

Puerto Rico adopts star-rating system for hospitality properties

Tourism Co. to invest at least \$225,000 a year in hotel inspections

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Tourism Co. unveiled last week the island's first ranking system to evaluate the performance of 130 unflagged hospitality properties representing nearly 8,000 rooms in Puerto Rico.

"The classification system will provide guidelines for tourists concerning the availability of services and amenities on local hospitality properties," said Executive Director Jose Suarez. "It will prevent guests having false expectations and help to minimize the surprise element once they arrive."

Tourism Co. granted consulting firm Canadian Diamond Hospitality a contract worth \$225,000 a year to conduct the inspections, which will be performed by experts in the field. Inspectors stay at properties at least one night without revealing the purpose of their visits.

Last month, Diamond began inspecting 130 properties, including local paradors, that are neither endorsed by the Tourism Co. nor flagged under any hotel chain.

"Existing properties with hotel chain branding won't receive inspection since they are ranked by the chains themselves or international ranking systems such as AAA, Mobil Travel Guides, or 4 Star. These rankings will prevail," said Suarez.

Puerto Rico's classification system includes more than 100 criteria in two categories (hotel facilities and services), each representing 50% of the score. The hotel receives points in each category and is then ranked accordingly.

"It isn't bad to receive only one or two stars. The system guarantees a uniform evaluation system for

all properties," said Suarez. "It will help to enhance our tourism offerings by motivating hotel owners to maintain their properties and to improve their services," said Suarez. "In cases where an owner would like to improve...hotel operations to raise its ranking, we will give him or her six months to make the necessary changes."

The Tourism Co. developed the classification system by assessing the recommendations of a 12-member quality committee comprised of private sector representatives, the Paradors Association, and the Tourism Co. The system also took into consideration the realities and singularities of hospitality properties in Puerto Rico.

The first results will be released in November and will be published in the government-sponsored "Que Pasa!" magazine and on the Tourism Co.'s website.

Classification systems are used in many countries as a way to rate hospitality properties and their services. AAA, Mobil, and 4 Star are considered industry standards. These organizations evaluate hundreds of properties worldwide.

AAA's ranking system awards diamonds while Mobil Travel Guides awards stars. A one-star property has minimal accommodations whereas a five-star property has numerous amenities and services offered in a luxurious setting. AAA gives nearly 90% of inspected properties two to three diamonds.

The Tourism Co. has been evaluating hospitality properties for years now; those evaluations, however, are internal and can be discussed only with the hotel's owner. ■

PUERTO RICO HOTEL STAR-CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

★
Facilities are clean and comfortable, offering modest accommodations and limited services suitable for those with small budgets. For example, food & beverage services and facilities available at hotel reception are limited, but furniture is in good condition, and guests have access to adequate amenities, including towels and soap.

★★
These properties are moderately priced with comfortable accommodations and offer various services and amenities. Comfort and cleanliness are essential. A two-star hotel would include, for example, medium or big rooms, a pool, and convenient bathrooms. The hotel reception has comfortable furniture and some decoration.

★★★
An array of guest services and amenities are provided and properties have defined styles and ambiance. Quality hotel facilities, amenities, and services are available. Three-star hotels provide housekeeping services and have appealing reception areas that are open nights; clean, and comfortable rooms with seating areas and suites are available. At least one restaurant is onsite.

★★★★
Four-star hotels offer excellent service, plenty of amenities, and excellent facilities. They project a noticeable level of quality and pay special attention to details. The front desk offers service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Employees are trained to handle any request within 15 seconds.

★★★★★
Five-star facilities offer a large number of services and amenities. Characterized by luxury and sophistication, they exceed guests' expectations in numerous ways and offer exceptional service in all areas.

Source: Puerto Rico Tourism Co.