

'Only one room left': Why hotel booking sites can't be trusted

[which.co.uk/news/2019/05/only-one-room-left-why-hotel-booking-sites-cant-be-trusted](https://www.which.co.uk/news/2019/05/only-one-room-left-why-hotel-booking-sites-cant-be-trusted)

By Jo Rhodes 24 May
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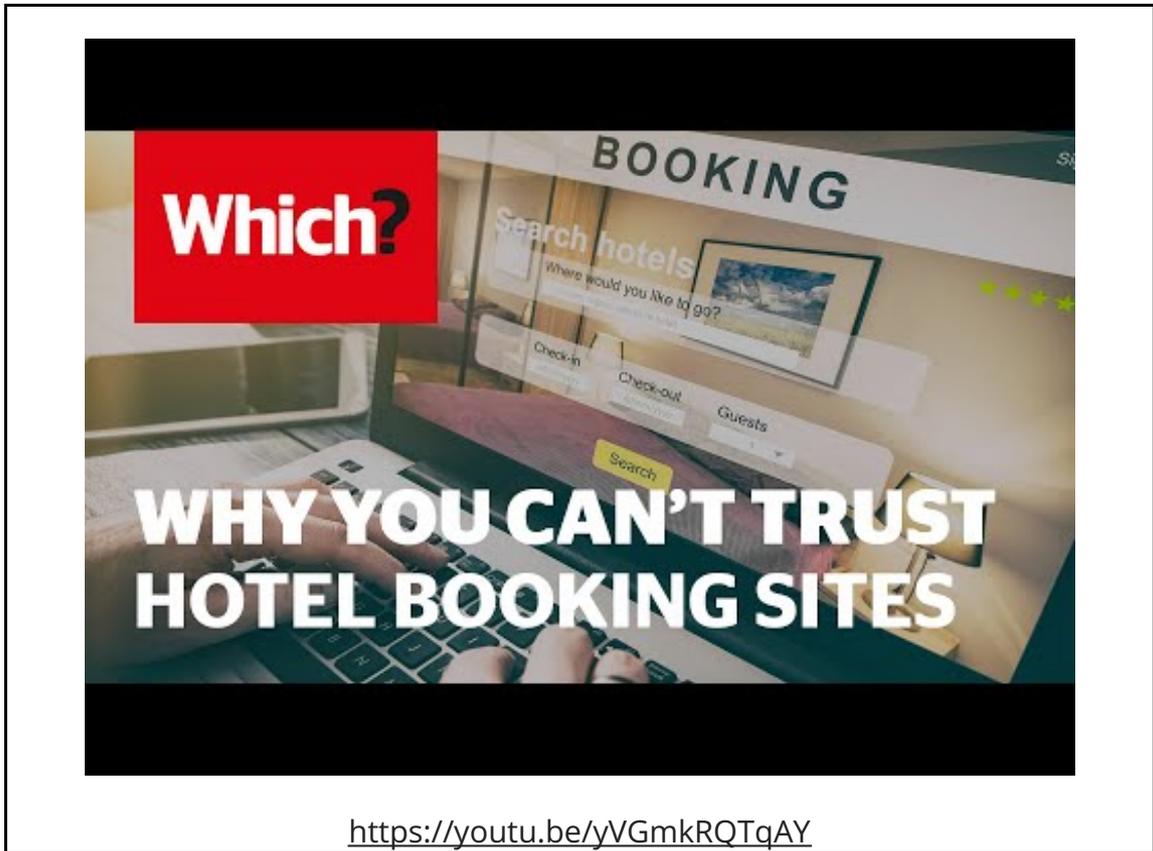


Holidaymakers should still be wary of dubious sales tactics when using hotel booking websites, Which? Travel has warned.

Agoda, Booking.com, eBookers, Expedia, Hotels.com and Trivago have been ordered to phase out dodgy practices following a probe by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

But Which? Travel has found all of these dodgy practices are still taking place ahead of the summer holiday season. While the sites have until 1 September to phase out these practices, holidaymakers are at risk of being left out of pocket if booking before then.

Video: Hotel booking traps to be wary of



For the companies you can trust, see the results of our [best and worst hotel booking sites](#).

Don't trust the discounts

The image shows a comparison of hotel pricing for Millesime Hotel. On the left, the hotel's price is shown as €279 (with a note of -€239.82) and a "SHOW ROOMS" button. On the right, the Trivago price is shown as £244 (with a note of -63% discount from a previous price of £675). A "View Deal" button is also present. The text "HOTEL'S PRICE" and "TRIVAGO'S DISCOUNT CLAIM" are overlaid on the respective sections.

| Source | Price | Discount |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Hotel's Price | €279 (-€239.82) | - |
| Trivago | £244 | -63% (from £675) |

We found that some sites are muddying the waters with misleading 'was/now' discount claims.

A standard room advertised at a discount might look like a steal, but it's less convincing when you find out the saving was calculated by comparing standard and luxury room rates.

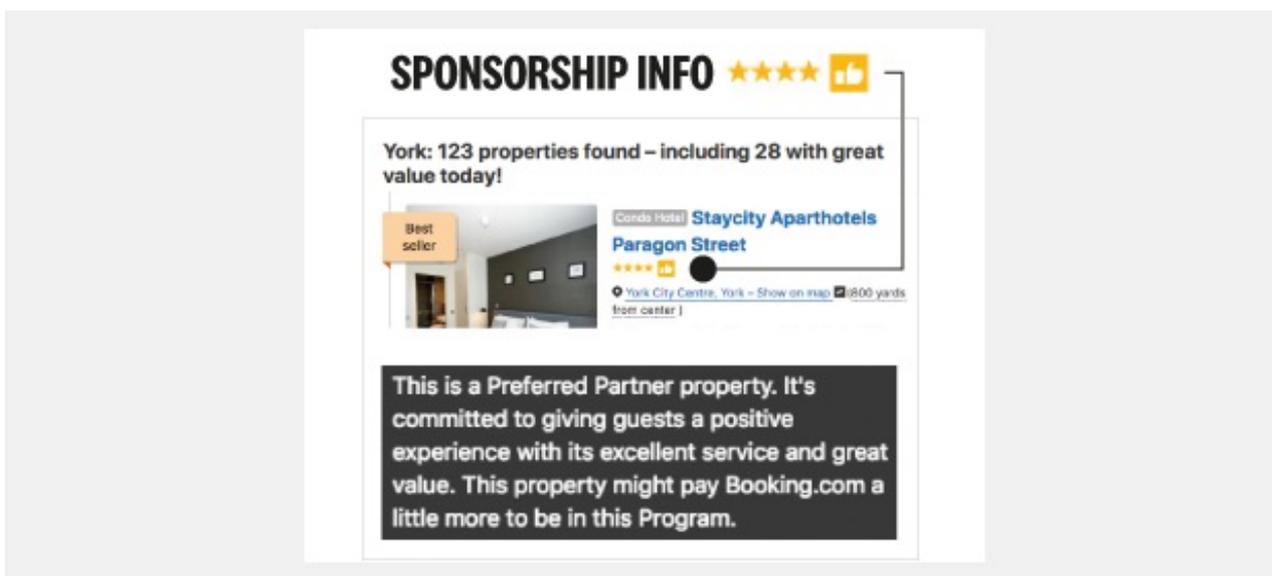
The standard room isn't on sale at all – it's just cheaper than a suite.

Trivago had an equally creative take when it came to discounts. When we looked at Paris's Millesime hotel through Expedia – as directed by Trivago – it claimed a saving of 63% (yet that was only the case if you compared it with the most expensive price available on another site, rather than the average).

And it gets worse. When we clicked through, the 'pricier' site was actually offering the same room for £240 – £4 cheaper than Expedia. So not only is Trivago making inaccurate discount claims, it's costing you money.

From 1 September, all savings must be genuine or Trivago could land itself in court.

Find the real search results



Once you enter your destination and dates, don't assume the most relevant hotels appear first in search results.

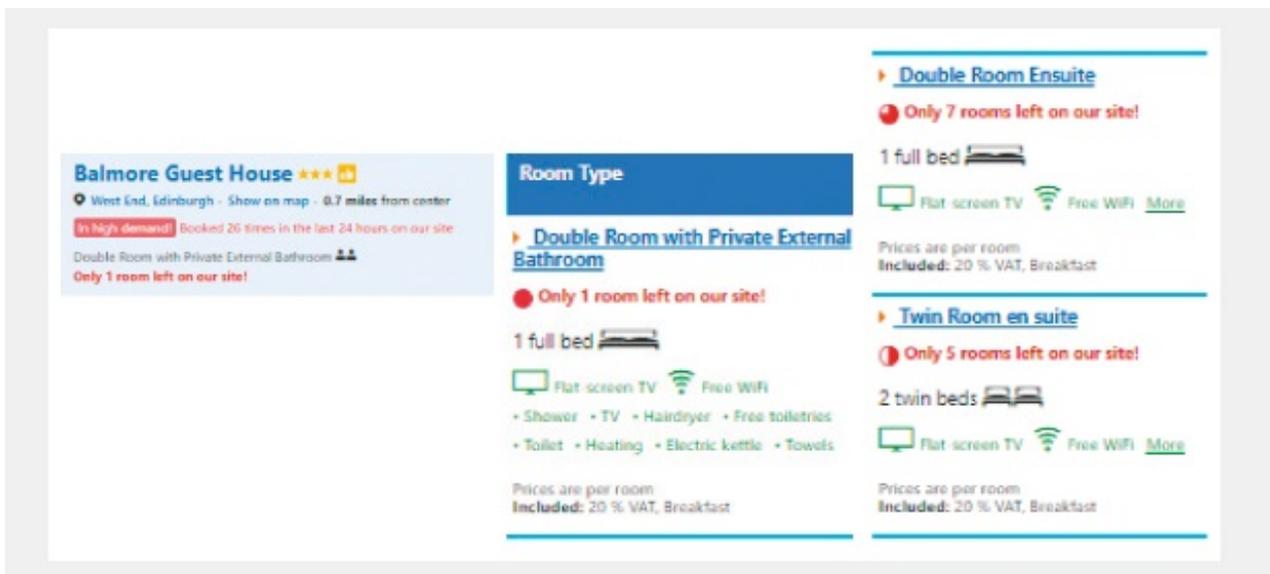
Properties pay a premium for a prominent position at the top of the page and this isn't always clear to holidaymakers.

On eBookers and Expedia, it's all too easy to miss the word 'sponsored' in paid-for listings. Meanwhile, the only clue on Booking.com is a yellow thumbs up icon. Hover over it and a pop-up explains that this hotel 'might pay Booking.com a little more' – but only if you bother to read the blurb.

The CMA says that booking sites must clearly differentiate between sponsored and unsponsored listings by the deadline.

Until then, you can filter searches by price or location. That will sift out the site's sponsored links.

Ignore pressure selling



Some 44% of Which? members admitted Booking.com's 'only one room left on our site' prompt would influence their decision to book.

However, when we clicked through, in some cases there were more than 50 (slightly different) rooms available.

For example, if you'd pounced on the last double room (with private external bathroom) at the Balmore Guest House in Edinburgh, you might be miffed to learn there were another seven doubles available (with en suites) for the same price.

When it says one room left, it means one room which is exactly the same grade, occupancy and price point as this one – regardless of whether there are several dozen similar rooms that will do the job just as well.

The CMA is forcing sites to tell the 'whole story' and not use false or misleading claims about popularity and availability. Until then, take prompts like this, as well as 'x number of people looking' with a pinch of salt.

Beware hidden fees

The screenshot shows a comparison between an advertised price and a real price for the Grand Hyatt New York Hotel. The advertised price is £189 per night, while the real price is £219.56. The real price includes hotel tax and service fees of £30.59 and a destination fee of £26.72. A green banner at the bottom states: "We price match. Find it for less, and we'll match it!"

| Category | Price |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Advertised Price | £189 |
| Real Price | £219.56 |
| Included in price | Hotel tax and service fees £30.59 |
| Not included in price (collected by the property) | Destination Fee £26.72 |

It's the classic trap: you're reeled in by a cheap headline price, only to find sneaky charges – such as resort fees or city taxes – being added at the checkout later on.

Largely sites have become more transparent about pricing. However, we still found Agoda duping customers in April.

Take the Grand Hyatt New York Hotel for £189 a night. When we clicked through to the payment page, a £30 hotel tax and service fee suddenly materialised.

And that's not all. The small print revealed that a £27 'destination fee' would also be collected at the property. Suddenly that nightly rate had soared by £57, a 30% increase.