

A Hotelier's Review of TripAdvisor

One B&B owner turns the tables on TripAdvisor, reviewing her experience with the site and sharing how she gained a powerful business ally

by Serenella Mencarelli

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TripAdvisor-branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, with more than 25 million monthly visitors, 10 million registered members, and 25 million reviews and opinions of properties and destinations.

I am the owner of the "A casa di Serena" San Pietro Bed and Breakfast in Rome, which I've run with my young daughter for 10 years. Only a couple of years ago, I learned of TripAdvisor. Since then, my business has undergone a substantial change.

How TripAdvisor found its way to my B&B

The TripAdvisor website was brought to my attention by a guest from the US. After he booked and confirmed his stay at my B&B, this gentleman took the time to check the reputation of the B&B on your site and he found a negative review about the breakfast we serve. The reviewer said the food came in all sorts of packages, that there was no fresh bread, and so on. The gentleman sent me an e-mail asking if he also would get the same type of breakfast. At that moment I panicked!

In Italy, unfortunately for me, each region has its own laws, and according to the laws in the Latium (Lazio) region, breakfasts served in B&Bs must be prepackaged with the expiration date marked by the manufacturer. This excludes the possibility of preparing homemade food (baked cakes, eggs, etc.)... The penalties for infringing this law range from very high fines to the withdrawal of the B&B's license. Even if the prepackaged food I serve is of high quality, I understand that guests may expect something else.

The most valuable feedback

All owners are terrified by TripAdvisor at first. I was too, but the site made me understand not only the improvements I needed to make to my business, but that the review of any guest is the most valuable feedback an owner can have! I run my property with passion and put in a lot of effort in order to make the stay of every guest the most comfortable and pleasant ever.

When I receive a positive review, I am on cloud nine! Unfortunately I cannot do miracles and I am aware that each of us is different and that people are more

and more interested in customized products and service. Often people forget that they are staying in a B&B and they make requests that a small property like mine cannot meet.

I think of myself as a very attentive person in this field. A couple of times I've had to fight some false and smearing reviews, but thanks to TripAdvisor's support section, all I had to do was report them. I provided all the different documents that proved the review mendacious. To my great surprise, I received not only outstanding and prompt customer care, but I was surprised to discover the human component—made up of attentive and extraordinary people—behind this cyberworld!

A community with genuine give and take

Now I have stopped fearing TripAdvisor. While waiting for late arrivals, I started browsing the site. I've added a photo of my property, I pinned my travel map... in a few words, I joined this community and tried to understand its dynamics. Then I discovered the forum section and only recently and timidly I've also tried to make my humble contribution.

I've found not only a fantastic community who gave me a very warm welcome, but also a lot of useful information for my own trips. I could act freely and at ease, even disagreeing out loud with TripAdvisor's own "Dirtiest Hotels 2009" feature, and received, besides solidarity from many other users, many good tips for my business.

Continuing the relationship with TripAdvisor

Soon I will add a link to TripAdvisor from my new website, giving my guests the opportunity to publish their reviews directly from my own site. Furthermore I am trying to convince my colleagues to join and be active in the TripAdvisor community and to consider it an ALLY!

I believe that TripAdvisor is unique, incontrovertible, but most of all, unbiased, and that it serves both travelers and owners with the only means to verify what is often represented on property websites, which is quite different from reality. TripAdvisor and its DNA have won my heart, and it has become so contagious that my daughter, who is a senior at the university, is preparing her final thesis on TripAdvisor, where she outlines the differences between marketing strategies in Italy and the United States of America!

Kind regards,

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About TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel community with 25+ million unique monthly visitors, more than half of them coming from outside the United States. TripAdvisor features more user-generated content than any other travel site: more than 10 million members have contributed 23 million reviews and opinions, and nearly 1.5 million traveler photos, on more than 817,000 hotels, attractions, and restaurants in 61,000 cities.

TripAdvisor operates in the following countries:

- U.S. (www.tripadvisor.com)
- U.K. (www.tripadvisor.co.uk)
- Ireland (www.tripadvisor.ie)
- France (www.tripadvisor.fr)
- Germany (www.tripadvisor.de)
- Italy (www.tripadvisor.it)
- Spain (www.tripadvisor.es)
- India (www.tripadvisor.in)
- Japan (www.tripadvisor.jp)
- China (www.daodao.com)
- Sweden (www.tripadvisor.se)
- The Netherlands (nl.tripadvisor.com)
- Portugal and Brazil (www.tripadvisor.br)