Unit 7

Check-out

# Reading

### A. Check-Out and Account Settlement

Check-out and account settlement are the final stage of the guest’s stay in the hotel. Before leaving the hotel, the guest will generally stop at the front desk to review his or her account, pay any outstanding account balance, and receive a copy of the account statement. The guest will also close his or her safe deposit box and return the room key.

During check-out and account settlement the front desk agent may check for mail, messages, and faxes. He should also make sure that the guest has cleared his or her safe deposit box or in-room safe and returned the key.

Front desk agents usually determine guest’s method of payment during registration process. Common methods of room rate payment are: cash, personal checks, credit cards, direct billings and special programs.

Some guests prefer to pay guestroom charges during registration, in advance of occupancy. Guests who pay cash for their accommodation at the time of registration are called PIA (paid-in-advance) guests. They are not given in-house credit. They have to pay for their purchases at the point of sale. Hotel employees are given PIA lists of cash-paying guests. This won’t allow the employees to post charges to guest’s accounts.

The main duty of the front desk agent is to make sure that the account is accurate and complete. Therefore he should ask the guest if he has made additional recent charges, and post them to the guest’s account. After that he presents a final account to the guest for review and settlement. During this time the front desk agent should ask how the guest intends to settle the account, regardless of which method of settlement the guest specified during the registration process. This question is necessary because many front offices require the guest to establish credit at check-in. A guest may establish credit by presenting a credit card at check-in, and then decide to settle his or her account by cash or check.

After determining how the guest will pay, the front desk agent carries out account settlement, that is, brings the guest’s account balance to zero. This is called zeroing out the account. He gets the room key from the guest, and creates a guest history file. The front desk agent should always thank guests for staying at the hotel and wish guests a safe trip.

When a guest checks out and settles his or her account, the front desk agent changes the guestroom’s status from occupied to on-change on the room status report. On-change is a housekeeping term that means that the guest has checked out of the hotel and that the room he or she occupied needs to be cleaned and prepared for the next guest.

### B. Late Check-Out

Guests do not always check out by the hotel’s check-out time. To prevent late check-outs, the front office should post check-out time notices in conspicuous places, such as on the back of all guestroom doors and in a prominent location at the front desk.

Late check-outs can be a problem for some resorts. Guests may wish to stay the full day and use the recreational facilities of the resort, including their room. Therefore it is important to inform guest properly, and tactfully insist on observing the check-out time.

Some hotels authorize the front desk to charge late check-out fees. A guest will probably be surprised to find such a fee on his or her account, especially if he or she is not familiar with the hotel’s check-out policy.

Some guests may even feel angry when they are charged late check-out fees and refuse to pay. Front desk agents should approach such situations calmly, offering a well-reasoned explanation for the late check-out fee policy. A front office manager may be called to discuss the matter with the guest.

Front office staff should not make an apology or express regret about the late check-out fee. The hotel’s check-out time is carefully selected and not arbitrarily set. Management establishes a check-out time so that the housekeeping department will have sufficient time to prepare rooms for newly arriving guests. Guestrooms should be cleaned and prepared for arriving guests before the housekeeping staff completes its work shift. For this reason, the hotel may feel justified in assessing a late check-out fee.

Give answers to the following questions:

1. 1. What does the guest usually do before leaving the hotel?
   1. What procedures should the front desk agent carry out when the guest is checking out?
   2. Why is it important to ask the guest how he intends to settle his account?
   3. What are the main methods of account settlement?
   4. How may a guest establish credit at check-in?
2. 1. What is a late check-out? What is the usual check-out time? Why is it important to observe check-out time?
   1. Why are late check-outs a problem in resort hotels?
   2. What is a late check-out fee?
   3. How do some guests behave when they are charged a late check-out fee?
   4. How should front office staff behave in late check-out situations?