

The Pre-Booking Checklist

The standard I'd hold a \$20k booking to, before anyone pays.

Keep it open while you book. Most of section 2 works as a single email to your booking contact: send the questions once, keep the replies. That is your paper record. The ready-to-send email version is on the last page.

1 · BOOK IN THIS ORDER

Most people book the flight first. The hotel is the scarcer piece: there is usually one room category you actually want, in one property, in one specific week. Hold that first.

- ☐ **Set the dates against the destination**, not just your calendar: the weather that month, local holidays, anything that closes for the season.
- ☐ **Hold the hotel on refundable terms.**
- ☐ **Ask how the connection at the other end works** before ticketing flights: seaplane, ferry, charter flight, private driver. The hotel often arranges it after the room is confirmed, and some run a few times a day. Have it confirmed for your dates, not just requested, before your flights are locked.
- ☐ **Then ticket the flights.**
- ☐ **Book anything with few seats** and a set date when reservations open: the restaurant, the guide, the permit. Ask when that date is, and put it in your calendar.
- ☐ **Ask about travel insurance** before you pay the first deposit: cancellation, medical, trip interruption. Some of the most useful cover can only be bought within a set number of days of that first payment. Ask how many days you have.

2 · CHECK THE HOTEL BEFORE YOU PAY

Three things to pin down: the cancellation terms, the real total, and the room itself.

CANCELLATION

- ☐ **Get the free-cancellation deadline as a date and a time**, in the hotel's local time zone. Do not settle for "30 days before arrival": get the actual date.
- ☐ **Ask what the penalty is** if you cancel the day after that deadline: one night, a percentage, or the whole stay.
- ☐ **Ask whether the deposit comes back** if you cancel before the deadline, and whether it counts toward the balance.
- ☐ **Ask what changing dates does** to the price and to the terms: is the rate recalculated, and does it stay refundable? Flexible rates can turn into prepaid ones when moved, especially in peak weeks.

THE REAL TOTAL

- ☐ **Ask for the all-in total in writing**, with every required charge named: resort or service fees, breakfast if it costs extra, minimum-stay or holiday supplements, extra bed. In the US, the advertised price must already include required fees by law; everywhere else, ask anyway.
- ☐ **Ask about festive supplements** if your dates include December 24 or 31, or a local holiday: does a compulsory dinner apply, and is it per person?

THE ROOM

- ☐ **Get the exact category name**, written the way the hotel writes it. "Ocean View," "Ocean Facing," and "Ocean Front" can be three different rooms in three different buildings.
- ☐ **Ask the hotel to explain in one sentence** what their view words mean.
- ☐ **Ask the room size**, and whether that number includes the terrace.
- ☐ **Ask which building, wing, and floors** the category sits in, and whether any of its rooms sit above the pool bar, the road, the jetty, or the service areas.
- ☐ **Ask for current photos** of that exact category, not the gallery pictures.
- ☐ **Ask about renovation** during your dates, and which part of the property. Renovation calendars rarely appear on booking pages.
- ☐ **Ask for your room preference to be noted in writing** on the reservation. It is not a guarantee, but it puts your request on the file the front desk actually reads.

CONFIRMED IN WRITING

Room category _____

All-in total _____ Currency _____

Cancellation deadline _____ Local time _____

Penalty after deadline _____

Named contact _____

THE PRE-BOOKING CHECKLIST

3 · ONE TRIP, NOT SEPARATE BOOKINGS

A trip at this level fails at the joints more often than in the parts.

- ☐ **Put your landing time, the transfer, and check-in on one line**, and check the gaps are real. A late landing against a 4 pm seaplane cutoff is a problem you want to find now, not on arrival day.
- ☐ **Compare the cancellation deadlines** of the hotel, the flights, and the connection. The trip's real deadline is the earliest one.
- ☐ **Ask what happens to the transfer and the restaurant** if one segment moves by a day.
- ☐ **Do not release a payment** while any of this is still an open question. Get the written answer first.

4 · GET IT IN WRITING, IN ONE DOCUMENT

If it is not in the confirmation, it does not exist. The confirmation should name:

- ☐ **the room category**, worded exactly as it was sold to you
- ☐ **the all-in total**, each required fee on its own line, the billing currency, and the exchange rate that applies if that currency is not yours
- ☐ **the cancellation deadline** as a date and local time, with the penalty on each side of it
- ☐ **what is included**: which meals, which drinks, transfers with the vehicle type, and any resort credit with the rules for spending it (where, whether it splits, whether it expires daily)
- ☐ **guest names** spelled as they appear in the passports, and the bed setup

- ☐ **the deposit amount**, the date the balance is due, and what happens if it is late
- ☐ **a named person** at the property you can write to
- ☐ **who your contract is with**. If you booked through a third party, changes and cancellations usually run through the seller, not the hotel, so keep the seller's terms in the same file.
- ☐ **If anything on this list is missing**, reply and ask for an updated confirmation. One document.

5 · SIGNS THE BOOKING IS BELOW STANDARD

Each of these is visible before any money moves. Treat them as final verification points: anything here that is still true on booking day is worth resolving in writing before you pay.

- ☐ The total changes between pages and nobody can tell you which line moved.
- ☐ The confirmation describes the room but never names the category, or names a different one.
- ☐ The cancellation policy is quoted as a duration, with no date attached.
- ☐ Something you are paying for is listed as "subject to availability."
- ☐ The renovation question gets answered by phone but never in writing.
- ☐ The transfer is "arranged," with no vehicle type, no pickup time, and no name attached to it.
- ☐ The deposit is due now, and the terms will follow later.

That is the whole list. None of it is complicated, and none of it is secret. It is work: the same questions, asked early, in writing, and checked against each other so the trip holds together as one piece.

THE ONE-EMAIL VERSION

Copy, paste, send to your booking contact. Keep the replies.

Subject: Questions before we confirm the booking

Hello, before we confirm, could you help me with the following?

1. Could you confirm the free-cancellation deadline as a date and a time, in the hotel's local time zone?
2. What is the penalty if we cancel the day after that deadline?
3. Is the deposit refundable if we cancel before the deadline, and does it count toward the balance?
4. If we change dates, is the rate recalculated, and does it stay refundable?
5. Could you send the all-in total in writing, with every required charge named, the billing currency, and the exchange rate if that currency is not ours?
6. Does a compulsory festive dinner or holiday supplement apply to our dates, and is it per person?
7. What is the exact name of our room category, as the hotel writes it, and what do its view words mean?
8. What is the room size, and does that number include the terrace?
9. Which building, wing, and floors does the category sit in? Are any of its rooms above the pool bar, the road, the jetty, or the service areas?
10. Could you send current photos of this exact category?
11. Will any part of the property be under renovation during our dates, and which part?
12. Could you note our room preference in writing on the reservation?
13. Could you send one confirmation document naming the room category, the all-in total, the cancellation deadline and penalty, what is included, the deposit and balance dates, and a named contact for our stay?

Thank you.

One email, one reply, one document. The replies you get back are your paper record: keep them in the same file as the confirmation.

WANT YOUR NEXT TRIP PLANNED TO THIS STANDARD?

A careful person with time can run every check in this list. What changes when you hand it over is accountability: one person who asks these questions before you ever see a booking, compares the answers against each other, and does not settle for the first one.

You decide the trip. I hold the standard.

PLAN MY TRIP

Or send your request here: halcyonvoyages.com/plan