

Your Ultimate Budget Room Checklist

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Just how safe and clean is that budget hotel or hostel room you're eyeing? Here is everything you need to check, test and ask about—before you lay your head down.



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Since our [Trans-Americas Journey](#) road trip through North, Central and South America began back in 2006, we've spent the night in thousands of different rooms—many of them between US\$15 and US\$30.

We've learned the hard way that when you're shopping around for the cheapest acceptable room in Houston or Merida or Panama City, it pays to vet the room carefully before you settle in. Sure you want to look for basic cleanliness and security issues, but this checklist of questions will help you dig deeper and ensure you get the best budget room for your bucks.



Your Ultimate Budget Hotel/Hostel Checklist

- Is there a seat on the toilet and does the toilet flush?
- Do the faucets work?
- Is the bathroom light bright enough to shave by?
- Is there a shower head or just a bare pipe?
- Is the mattress really an amateurishly disguised torture device? Go ahead. Sit on it.

- Exactly how lumpy and stained are the pillows? If you have any doubts putting your head on them (and you will) it's worth investing in [Hummingbird Travel Gear compressible travel pillows](#). They're light and small, and even though they're the size of half a loaf of bread when compressed into their built-in stuff sacks, they fluff up remarkably and stay fluffed all night.
- Are the sheets clean and at least *partly* cotton? Ever since we moved into a room that turned out to have curly black hairs in the bed, we are not above throwing back the sheets to get a better look at the bedding.
- Does the fitted sheet or base sheet actually stay in place or are you going to wake up with your cheek pressed against that mystery mattress?
- Are there holes in the mosquito net? Are they patchable? We always travel with plenty of white thread and a sewing needle. Why white? Because most nets are white and if you darn them with coloured thread, each coloured patch will look like an insect against the white net.
- Are the light bulbs bright enough to ready by or just a tease?
- Does the fan work and is it quiet enough to sleep with?
- Are the ceiling fan blades *above* the light source? If the blades are below the light, you'll get a crazy-making mild strobe effect when you turn them on at the same time.
- Do the curtains close well enough to provide privacy? Do they blow open when the fan is on? We travel with a metal clamp—like the sort used to keep papers together in an office—and this works like a charm to secure unruly or ill-fitting curtains.
- Do the windows have screens on them and are they (relatively) free of holes?
- Is the TV (if there is one) in a position where it's actually viewable from bed? We've been in a disturbing number of budget rooms in which the TV is placed in a corner *behind* any form of seating.
- Are there any electrical outlets and are they in locations that are actually useable for your laptop or charging your phone?
- Does the wifi signal (if there is one) reach the room? The pat answer to this question is always “yes,” so we find it's also helpful to locate the actual router to make sure your room is within range.

What's your TOP TIP for assessing budget rooms?

KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY



In April of 2006, journalist Karen Catchpole and photographer Eric Mohl left their jobs and apartment in New York City and embarked on the [Trans-Americas Journey](#), a 200,000-mile working road trip through all 23 countries in North, Central and South America. After many years on the road they are still nowhere near their goal of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America where the road literally ends. Until then, their slow and steady overland exploration of The Americas continues.

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