

Notes on Establishing and Running Backpacker/Traveller Hostels

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There are travellers, backpackers and tourists. Travellers are the old hands, usually alone or in couples, backpackers are the younger OE types, ready for adventures, usually quite adaptable, and then, there are tourists, who give their money freely to others to spend for them, a class of non-traveller that will not concern us here.

Backpacker Hostels, in general, should be for bona fide travellers, usually older, and backpackers, usually younger, of whatever ilk, 'passing thru', all with passports, and with characteristic baggage. The proportion of any locals sharing any such facilities is thus critical, as a majority of locals then transforms the hostel into something more like a **boarding house**. **Not always a good mix, usually depending on locality**, and, availability of other accommodation that caters for locals, especially those that could be classed as itinerant. Certainly, no-one should be admitted who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, traveller, backpacker, or otherwise, **and any alcohol rules, for or against, within the premises, should be made very clear at booking.**

Thus, backpacker hostels should really cater for nothing BUT bona fide travellers and backpackers, and, passports should be the defining ID, being the least likely ID to be forged. Also, accompanied by that appropriate luggage, and, sensible travel plans. **These factors also act as a first-stage admittance filter**, and thus saves the problem of dealing with any itinerant locals, or other undesirables, who may exhibit anti-social behaviour, especially drug and alcohol dependence. **As for off-seasons, and for admitting other non-traveller/backpacker guests, managers and proprietors have to make their own decisions re guest admittance, and on a case by case basis.**

Also, be aware of potential scams directed at your hostel, such as phony requests for accommodation references re false visa applications, any credit card scams, especially refunds for cancelled phone bookings made with stolen cards or numbers, multiple phone reserve bookings at hostels by chancers at busy weekends, without card deposits being paid, and, hard-luck stories, especially ANY requests for credit, all of which should immediately be denied. There will be others, sadly....

Finally, always state, or otherwise confirm, in advance, that any validated holding deposit is non-refundable, and, that any fully-paid block booking cancellation needs 48 hours notice for a refund.

Good Hostel Management Rule of Thumb: If you do not want someone in your home, then do not put them in your hostel....OK!

Backpacker hostels that include pub facilities will inevitably be noisy, cater for a younger set, and, should be avoided. **Home-away-from-home should not necessarily be a backpacker atmosphere**, rather, that of a traveller's haven that feels safe and secure, whilst providing good local knowledge for getting out and about, or for making travel plans further afield.

Traveller/backpacker preferences will include security and general well-being, which includes pleasant and relaxing surroundings, clean and well-appointed facilities, always welcoming, and budget oriented, but definitely not stingy. **If you do not have patience, good humour, and people-skills, then be sure to appoint a manager who has, or very likely face business failure, especially in any competitive local travel accommodation market.**

Bed-and-breakfast accommodation, as such, is more upmarket, tho some backpackers do offer a light breakfast, perhaps free tea and coffee, etc, light snacks, all of which would be appreciated, and make for good verbal references wherever travellers gather, or on a dedicated website. **All in the pricing.**

Be sure to check with local Councils, before committing to a premises, or converting your own residence, re licencing, building standards, formal regulations, et al, especially before actually committing a large investment, etc, so that you are absolutely sure of approval, longevity, locality future, etc, and/or can adjust planning and facilities accordingly.

More specific points:

1) **Any booking should involve a bankcard number**, and thus, a penalty can be invoked if not taken up. **Phone bookings** without a bankcard number should be discouraged, or, referred to an online booking agent such as Hostelworld. Also, **a dedicated website for the hostel**, as well as networking thru such sites as Hostelworld, is desirable, as booking websites are promoting themselves and everyone else, and can thus

be complex and confusing. Should such a booking agent require a booking monopoly, then, just install a direct booking link on the premises website. Best of luck for those valuable walk-ins, or, valid direct enquiries, especially during off-season..... ?

'Deals' for online bookings that appear to discriminate against walk-up visitors can be annoying and confusing, and consequently reflect badly on your hospitality, so fixed, possibly seasonal prices, for all-comers, online or otherwise, would be fairest and best received...? Where appropriate, a weekly rate with reduction will be welcomed, especially for a more extended stay. Note that there could be licence regulations re duration of stay in some domains, even for guests.

2) Stay focused on your traveller/backpacker market, by nature, they are, for the most part, intelligent, and potentially good guests, do not follow the social and economic cancer of mature capitalist-style tourism, and go a bit more upmarket than just budget, because someone else will slip in just below, and steal your best market. Your guest market are not all stupid and undiscerning, just because they are on a budget.

Bed and Breakfast is most threatened by MC-ST, being seen as the biggest direct threat to '5 Star Accomodation' investment, and, the accompanying unchecked cargo-cult rush for building more expensive accomodation, when/where there seems to be an endless tourist cash-cow captive market. When this market finally collapses, there will be lots of debts and unused expensive infrastucture, so, do not be part of this looming crash, and most importantly, always retaining your ideal traveller/backpacker clientele. Also, take due credit that any income, directly and indirectly derived from small-scale accomodation businesses like yours, remains in your community.

AirBnB is an example of potential backpacker undercutting, especially in off-peak times, or in less-travelled regions. So, always pay attention to sensible value-for money, your best market focus will be those happy enough to pay a reasonable amount extra for security, location, and room to unpack, plus a shower and a comfortable bed..? Plus, meeting other Real Travellers to talk to, and exchange information.

3) Visible cameras, and or security video displays, especially around outside entrances, will reassure prospective guests, and will deter anyone with ulterior or opportunist motives, guest or otherwise. Reassure guests that security lockers are always be available, locks being regularly changed. Similarly, that entrance keys, and/or codes, are also being regularly changed. A backpacker premises entrance, especially with adjacent front counter reception, will be immediately reassuring of optimum guest security anyway. (See also 21 below, for more on Security.)

4) Kitchens should be well-lit, well-ventilated, have adequate stoves, fridges, cupboards, cutlery, crockery, baskets, cooking equipment, microwaves, marking pens, tables, chairs, etc, in relation to guest numbers, and, be positioned away from bathroom, laundry, and thru-traffic areas.

5) Backpacker facilities that do not cater for proper cooking are easier to manage and maintain, but, should have lower prices that reflect this, tho tea, coffee, milk, basic cutlery, plates, and small snacks, should still be offered, plus, a fridge, and microwave be available for any reheating of takeaways.

6) All rooms, bathrooms, toilets, etc, should have adequate hooks, shelves, and room to move freely. Toilets must have direct outside ventilation, otherwise, air being directly fan-extracted if no window is present that can be thus utilised. Soap and toilet paper should always be abundant. Also, a handbasin in the toilet area would be an extra sanitary safeguard where people are living at close quarters. One such handbasin in, or adjacent to, the kitchen area would be similarly useful. Plugs attached to all sinks and baths will be greatly valued, as would ordinary hot and cold taps, rather than so-called 'designer' plumbing that is expensive, fragile, and over-complicated to use. Modular hot-water heating, by whatever means, can still utilise basic hot and cold taps.

7) Kitchen and lounge areas should both be away from bathroom and toilet facilities, or, with good separate ventilation, and, have well-fitting intervening/interconnecting doors. Firedoors may also be necessary depending on local regulations, and are effective air-seals as well, being spring-closing.

8) A quiet room should be provided, away from tvs, radios, or else sleeping rooms should be large enough to incorporate table and chairs, so that letterwriting, reading, notetaking, and relaxing can take place during daylight hours. Mobile phones should only be answered away from quiet areas, including sleeping rooms. TV and other media should be in an appropriate room, again separate from either quiet rooms or kitchen. Most travellers will not bother with modern TV anyway, in the age of the smartfone, notebook, or laptop, unless just for news updates, and weather forecasts.

- 9) **Sleeping rooms should be quiet rooms** anyway, no mobiles enabled to ring, or be answered or otherwise used, except silently. **Laptops should also be used with earphones**, and, **any alarms should just vibrate if possible**, tho such alarms could be avoided by management waking guests on request. Individual reading lights for sleeping areas are necessary. **No food or drink should be allowed in sleeping areas. No smoking, or these days, vaping, within the entire premises, must be enforced.**
- 10) **24-hour management presence** will depend on size, business budget, etc, but, management presence during book-in and book-out times is advisable, and, a hospitable gesture, plus, **ensuring keys or passcards are not forgotten, and a guest farewell is well-remembered.**
- 11) **Backpacker premises with only visiting management presence simply cannot be secure**, especially re door-keys, codes, legitimate guests, etc., **so in such places stay only at your own risk**, unless management can provide/guarantee regularly-changed key-sets for doors and security lockers.
- 12) **Local contact networking should be enabled**, to travel-agents, sightseeing, doctors, dentists, hospitals, good food and shopping facilities, other backpacker premises further afield, et al, and, **never for proprietary interests that resemble tourist-trap contrivances.** Such discerning networking info is very much appreciated by travellers, and, the hostel is then seen to be good and reliable base of operations.
- 13) **Wifi should be free, unlimited, and ubiquitous**, via a strong modem, and anyway, is tax-deductible as part of any business. Also, ensure ubiquitous charging facilities, perhaps have a selection of technology aids on sale, rather than just lend out cables, etc.
- 14) **Beds or bunks depends on premises and room sizes, and prices, but should be well-constructed**, not shaky or squeaky, mattresses on planks work well. Mattresses should have afitted underblanket, plus, fitted sheets, and covered doonas are easier to service than blankets. **Bunks built as pods provide strength**, stability, and some degree of privacy, as well as being potentially standalone, **other forms of bunks will not be fully stable unless well-secured to an adjacent wall.**
Sleeping room coverings should reflect temperatures, there should also be adequate ventiltion, and natural light during the day. **Sensible seasonal thermostatic settings will be appreciated, as will be your smaller power-bill.** **Smaller and larger rooms will have a bed-price differential**, plus, mixed and/or segregatged gender both have their advantages, and disadvantages. Family rooms may be appreciated, also singles, again, **all a matter of size and scope of available premises, your choice.**
- 15) **Pay attention to noise sources**, eg, have double-glazing on the front of a building facing a busy road, **make sure that regularly used doors close quietly, especially if spring-loaded**, make sure toilets and showers are reasonably quiet in operation, or muffle them accordingly. **Shared sleeping rooms with ensuite facilities** should not be too small, flimsy, or, poorly lit or ventilated, a double-door system is worth considering. **Any self-closing doors should do so quietly, especially around sleeping areas.** **Shared bathroom facilities along a passage** have obvious advantages, especially for ad lib cleaning. **Sleeping rooms are best sited away from ambient noise and olfactory disturbances of whatever kind, and this should be a selling point for prospective guests bookings.**
- 16) **Crash-pad facilities for a lower price**, eg, couch or floor, can be useful and appreciated, if there is a short overlap in normal bed availability, tho this can depend on fire regulations, management discretion, etc.
- 17) **Be sure to utilise durable and easily cleaned appliances, fittings, and surfaces, throughout your premises, good planning beforehand will save time and effort involving cleaning routines.** **If facilities cannot be closed for cleaning during the day**, then consider a night cleaner, depending on size of business. **Smaller premises can be more flexible**, especially if there is a quiet room for guests to retire to when any cleaning is necessary.
- 18) **A complementary computer or laptop in the quiet room** would be appreciated for those in unexpected need, due to some mishap, **recommended is a Linux OS**, which will provide trouble-free web use, including online email. Documents and pictures can be processed also, paying attention to saving formats. Hard drives can be simply swapped in and out, even from other systems, and as long as 64-bit is matched, 32-bit is no problem.
- 19) **Laundry facilities should include hand-washing and drying faciities**, and a dedicated spin dryer plus a clothesline or drying-room, this saves power, plus, some people prefer handwashing clothes, rather than continually subject them to the rigors of machine washing. Very small loads in automatic washing machines are also uneconomical. **A guest wash-tub can have various uses, and thus be much appreciated.**

20) **Do not install frail and/or complicated household fittings or furniture**, inadvertent breakages are an embarrassment, to both parties, that need not occur. **So-called 'energy-saving' plumbing, lights, et al**, should also be carefully researched. **Over-complicated systems, in kitchen, bathroom or laundry**, may lead to frustration if operation is complicated, **tired and/or hungry guests who have paid their bills in advance should not need a manual to operate normal household equipment. Simple and clear signage, when necessary, would also be appreciated.**

Poky areas, especially without windows, or, otherwise poorly lit or ventilated, just to squeeze in more guests, will also, in the long run, be deleterious to hostel reputation. **Independent travellers are such because they are intelligent, and will be discerning** within the bounds of budgetary common-sense. **Other hospitable touches** such as quality toilet paper, paper towels, cling-wrap in the kitchen, milk in the fridge, hot drink or snack provision, etc, will be appreciated, not every self-catering shopping list is so detailed, or every bag or pack big enough to carry everything in one trip. **A small 'reception shop' would thus be useful, especially with numerous guests. Again, in general, do not be seen as stingy, in services or atmosphere, especially in comparison to your prices.**

21) **Security should be well-thought out, adequate, and without being over-intrusive**, both outside and inside the premises. **The well-behaved and welcome guest is always the priority to be cared for**, any bad guests should be excluded immediately. **Entrance to the premises should be secure**, and well-lit, a lockable 2-door system is advised. A live, visible, colour security video is also advisable. **Security lockers, safety deposit, a lockable luggage room, all are useful;** backpackers may have 3-4 guests, or 300-400, but personal and property security will be equally important to all, and, **guests must pay attention to their own personal security procedures as well.**

Cultivate a relationship with local law-enforcement, to the extent of them knowing where your business is, and also, seek their advice for potential problems, internal or external. **Eg, 'witnessing an eviction' will be more readily overseen, rather than just 'perform an eviction'.**

Check for any blacklist, formal or informl, that may be shared by other backpacker premises, near or far. In this respect, previously-recorded passport numbers are very useful. Guests own personal non-paying visitors should at least be welcome in reception areas, even if only for short-term. Do not be unduly inhospitable in that respect, **a visitor may be a future guest, or refer same, if otherwise travel-minded themselves.**

22) **Be fully aware of your prospective premises's neighbourhood**, both during the day, and at night, this will be reflected in prices, if the ambience is unsavoury at any time. Consider noise, lighting, foot and street traffic, guest parking and security, proximity to transport, sharing a building, **plus stability and future prospects of the neighbourhood in general. Freehold property ownership is also advised**, you would be in a fairly competitive industry, and this would also ensure **optimum** guest stay pricing, rather than forced maximum pricing. **Some concessions are then easily possible**, say 6 days paid, 7th free, if paid in advance. Such friendly considerations are especially useful in off-seasons. **In more remote areas**, or just those with spacious parking, **'self-catering backpackers plus budget motel'** in advertising material, will target an extra niche traveller market.

23) **Well travelled proprietor and/or management hosts will be an advantage for a backpacker premises**, guests will enjoy such empathy, and, any other staff should be similarly interested in travel, and travellers, especially as guests. **To reiterate, if you do not have patience, good humour, and people-skills, then be sure to appoint a manger, and ancillary staff, who have such skills, or very likely face business failure, especially in a competitive local travel accomodation market.**

24) **Advertising in the travelling market is competitive**, so, you will need to be creative. **Clear information, especially directions, locations, photos, etc, will be vital, wherever they can be placed.** Your best advertising will be good old word-of-mouth, and, your duplicate booking forms and cash receipts should also carry eye-catching information, thus, **just issuing a tear-off cash receipt is an good advertising opportunity lost. Your own independent website is strongly recommended**, your are your own best publicity agent, pictures, maps, etc, included, and there can be links to booking sites included, useful to refer phone bookings to. **Similarly, the blogs that will be written by guests, as well as the quality of your own website, and those of booking networks, will all count strongly re your business reputation.**

25) **Above all, in this age of Internet blogging, always consider possible guest comments online**, not all will be favourable, for whatever reason, including plain bad human nature. You can never please everybody, but, **a marked majority of comments that commend security, comfort, convenience, value-for-money, and a good welcome, are always the best to receive.**

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