intrigued by some of their choices and believe they warrant further exploration for Alaska:

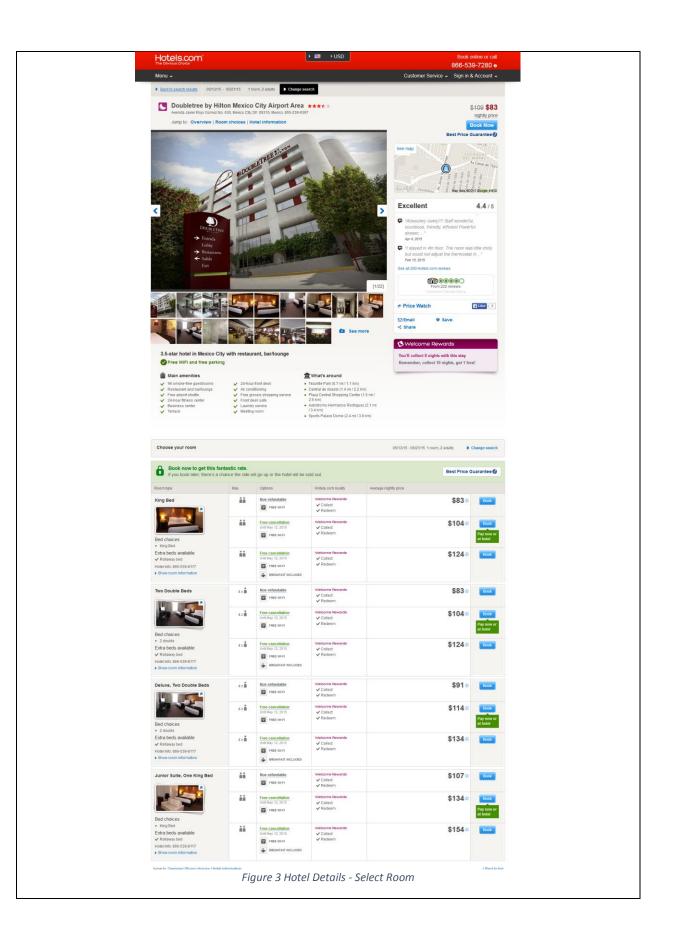
- Pervasive messaging of value propositions to customer: urgency, limited supply, good deals, and loyalty programs
- Simpler checkout process, requiring very little information
- Easy sign up in path and clear benefits for loyalty program
- Consider adding recent searches functionality to alaskaair.com and further optimizing booking form
- Continue A/B testing as each website's audience may be different

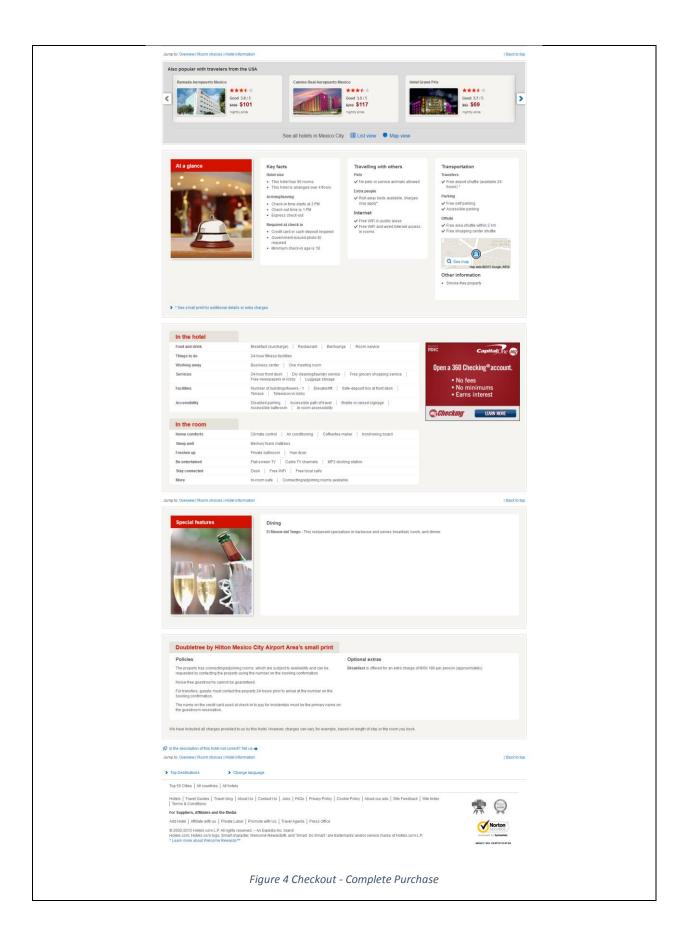
Appendix

Purchase Funnel Desktop Screen Capture:









			Website feedback
			Website feedback
Secure booking (it only takes 2 minutes)	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
Doubletree by Hilton Mexico City	/ Airport Area		
Don't r	miss out.	Contact us	
	Id collect 8 nights after your stay.	Book online or call This call is free. 24	
Sign in o below.	r sign up. Or just continue with your booking	days a week.	
Sign in (optional) Sign in for faster booking		Your Reservation Summary	
eign miter weren worning		Doubletree by Hilton Mexico	
Don't worry, book now and make changes for free	until 05/12/15	City Airport Area	
Room details		Mexico City, MX 866-925-8705	
King Bed - Adults: 2, Children: 0		Excellent 4.4/5	
First name Please give us the name of one of the people staying in thi	s room	Hotels.com Guest Review	vs
ricase give us the name of one of the people staying in an	3 10011.	00000	
Last name		TripAdvisor Traveler Ratio	
			ay, May 13, 2015 ay, May 21, 2015
Preferences (optional) King Bed Non Smoking			
 Make special requests for this room, or tell us about your 	accessibility needs	Average nightly rate King Bed	\$104.00
If you don't book now, this arr	nazing deal could be gone	Wednesday, May 13, 2015	\$104.00
		Thursday, May 14, 2015	\$104.00
Payment details	🔒 Safe and secure	Friday, May 15, 2015	\$104.00
Credit / Debit card O PayPal O Google W		Saturday, May 16, 2015	\$104.00
		Sunday, May 17, 2015	\$104.00
First name	We accept the following payment methods	Monday, May 18, 2015	\$104.00
Last name	🔯 🙆 🔝 PRCVVR 👖 😋 V/SA	Tuesday, May 19, 2015	\$104.00
	PayPal 1	Wednesday, May 20, 2015	\$104.00
Card number		Subtotal	\$832.00
	You can count on us	Taxes and fees	\$158.08
Security code	 We use secure transmission. We protect your personal information 	Total to pay now	80.00
Expiration date		(including taxes and fees) 🛈	
Month Vear V		Full payment will be charged when you b	ook this hotel
In a rush? No problem. We don't need your full address as you o	an book securely without it.		
Billing address		Apply a discount code ①	
Country		Ap	лу
United States			
Zip Code (We'll use this to verify your credit card details)		Why sign up with Hotel	s.com?
		Earn free nights with Secone I *Learn more 2	Rewards
Your details		Speed up your booking process	
Email address		View or change your bookings Print receipts and itineraries for years	
(We'll send your booking confirmation here)		 Save your favorite hotels and des access 	
Telephone number		Be the first to know about special	ullers
(We won't call you for marketing purposes)			
	ome Rewards for Free		
	do - just create a password		
Confirm password V Collect	10 nights, get 1 free otels faster		
Stay signed in (Uncheck if			
on a shared computer)			
Terms of booking & cancellation policy King Bed			
Free cancellation until 05/12/15			
 If you change or cancel your booking after 3:00 PM, 05/12/15 (for 1 night (including tax) 			
 We will not be able to refund any payment for no-shows or ea Terms of booking	rly check-out.		
By continuing with your booking, you agree you have read and accept	t our Terms and Conditions හ and Privacy Policy හ		
	Best Price Guarantee Book		
We will never sell your personal information and we use secure tran information.	smission to protect your personal		

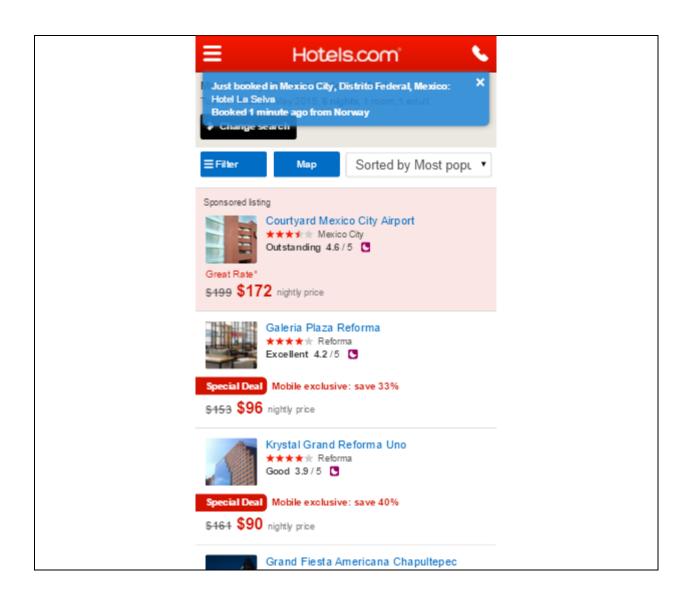
els.com

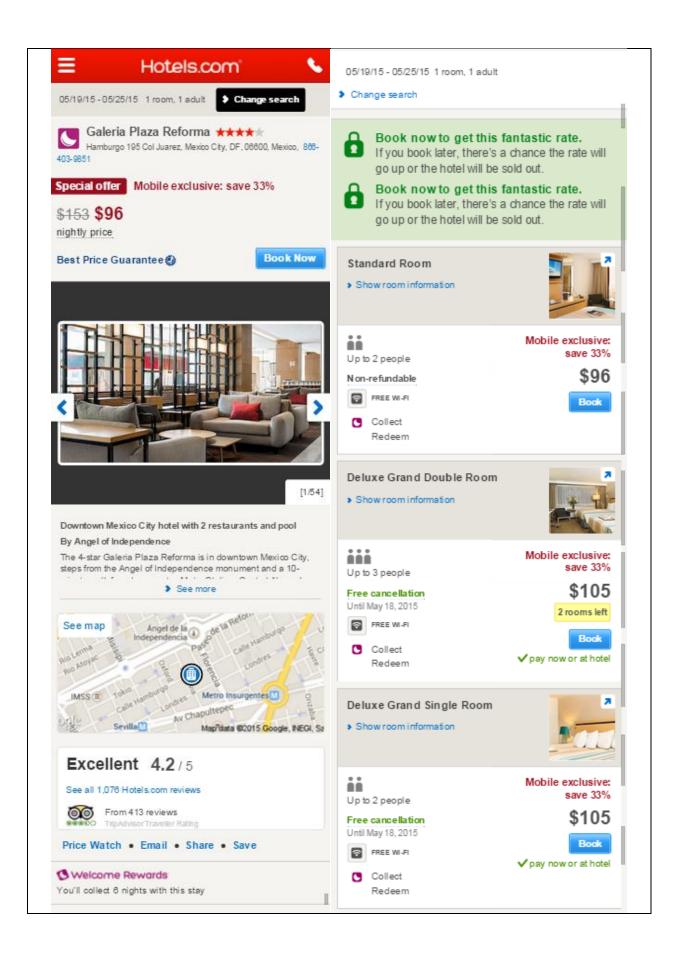


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Mobile Purchase Funnel

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Find a hotel
Enter a City, Hotel Name, Landmark or A 🕄
Check in: May 2015 • 1 Fri •
Check out: May 2015 Z Sat
Adults (18+) Children
Add another room
Search
Welcome Rewords: Our loyalty program Our loyalty constant Our loyalty constant Our loyalty constant Our loyalty constant
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Recommended hotels



See all hotels in Mexico City

At a glance

Key facts

Hotel size

This hotel has 434 rooms
This hotel is arranged over 11 floors

See more

In the hotel

Food and drink Full breakfast daily (surcharge) Restaurant Bar/lounge

> See more

In the room

Home comforts

Air conditioning Minibar

See more

Galeria Plaza Reforma's small print

Policies

Only registered guests are allowed in the guestrooms. The name on the credit card used at check-in to pay for incidentals must be the primary name on the guestroom

See more

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All hotels



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Hotels.com		Almost there I 6 other people have booked this hotel in the
Optional (you can book as a guest	t too!):	Guest Names and Room Preferences
Sign in or Create an account to get 1 free night for every 10 nights you more)		First Name Last Name Preferences
Booking details	0	Queen Bed Non Smoking
Galeria Plaza Reforma		Select accessibility requests for this room (optional)
Hamburgo 195 Col Juarez, Mexico City, (06600, MX	Payment Method © Credit / Debit card
Check in:	05/19/15	Google Wallet
Check out:	05/25/15	Verilige
Number of nights:	6 nights	Card Type
Room type: St	tandard Room	Card Number
Number of rooms:	1 room	Expiration Date
Room Charges		Month Year Card Security Code
This offer has been applied: Mobile exclusive: save 33%		Billing Information
Free Wireless Internet		The name provided must match the credit card that is used to reserve your room.
Nights: 6 Adults: 1 Children: 0		First Name
Tuesday, May 19, 2015	\$103.63	Last Name
Wednesday, May 20, 2015	\$103.63	Country
Thursday, May 21, 2015	\$103.63	United States
This offer has been applied: Mobile exclusive: save 33%		Confirmation E-mail
Free Wireless Internet		E-mail Address
Nights: 6 Adults: 1 Children: 0	1	Telephone number
Tuesday, May 19, 2015	\$103.63	Country United States (+1)
Wednesday, May 20, 2015	\$103.63	Phone Number
Thursday, May 21, 2015	\$103.63	Cancellation Policy
Friday, May 22, 2015	\$89.33	Special non-refundable rate This special discounted rate is non-refundable. If you choose to change or cancel this booking you will not be refunded any of the payment.
Saturday, May 23, 2015	\$89.33	Total to pay now \$688.86
Sunday, May 24, 2015	\$89.33	Full payment will be charged when you book this hotel. By continuing with your booking, you agree you have read and
Room Subtotal	\$578.88	by continuing with your booking, you agites you have read and accept our Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy Book
Taxes and fees	\$109.98	
Total to pay now	\$688.86	Mobile and overseas: 866-403-9851 Privacy Policy Cookie Policy Terms & Conditions
Full payment will be charged when yo hotel.	OU DOOK THIS	Site Feedback © 2002-2015 Hotels.com L.P. All rights reserved. – An Expedia Inc. brand
Apply a Coupon Code		Hotels.com, Hotels.com logo, Smart character, Welcome Rewards™, and 'Smart. So Smart.' are trademarks and/or service marks of Hotels.com L.P.

Filters list

- Hotel name
- Price
- Star rating
- Guest rating
- Payment Preference
- Welcome Rewards
- Neighborhoods
- Landmarks
- Accommodation type
- Amenities
- Themes/types
- Accessibility features

It also contains the number of hotels, a Why book with us? section, a contextual ad to switch to Spanish (at least when searching for Mexico), and vertical banner ad.

Hotel Details page contents

Hotel overview

- Name, rating, and address (with Welcome Rewards logo to indicate it qualifies for rewards)
- "Special offer", strike through price, and Book now button (with Best Price Guarantee)
- Map
- Ratings & Reviews, Price watch, and sharing features
- Welcome Rewards breakdown of what you'll earn
- Photos
- Construction warning
- Amenities & nearby landmarks

Rooms and rates

- Change search link
- Price guarantee/urgency messaging
- Table of rooms:
 - Name, picture, description, link to description
 - # of occupants
 - Refund policy, main amenities
 - Hotels.com Loyalty eligibility

- \circ Offers
- Average nightly price
- o Book button

Other popular hotels

• Name, star rating, customer rating, price, photo

Additional details like amenities

- At a glance section
 - $\circ \quad \text{Policies}$
 - Kids, pets, internet
 - Parking/transportation options
 - o Smoking policy
- In the hotel section
 - Food and drink
 - o Things to do
 - Working away
 - o Services
 - Facilities
 - o Accessibility
 - o In room amenities
- Special features
 - Spa, restaurant info, awards/affiliations, etc.
- Policies/small print