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Avoiding unfair travel fees

Hidden charges for hotel rooms, rental cars and airlines can make your bill higher than you expect

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Oct. 8 — With hotel occupancies, rental car companies and airline revenues down, travelers should beware of being confronted with charges they didn't know existed until they get their bill. In many cases, these extra feed and costs seem absurd and in fact, they are, if you willingly pay them. "Today" travel editor Peter Greenberg explains how you can be a wise traveler.

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WATCHING OUT AT HOTELS

Resort fees, energy surcharges, tourism fees and at some hotels even a "reservation processing fee" can be added to your bill. Together with local and state taxes, these fees can increase your hotel bill by 20 percent or more. Phone charges are the biggest complaint among travelers. Many hotels will charge up to \$2 for local calls, even for dialing an 800 toll-free number. As a result, many guests now only use their cell phones. Still, it can be tough when you want to plug in your laptop in your hotel room and go online. Overseas, the phone gouging by hotels is of legendary proportion. Some travelers have become so angered by this that they now shop hotels based solely on what they charge — or don't charge — for phone calls.

But there are solutions. **KALLBACK**, www.kallback.com, is a service designed to beat the hotels at their own game, playing by their rules.

Here's how Kallback works: You join (it's free) and you're given a personal PIN number as well as a personal phone number to call. When you are ready to travel and know the phone number of the hotel where you are staying, you call the personal phone number, enter your PIN number and tell the computer the number where you can be reached. You also tell the computer that you want it to call you later. Then when you arrive at your hotel and check into your room, you

call that number back directly from your hotel room and only let it ring once. Then hang up. That signals the computer to call you back, and a voice computer tells the hotel operator it is looking for you and asks to be connected. When the phone rings in your room, you hear the same computer voice asking for you. Punch in your PIN number, and the computer then asks "what number would you like me to call for you?"

Officially the hotel only records the call as a free, incoming call. And it saves you a substantial amount of money.

One hotel chain in the U.S. has announced a great phone deal to try to soothe angry guests. If you sign up and register to join the Wyndham hotel's frequent stay program then all of your local and domestic long distance calls are free every time you stay at a Wyndham hotel. They also offer free high speed internet access, free faxes and free copying. The impact of the unique offering has produced the highest traffic to www.wyndham.com in a single month — 25 percent more visitors in June than the previous brand record. Additionally, online reservations have increased 160 percent versus the same time last year.