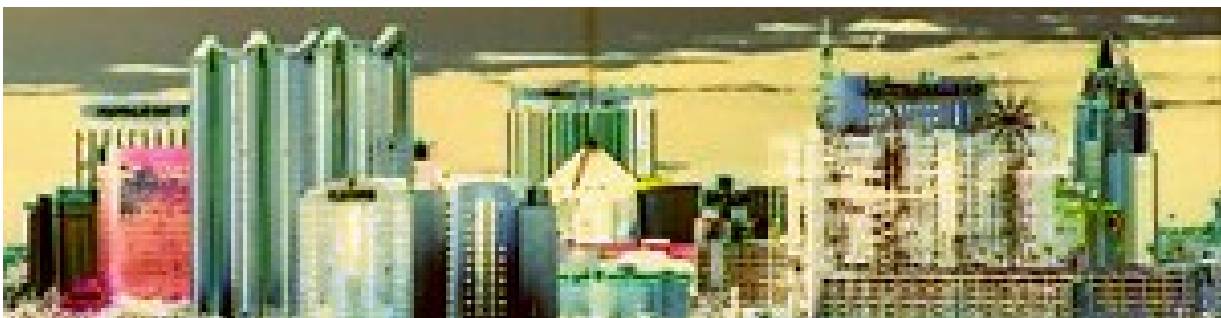


In “A Tale of Two Cities”, Charles Dickens wrote, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.” Those words seems to fit today’s luxury hotel business dilemma. It can be the best of times for the senior traveler, while the worst of times for those overpriced posh palaces we could never before afford. At least until now.

It’s in the news daily, and now you see it in the newspaper, on TV and online ads. Prices are down, particularly in the upscale hotels. In addition to the general slowdown in the national economy, the big hotels have been hit by guilty consciences. There has been a drastic drop in conference and convention business in Las Vegas, New York, San Francisco, London, Paris and other former luxury destinations for big business travel.



The reason is that the big business moguls from money-strapped insurance companies, banks, auto manufacturers and others have scaled back on their so-called annual travel-related business meetings. They formerly gathered in the high-rise laps of luxury to spend an hour or so a day on business matters, while living it up the rest of the week at investor and taxpayer expense.

Because the business convention cut-backs have caused hotel rates to drop by half or more, now’s the time for senior travelers to take advantage of the situation and book vacations at those fancy hotels and resorts at bargain rates.

Las Vegas is a prime example where luxury room rates dropped an average of 30 percent over the past year. In some hotels, the bargains are even better. For example, the new Trump International, which offered its posh rooms for \$250 a night when it had its grand opening in 2008, now advertises summer specials at \$89.

Other top Vegas hotels, including Paris, Wynn, Encore, Bellagio, Mandalay Bay, Venetian, Palazzo and Mirage are offering similar bargains. Rooms that were formerly \$200 to \$400 a weekday (Sunday through Thursday) are now offered for \$99. Weekend rates are still about double that, but far less than they were a year ago.

Additionally, in Vegas and other choice city and resort areas, the hotels are adding other new incentives, such as free breakfasts, airport check-ins and free shuttles. Hotel-air packages are more attractive this year as both industries struggle to keep their beds and airline seats filled with happy travelers.

If you're planning vacation travel to cities, resorts and other choice destinations where prices used to be way above your budget, maybe this year is when you can get your foot in the door of luxury. Do your homework and scan internet and travel agency offers. And when you get those amazing bargains, don't forget the mantra of the senior traveler: "I'm sure you can do better on that price."