

## **Surcharges and other *Surprises* or Unexpected Fees**

*The following is a review of ideas and information exchanged during panel and facilitation discussions on the subject of surcharges and hotel fees. It is by no means a comprehensive article, but simply gives some tips to avoid the miscommunication that can occur when dealing with these types of charges.*

Whether you refer to them as surcharges, incidentals, spa fees or hotel fees, many planners and hoteliers are finding that they have some discussion over appropriate charges *after* the event has occurred. Some hotels claim that the title “surcharges” only applied to the energy surcharges that have now been eliminated for the most part. However, most agreed that the title could simply be changed from surcharges to surprises. Changes in management, different sales staff and undereducated planners and suppliers have been “blamed” for these surprise charges. However, some most of these charges result from a miscommunication between parties or misunderstanding as to what an agreement states. With the changes in the economy, every banquet bill and room statement is being checked and double checked to make sure that charges are appropriate, guests are accounted for and that organizations have received what they requested. In addition, hotels are double-checking to make sure that room blocks were met, proper minimums were achieved and organizations did what they promised to do.

Some planners advise setting a standard based on what is available at the time of the contract. For instance, having a clause that states that all amenities that are provided at no charge at the date of the contract will continue to be offered at no charge during the convention. Others suggest having an on-going audit of charges each day to make sure that the charges are appropriate while you remain at the property. One meeting planner suggested assigning one individual to be on-site whose only job was to check those charges each day. Others suggested adding a clause that stated that any new charges or services that a hotel adds are to be forwarded to the planner for approval before the event occurs or they will not be charged. A good attorney can structure your contract or addendum to meet your needs. From the hotel’s perspective, increases can be tied to percentage increases seen in the past, contracts can clearly spell out additional fees if changes (especially last minute) are submitted and clauses can state what can happen if the organization is not capable of honoring its end of the agreement.

More than the language contained in any agreement, however, is the need to communicate. Running an association out of business because its membership has declined dramatically or crippling an organization going through economic times should not be the objective. Nor should planners try to “hide the ball” with pertinent information or avoid giving hoteliers enough time to resell space, change menus or create contingency plans.

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## List of Charges and Fees

While certainly not comprehensive, below is a list of some charges and fees that some planners have experienced. Charges vary from property to property. Many will argue that many of those charges listed below are reasonable. Also, some planners have been pleasantly surprised when comparing their suppliers' charges with the ones below.

### Site Inspection Charges

Spa fees or charge for entrance to workout equipment  
A/V Charges when using your own equipment  
Changes for delivery of in-room amenities  
Portage Charges  
Fees for boxes/Storing  
Telephone Charges (per line, per meeting room)  
Coffee In Rooms  
Self-Parking Fee  
Bar Tender/cashier/carver Fee  
Accounting Fee to Create statements  
Space Rental (Meeting rooms over & above designated space)  
Exhibit Space  
Telephone Installation (per exhibit)  
Box delivery to meeting as oppose to holding at front desk or concierge  
Accept or Sent Fed Ex or Fax "handling charge"  
Labor-Chefs & outdoor set ups  
Tables of 8 instead of 10-due to extra labor, additional tables and more linen  
Extra Charge-Outside Venders  
Patching Fees  
Water Pouring Charge  
Room Delivery Fee – based on number of items/inside & out  
Re-keying  
Cleaning Charges  
Early/late checkouts  
Easels/chairs/trees  
Health Club Fees  
Taxes Required  
Resold Rooms  
Over Guaranteeing  
Setting the room "Chevron" style instead of other room set up  
TV Channels that can be received

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