



## TIPS ON HOTEL PHOTOGRAPHY

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## AUTHOR



**Marco Antonio Fonseca**, MBA in Marketing at Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Business Administration at FEA – Universidade de São Paulo, is a specialist in e-Commerce and Digital Marketing, and VP of Operations at Cloudbeds in Brazil. One of his objectives (Cloudbeds' too) is to improve the hotel business worldwide, with best practices in operations and sales. For this reason, decided to create this guide, sharing the knowledge obtained through dozens of books, professional photography courses and more than 20 years as a hobbyist photographer.



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## INTRODUCTION

It might be an exaggeration to say that "Image is everything". However, there is no question that pictures have enormous influence on the purchase decision of products or services. Studies show that people prefer – even at the subconscious level – to interact with images than with text. According to William C. Bradford, author of *Reaching the Visual Learner: Teaching Property Through Art*, "65% of people learn best through pictures [...] Another benefit of images, which may be of special interest of those promoting to guests all around the world, is that images transcend all languages - without the need for translation".

Photos and Images allow proper "storytelling", involving the website visitor or hotel guest emotionally, while showing important details about each type of accommodation and hotel amenities.

This is especially true on the fields of e-commerce and hospitality, in which the acquisition of the product / service is separate in time from receiving (and enjoying) it. It is so important that we strongly recommend hiring a professional photographer, preferably with experience in hotels or architecture. The cost-benefit and return brought by quality photos can greatly offset the investment.

This guide will be useful even in these cases, guiding the hotel on some important points. In addition, we present tips for those wishing to take the photos on their own, for cost saving or gaining time to quickly publish on OTA portals and own website.

If we had to list down the basic aspects to be considered for hotel photography, we could mention:

- **Listing the Themes**
- **Preparing the Locations**
- **Photography Equipment**
- **The Photo Session – Basic Techniques**
- **Treating and Editing Images**

For some basic concepts on photography we recommend reading the book [John Hedgecoe's Complete Guide to Photography](#) (2004, John Hedgecoe).



## LISTING THE THEMES

Our first tip is about Planning. We will reach much better results if we plan ahead the themes for the photos ('What do we want to show?') and all that will be needed previous to the session.

It is worth thinking about the following suggested themes, among others:

Suggested Themes	Example Theme	Suggested Photos
<b>Hotel Profile</b>	Business	Business Center; Empty Auditorium (to show ample space); Full Auditorium (movement); Computers; Meeting Room (available equipment).
<b>Hotel Profile</b>	Leisure	Pool Area (with or without people) on a sunny day.
<b>Accommodations</b>	Double Room	General view of room; Highlight of the Bed (bedside, quality and beauty of pillows, sheets and blankets); Other views from room (showing TV, mini-bar, air-conditioning, curtains, pictures).
<b>Accommodations</b>	Double Room - bathroom	General view of bathroom (to show lighting, clarity, space, cleanliness); Other view of bathroom (box, bathtub, type of showerhead)



Suggested Themes	Example Theme	Suggested Photos
<b>Food &amp; Beverages</b>	Hotel Restaurant	Restaurant decor (set tables, lighting on, bar at the back); Buffet with people getting served; Highlight on table decoration and covert; Typical local food and fruit.
<b>Food &amp; Beverages</b>	Breakfast	View of the breakfast buffet table; Breakfast salon ready before first guest arrives.
<b>Hotel (General)</b>	Public Areas	Photo of the Front Desk / Lobby (show elevator if available); Other view of the front desk showing the Concierge; Highlight of Front Desk / Lobby decoration; Front Desk, with staff and guests (attention not to make it look messy or crowded!).
<b>Location</b>	Nearby Attractions	Beach on a sunny day; Promotional pictures provided by the local Secretary of Tourism (museums, parks, market, etc.); Local Convention Centers; Transportation hubs (like a subway station close to the hotel).



## PREPARING THE LOCATIONS

Alike defining the themes, preparing the locations is something that needs to be thought of in advance. The locations must be prepared before the photos. If necessary, perform or anticipate a retrofit (or paint) before the photo shoot.

It is also important to make sure that people who will appear on the pictures are well dressed (uniforms, if the case), hair is cut and tidy, and with makeup on (in some cases even for men, a 'pancake' / foundation might help).

### Accommodations

It's important that at least one of each room type is available at the day of the photo session. This will prevent having to schedule several sessions. If you have rooms with very distinct decorations or features under the same category/type (i.e. ocean view), try to show variations within your inventory.

Rooms must be clean and tidy, the way guests will find them at check-in. Beds made; TVs, fans and other equipment turned off. Something that can be different from usual are the hotel materials such as pamphlets, menus, notepads and pens that may be removed from the room – it reduces excess elements that could distract the viewer.

Give preference to the rooms with more discrete decoration, furniture and pictures / paintings. Strategically placing small flower ornaments, decoration items, chocolates, etc. are a nice touch not only for the day of the photo shoot, but every day – your guests will love it. Use fresh bed sheets, towels and floor mats. In case the apartment has carpet, check its condition. It might need to be cleaned or even replaced. The same applies to rugs. Check if the walls are clean, if they need some paint retouch or cleaning.

Even in the case the rooms have natural lighting (big windows), check if all the light bulbs are working properly, if they provide good lighting (you may want to replace with higher power bulbs for the pictures) and that they are all of the same type and wattage. This is a very important point to consider, because of something called "Color Temperature". Mixing incandescent, fluorescent and electronic bulbs will lead to pictures with undesired colors and contrast.



## Public Areas

Build a list of all public and leisure areas that you wish to have pictures of. In some cases, it may be necessary to shut the place down for some time to allow proper preparation. In this case, remember to communicate that to your guests ahead of time.

Some places might require you to take pictures when no one is present. For example, pictures of the front desk, halls and corridors, or gym can be taken during early mornings. You may prepare the room where breakfast is served an hour earlier; take pictures of the pool at 7 a.m. or during a sunny winter day when you know no one will be around.

In some cases, the opposite is true. You might want the presence of employees or guests to present a happier and busier place. Let your employees know in advance so that they are well dressed and tidy on that day. Remember to call all the employees needed to reflect your hotel's everyday life (for instance the Kids Entertainment Team in a Resort).

Avoid close-ups of people or portrait-like pictures – remember the theme is your hotel, not people. Avoid posing; people must look comfortable in natural situations. Take a lot of pictures so you have enough to select the best ones afterwards.





## PHOTOGRAPHY EQUIPMENT

Luckily, the photography industry has evolved a lot with digital photography. Currently, several compact point-and-shoot cameras and even cellphones have features that could only be found in very expensive equipment less than a decade ago. In addition, not having to use film brings great savings (buying film and developing) and the freedom of taking several similar pictures of the same scene and selecting only the best one.

### The Camera

This is our main piece of equipment for taking pictures. If you are not a professional photographer, there is no need (and wouldn't be worthwhile) buying professional cameras for this task only. On the other hand, we do not recommend using cameras with outdated technology or poor resolution. Important points to consider:

- Despite all technology, optics are still the most important part of photography. The quality of the lenses is very important and, unfortunately, better lenses cost more and are usually bigger. For this reason, pay attention when buying compact cameras, do some research on the quality of the lenses. On this matter, we can say that very few cellphones would be adequate for this task.
- Adjusting the settings: although we don't need a camera with full manual settings, it is very good to have the modes "P" (Program), "A" (Aperture) and "S" (or "T", Shutter Speed) available.
- Aperture Size (minimum): one of the parameters used in photography is called Aperture. In short: the smaller the aperture number (an inverse of the aperture size), more light the camera will be capable of capturing while the shutter is open. It is directly related to the quality of the lenses (and / or size). The minimum (thus, better) aperture size is usually shown under product specifications. It is not uncommon to find digital cameras with an aperture size of f/2 or f/4 (f/2 being better than f/4 or f/5.6).
- Connection for Tripod: give preference to a camera that has a connection (screw) for a tripod at the bottom. The tripod will be very useful for your photos.
- HD Video Recording (High Definition): many photo cameras are also capable of shooting high quality videos. If you are able to shoot beautiful and interesting videos, it might be a good idea to buy a camera with that feature.



- Connection for external flash unit: we will always prefer taking pictures without flash, if your camera has good lenses (Aperture of f/2 or f/4, for instance) and the rooms have proper lighting. In case there is the need to use flash for some pictures, it would be better to use an external flash unit, since the “onboard” flash is usually too weak.
- Take into account other uses for the camera (not just for this photo shoot), they might require other features such as exchangeable lenses, zoom lens, waterproof casing, connection for external flash unit, high definition videos, etc.

## Battery and Memory Card

Make sure to purchase a memory card that is enough for the job (or more than one). Normally, the memory cards provided in box with the camera (if so) have low capacity, so it's good to buy additional cards.

The situation is similar when talking about batteries. An extra battery or two can come in handy after preparing all your equipment, rooms, calling employees, etc. – you don't want to run out of juice during the session. The average time to recharge a battery varies between 4 and 12 hours. And depending on the use, it can run out in less than an hour!

## Tripod

When taking pictures of internal places, a professional photographer would certainly use one or more external flash units, synchronized and with power control, as well as reflectors and diffusers. As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, we want to provide practical tips for those who are short in resources or time, but want photos that are good enough to improve the hotel's presence on the internet.

The compact digital cameras with good lenses allow taking quite good pictures even without flash, if the place has some minimal lighting. In some cases, the camera will try to (automatically) compensate for the low lighting conditions by increasing exposure time, which might lead to blurred / shaky pictures.

The tripod allows you to keep the camera completely steady when taking the shot, allowing longer exposure times without blurring the picture. In addition to that, the tripod will help taking pictures from different angles, like positioning the camera close to a wall (to capture a wider view of the room).



## THE PHOTO SESSION – BASIC TECHNIQUES

In this guide, we will not get into detailed settings that would require manual adjustment of some parameters. For most of the pictures, Automatic (Auto) or “P” (Program) modes from compact cameras will do. The “P” mode usually adjusts everything automatically (like Auto mode), but allows important additional adjustments such as turning off the flash, locking the ISO (ASA) reference or exposure compensation - Let’s get busy!

### Composition & Framing

Place the camera on the tripod (or surface) and make sure there is nothing in front of it covering the lens. Adjust the zoom in a little bit to help framing the subject of the photo (see tip below) and adjust the camera so that the room or object are on the scene. An interesting suggestion is the so called “Rule of Thirds”. Just imagine that the area of the picture is divided in 9 squares (3 rows and 3 columns). Check the example below.



The difference is subtle, but noticeable. The simple fact that the bed is not centered, now moved to one side, already brings a better feel of amplitude and the interest in looking at other parts of the image.





Now check the imaginary lines on the third image (similar to the second one). The bed is at two crossings, centered with the right vertical line. The tray with the wine glasses is next to another crossing and the squares are well defined with the external area, the floor, the mirror and the top of the bed.





Take wide angle (minimal zoom) pictures only when extremely necessary. Compact cameras with zoom capability often have an exaggerated wide angle setting, which causes distortion to the image (rounded edges), called “fisheye effect”. It’s good to always apply just a little zoom to compensate this.

Check the distortion caused by the “Fisheye Effect” in the image on the left. Walls look concave. In this case, it might be on purpose, the effect desired by the photographer. The image even shows the photographer’s arm! Even with the wide angle view, the sink does not appear in the picture. For a hotel profile, this image could easily be replaced by two or three pictures from different angles.



Imagine different angles for your subjects and some peculiar views, parts of your hotel that catch the eye. It's not always needed to show the whole room in the picture, sometimes just a small part of it gives the viewer the sensation of "being there". Enjoy the fact that it's a digital camera and take many pictures, test a lot!



Above, an example: highlighting just part of the decoration.

Other "thematic" photos might help convey sensations, the "feel" of the hotel, describe specific services (without words) or maybe just the care that you have with your property.





The photo above shows small objects, but conveys a lot in terms of care, quality of silverware and glasses and the mood of the hotel's restaurant. Note that due to the proximity of objects focused (flower vase and second row of glasses), all objects closer or further from the camera are out of focus. This effect is on purpose, another way of directing the attention to some elements and creating a more interesting picture.

### Lighting

A very common definition of photography is that "Photography is Painting, with light instead of ink". For this reason, proper lighting is a must for good pictures.

The main concerns we should have when taking pictures of rooms and common areas of the property are:

- Be sure that the place has enough lighting, be it natural (sunlight) or artificial (bulbs or flash);







- Avoid mixing different kinds of light, for instance, a room with sunlight coming in from an open window and fluorescent lights on. Choose one;
- Check if all light bulbs are working properly and that they provide good lighting. Replace them with more powerful ones if needed, even if just for the photo session. You may also add other light sources for the session, in places that are too dark (even if the light source does not appear in the photos);
- Avoid taking pictures against strong light sources. This will cause the camera to close the shutter to compensate the exposition, leaving everything else in the picture dark. For example, when taking a picture of a room with a window and sunlight coming through, it might be better to keep the window

closed (or partially closed) and take the photos with artificial lighting. Another option is to keep the window open, but use it as backlight (and with artificial lights off).

Some cameras try to compensate for the problem (called HDR function), but it's best not to count on this.

If you think it's necessary, use reflective surfaces to better distribute the light around the place. Additional mirrors (strategically placed where they won't appear in the picture) might help. In specialized stores you can find professional reflectors and diffusers. A good tip is to use Styrofoam boards (white), that reflect the light with a smooth diffusion and low contrast (not to mention low cost).



## Let's Click!

Now that we have a good camera, locations are clean and bright, and the composition is ready, it's time to shoot our photos.

Make sure you have selected the best possible resolution in your camera. You might need to check the camera's manual for specifics. We want the best quality possible. It is always possible to reduce the resolution of a high-res photo, but it's impossible to increase the resolution of a low resolution photo (not without loss).

In case you don't know how to adjust ISO settings, we recommend that it is set to Auto ISO.

Do you know how to focus?

Attention: some people mix the concepts of "focus" and "zoom". Composing the scene using the zoom has to do with framing and highlighting important elements (or making distant objects look closer). Focusing means adjusting the lenses for proper sharpness of a specific part of the scene (and eventually, blurring the rest) – adjusting the distance of the focal point and the depth of field.

It is curious that many people don't know that all cameras (except simple ones) have what is called the "half press button". When lightly pressing the shutter button, try to hold it pressed halfway from the full click. If the camera has auto focus selected (the default for "P" and "Auto" modes), the camera will evaluate the scene and try to adjust the focus in order to make most of the elements in the frame look sharp, sometimes prioritizing those around the center of the frame or closer to the camera. Usually, the camera will signal that focus was obtained by showing a green square over the focused area and sound a beep once.

Low lighting conditions might keep the camera from finding the focal point, or might require you to keep holding the "half press" longer to allow proper measurement time. Reflective surfaces such as glass and mirrors might confuse the focusing system, too. In any case, do not take the photo without reaching the focus. When ready, just press the shutter button deeper for the click.



Even with the auto focus selected, you might lock the focus on a subject and re-frame the picture. This is an interesting feature to play with and take some different pictures. Also, it might come in handy when using the rule of thirds and focusing on something that is not in the center of the picture. Try focusing on an object close to the camera and, after focus is reached (and still “half pressing” the button), re-frame the picture including some elements that are far from the camera. Then fully press the button for the click.

In addition to the auto focus, we also recommend using the auto exposure. The exposure is the result of the combination of shutter speed and aperture size. In layman’s terms, it means the “amount” of light that the camera will allow to enter through the lens. It is possible to play around with the exposure compensation feature; or try testing other modes besides “P” and “Auto”, changing Shutter Speed (“T” or “S” mode), Aperture (“A” mode) or both (“M” or “Manual” mode).

If you’re using a digital camera, take several pictures of each scene, to make sure you will always have a good one. Take pictures varying the room lighting, the object in focus, the zoom level, ISO setting, etc. It’s also good to change things in the scene, such as taking a picture of the front desk with guests and employees interacting, and just with employees posing; or the Deluxe Suite with standard decoration and with an ice bucket, bottles of Champaign wine and roses on the bed (a picture that can be used to sell a honeymoon package, for instance).



## TREATING AND EDITING IMAGES

After the photo session, you will need to download the pictures from your camera to your computer. The first thing to do is delete the pictures that cannot be used (out of focus, too dark, tests, people blinking or in odd poses, etc.). This will allow paying attention to the good ones.

Get organized by creating a folder for each theme or location and sorting out the files.

Usually, the minimum necessary in terms of adjustments is to reduce picture size and file size. This can be done with basic software like Windows Paint or free online tools, such as <http://www.picsize.com/>. In case you want more advanced features, we recommend Adobe Photoshop, or a similar, free software called Gimp.

### 1 Crop and Rotate Your Picture: (Optional)

**Crop Menu**

Click and drag on the image to make selection.  
Hold *Shift* for square. ➡

**Crop Selection**

**Deselect**

**Revert to Original**

**Rotate Menu**

Use the buttons below to rotate your picture:

**Rotate 90° CW**

**1** The preview below is not the actual size of your image and is used for cropping only.

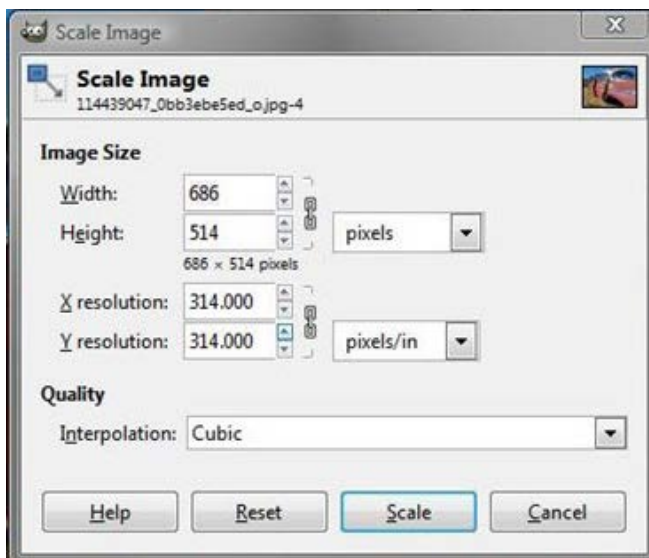
*Cropping an image using an online tool*



Starting from the original photo, you may use the cropping tool to select only part of it and discard the rest. Remember the rule of thirds? This could be a good moment to try different selections or even generate two pictures out from one larger picture.

This is another reason why it's important to take pictures in high resolution. Even after cropping an image, it will still have enough quality and size to look good online. After cropping (if you do so), you might make other adjustments to the image, such as Brightness & Contrast, Color Balance and Saturation or apply a Sharpness filter (Sharpen). Adobe Photoshop has some automatic adjustments that can come in handy.

Finally, you will need to resize the image (reduce) before publishing online. On the 'Resize' (or 'Scale') window, you should change the resolution to 72 dpi (dots per inch). That's the typical resolution of computer screens, meaning that an image at 72 dpi and 100% size at your image editing software will have the same size when people see it on the web.

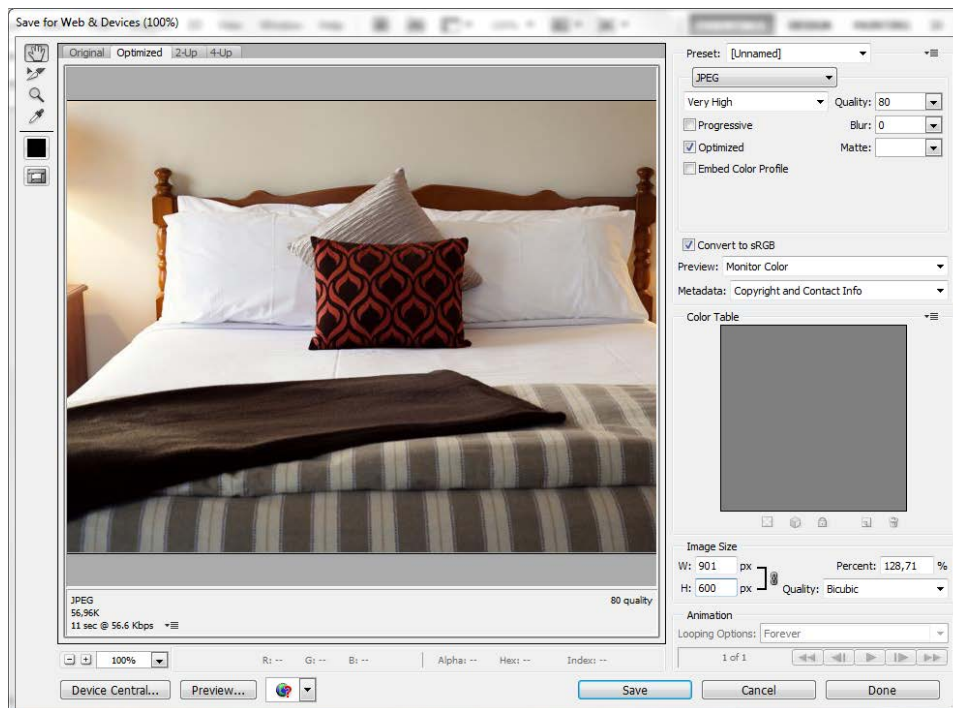


*Adjusting the image size (Scale Image) using the software Gimp*



Try different sizes. We recommend that the smallest dimension is not smaller than 500 pixels. When publishing the photos on websites and OTA portals, sometimes they are reduced or increased automatically. If the uploaded photo is too small, the portal will show it small or even worse, will forcibly increase it and the photo will be blurred. It would be ideal to upload a big photo, but then we face the problem of file size.

After resizing the image, you will save it to a format that can be used on the internet. We don't have to get into the details here, let's just recommend the use of JPG format. It allows adjusting the balance between quality and file size. A quality level between 60% and 80% is usually enough for good quality and low file size. Adobe Photoshop gives you the option to resize the image directly on the 'Save for Web and Devices...' window.



*Adjusting the file size and exporting the .JPG in Adobe Photoshop*



## POINTS OF ATTENTION

- For some generic themes such as food, local landscapes, local attractions, etc. it may be easier to search for existing photos from image banks or on the Internet. However, we reinforce that copyrights must always be preserved, as well as the payment of royalties when necessary. Do not publish images from unknown sources on your website or marketing materials. This way you avoid problems and support a professional.
- When taking pictures of people (that can be identified), make sure they are ok with this and, if you're planning to publish the pictures, try to obtain written approval from them. Be especially careful with children – you will need permission from the parents.
- Do not (ever) make photo collages that could be misleading. They rarely look good, and they might be perceived as dishonest behavior.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We at Cloudbeds hope that this guide was useful for you, that it helps everyone on the path of excellence in hospitality and generates more and happier guests. We have the objective of improving hospitality worldwide, and that begins with exceeding guests' expectations and making the hoteliers' lives easier.

If you liked this guide, we invite you to visit our website [www.cloudbeds.com](http://www.cloudbeds.com) and, in case you're still not a Cloudbeds customer, request a demonstration. We also invite you to share this guide with friends, co-workers and fellow hoteliers.





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