

The worst hotel in the world

By [Guy Stehlik](#)

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My recent blog on the best hotel I've ever stayed at got me thinking of the contrary. What is the worst hotel I have ever stayed at? Travelling and being in the hotel industry conjures up all sorts of both good and bad hotel memories, but I have to say, after careful thought and application of my measuring tool – how did the hotel make me feel? – I must admit to generalisation and claim that my worst hotel in the world is, in fact, a particular hotel category.

5-star hotels. There, I said it.



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Dissecting my decision reveals one clear reason for my bias: expectations. I guess if you are paying in excess of R3,000 per night to stay in a 5-star hotel, you have incredibly high expectations, and this is exacerbated if you are a hotelier staying in a 5-star hotel. There are very few 5-star hotels that have ever met my expectations. I can honestly say that the only 5-star hotel that has left me feeling as if this may be the 'best hotel in the world' would be a resort, or perhaps, a particular V&A Waterfront 5-star hotel.

If we look at 'value for money', in my experience, most 5-star hotels fall far short. We expect so much and we receive so little. It's not easy to put a finger on the exact problem – perhaps it stems from "hands-off" management, as in my view, most 5-star general managers are possibly the least hands-on managers in all the hotel categories. Perhaps they are too busy looking after Beyoncé or sipping Viognier with Meryl, but by no means are they concerned about any ordinary Joe, invisible even though he has paid the same rate.

And if this Joe digs deeper, the 5-star concept continues to feel like daytime robbery. Breakfast is served for a whopping R275, R40 for a local beer that's half the price at the restaurant next door; and meager bar snacks which don't compensate. R250 for overnight parking, where the same parking bay at a 3-star hotel might be free, is crazy. Dragging your own bag through the glitzy 5-star reception, getting the up and down from the Armani-suited food and beverage manager, and then schlepping your way to your room through a labyrinth of corridors, unaccompanied and unattended, armed with a faulty key card is – you guessed it – uncool!

These are some of my personal experiences that have left me with my mouth agape, wondering what my 3,000 bucks were for. The answer must be 'snob value' – I guess it's so I can tell my friends I stayed here, or I can leave my key card intentionally visible at the business lunch... but deep down, I know I'm getting taken to the cleaners. It's almost a 5-star disease.

Our local 5-star bracket needs a little introspection. I have been fortunate to experience true 5-star or even 6-star hospitality abroad, particularly in The Emirates, where staff are extremely well trained, remembering your name or your preferred drink, guests are properly profiled (there are hotels that place a photograph of your loved ones on your bedside table!), the bar snacks are unbelievable, and during dinner service the chef delights in sending through amuse-bouche. The result: guests leave feeling privileged to have experienced 'first-rate service' rather than being irked by that 'ripped off' feeling! What is more poignant as a hotelier is the realisation that these 5-star touches haven't truly cost much at all. But they reach far into the hearts of guests.

Amuse-bouche for thought.

ABOUT GUY STEHLIK

Guy Stehlik is the CEO and founder of BON Hotels and Director of BON Hotels International West Africa. Having vast experience in all aspects of Hotel Management as well as having owned his own hotels, Guy created BON Hotels as an "owner-staff-community-guest" centric company to herald in and define an exciting new era in hotel management.

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