



# AAA inspections for hotels

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As noted in the last issue of TRC in the article “Stressed out about hotel inspections,” there are two different types of hotel inspections, internal and external. An internal inspection is the kind that a franchisor performs for its franchisee. An external inspection is when a representative from an outside interest, such as the American Automobile Association/Canadian Automobile Association, enters a hotel in order to rate the property and the services it has to offer.

## The role of AAA

It is the external inspection that is the primary focus of this article, namely, the process involved for an inspection from the American Automobile Association/Canadian Automobile Association. AAA is a not-for-profit organization of some 80 member clubs serving more than 46 million members. AAA provides a variety of services to benefit its members, including emergency automobile services, driving directions and route maps, and travel agency services. In addition to negotiating discounted hotel rates for its members, AAA also publishes a comprehensive lodging guide for each state and province which lists those properties that offer a discounted room rate to AAA/CAA members and that have been inspected by an AAA inspector, known as a “tourism editor.”

Each TourBook® guide allows travelers to assess different hotels by reviewing comparative information that is presented in a precise format listing rates, amenities, location and other pertinent travel information. Listings in TourBooks® are provided without charge to those properties approved by AAA. While the rating achieved by the property may vary between one and five diamonds, the actual rating that a hotel achieves is based on how well it performs on the AAA inspection. The number of diamonds achieved by a hotel can have a tremendous impact on a hotel’s occupancy and revenue, as AAA is known and trusted by millions of travelers, many of whom rely on the recommendation of AAA and its diamond rating system when booking hotel reservations. Each year AAA typically evaluates more than 30,000 lodging properties.

## The inspection process

AAA will not evaluate a hotel unless it is invited to do so by management. A non-listed property must file an application to request an inspection from AAA. It also must meet AAA’s 27 minimum diamond rating requirements for consideration of a diamond rating. However, currently listed properties need not reapply, as a tourism editor will routinely conduct an evaluation on a regular basis.

AAA inspections are of the unannounced variety and generally occur once per year. The process begins when the tourism editor enters the parking area of the hotel. The condition of the exterior of the building and its curbside appeal are evaluated. Items such as the parking lot surface, signage, walkways, and the overall appearance are taken into consideration. While hotels that are deemed as prospectively eligible for four- or five-diamond status will be subjected to an overnight visit by the AAA tourism editor, most hotels can expect an unannounced evaluation from the inspector that will typically last less than a few hours.

An interview with the hotel owner, general manager, or property representative is the next step in the inspection process. The interview is a general discussion about the hotel. Deficiencies that were noted on prior inspections are reviewed, and the inspector evaluates whether or not a property is putting forth the necessary effort to make improvements and to take care of the AAA members when they stay at the hotel. The tourism editor is also looking for the hotel’s progress in adding services. Using previous inspection reports for comparison, the inspector can ensure that improvements are being made. The interview also permits the evaluator to obtain or verify factual data about the property that may be included in AAA’s travel information inventory with potential use in AAA’s worldwide printed and electronic publications.

## Inspection areas

The tourism editor performs his evaluation from a guest’s perspective through a review of six key areas:

- Management and staff
- Housekeeping and maintenance
- Exterior, grounds, and public areas

- Room décor, ambiance, and amenities
- Bathrooms
- Guest services (for four- and five-diamond ratings)

As the inspector passes through the hotel's lobby and other public areas of the hotel he is checking for overall cleanliness, stains, fading, scrapes, smudges, chips, and peeling wallpaper, and looking at the basic décor of each area. The condition of these areas is important to the tourism editor because public areas, especially lobbies, are the first interior views of a property a guest will receive. And because public areas tend to receive the most guest traffic, inspectors assume that they are a good representation of how well the hotel is maintained throughout.

An examination of a cross-section of guestrooms is the next and most critical component of the AAA inspection process. The inspector begins by scrupulously checking the doorway of the room for scrapes, smudges, worn finish, or holes. The carpet and floors are checked to see if they have been vacuumed adequately, or if they are worn, stained, faded, or have burn marks. Each part of the room is looked at in detail. The bed linens are checked for cleanliness and wear and furniture is examined for dents, scratches and overall wear. Dust on commonly missed areas such as picture frames and mirrors is an area of concern.

Guest bathrooms are also scrutinized as these are areas where most deficiencies are found. Cleanliness is of the utmost importance in these areas, and for good reason; nothing makes a more lasting negative impression on a guest than walking into a bathroom and finding traces of the previous guest. Chrome fixtures in bathroom areas are always one of the first places to show wear because meticulous cleaning is required here. The guest amenities in each bathroom should be arranged in a neat, orderly and convenient setup. These amenities should also be stocked to the diamond quota a hotel is attempting to obtain from the AAA inspection.

### **Evaluation summary**

When the inspection process is completed, the inspector fills out an evaluation summary. This summary will inform the hotel if it has been accepted for listing in future TourBooks® and what rating it has achieved. The summary will also note if any conditions are being placed on the hotel that may affect future ratings. The frequency of subsequent AAA evaluations varies slightly, depending on the classification and the assigned rating of each establishment. ↵

### **For more information**

Hoteliers may obtain detailed information of AAA's diamond rating process and inspection standards by visiting [www.aaanewsroom.net](http://www.aaanewsroom.net). Click on the link for "publications," and then for "diamond ratings."

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