

TIPS ON TIPPING

How much? It depends on where you are • by Nancy Star

Having sampled an extensive dim sum menu, the elegantly dressed couple left the Chinatown restaurant to walk off dinner. They strolled down Mott Street, peeking in windows that promised paper fans and herbal remedies. Suddenly they heard footsteps racing behind them. "Hey!" a threatening voice called out.

The man swung around to face his assailant—an out-of-breath waiter in a stain-streaked apron.

"You forgot to tip," the waiter shouted, throwing up his hands in disgust.

"Where I come from we never tip," the dumbfounded man explained in his Australian accent.

"Well you're in New York City now," the waiter growled. "And in New York, you always tip."

I became a tipping expert out of self-defense. As a frequent business traveler I lived in fear of meeting that waiter in cities around the world, of being the American version of that Australian tourist. It turns out it's not hard to avoid humiliation. You just have to know the ground rules.

First, a refresher course for tipping when traveling around the United States. The following guidelines apply to big-city restaurants and hotels as well as to luxury resorts around the country. In more modest establishments in small towns off the beaten track, tipping is slightly less pervasive. No captain will greet you, no wine steward will guide you, and the bellman who helps you with your bags may also be the owner of the hotel. When in doubt about whether a tip might be an insult, just ask, "Would you be offended if I offered you this token of thanks?" and be prepared to graciously back down.

The Right Amount

Here are a few general standards to follow when dining out. Tip the waiter 15% of the bill if service has been decent or better. If a wine steward helps you, a tip of 15% of the wine cost is recommended, though if your wine total exceeds \$250, a 10% tip is enough. When you've checked your coat, buy it back for \$1. If a doorman holds the door open for you when you leave, a smile and thank-you will suffice. If he gets you (*continued on page 44*)



CONSUMER'S CORNER

(from page 42) a taxi, however, he'll expect \$1 slipped into his palm.

When you take a taxi to your hotel, give the driver 15% of the fare, or 50¢, whichever is greater. The bellman who brings your luggage up to your room should receive \$1 a bag. If you call on him for additional service (such as bringing up the newspaper), another \$1 tip will be expected.

For each day of your stay the chambermaid (continued on page 53)

STICKY TIPPING TRAPS

Oh Captain, My Captain: If a restaurant bill arrives with a space for tipping the captain, and you swear there was no one of that rank in the joint, leave it blank. If, however, a captain assisted you, a tip of 5% is appropriate.

Table with a View: In a fine restaurant, giving \$20 in a handshake to the maître d' upon arrival will improve your chances of getting a table with a view. But only being a regular customer guarantees it.

On the Card or Cash? Some servers prefer cash to credit card tips, citing management's lax approach to settling bills. Don't make their problem your problem. Since either method is acceptable, do what's most convenient for you.

Too Taxing? There's no reason to calculate a tip based on food plus tax—unless the effort of subtracting the tax from the total bill is simply too bothersome.

Stiffing: Don't stiff unless the alternative is having a stroke. Instead, when service stinks, complain, first to your server, then to management. Reducing the tip works better than stiffing—especially if you don't want the waiter mistaking you for our Australian friend.

CONSUMER'S CORNER

(from page 44) gets \$1, which can be left in an envelope on the dresser or at the front desk with your room number on it. Custom dictates no tip is necessary for a one-night stay.

The valet who picks up or delivers laundry is not customarily tipped. But if you've left your shoes outside the door for a shine, give your bellman \$1.

If you want to be fawned over, tip the concierge upon arrival as you introduce yourself (\$10 to \$20, depending upon the hotel and your length of stay). Otherwise, tip him only if he's performed a service, like getting hot theater tickets or making a last-minute dinner reservation. In that case, \$10 to \$20 upon checking out would be appropriate for a one-week stay.

Gratitude at Sea

But what if your idea of a great vacation is a cruise? Plan on spending \$5 to \$10 per day on tips (first-class accommodations usually means first-class tipping expectations). During the cruise, tip the bartender or wine steward by adding 10% to 15% to each bar bill. At journey's end start stuffing envelopes: Both your cabin steward and dining room waiter should get about \$3 per person per day (\$5 for first class on a luxury liner).

If you're not comfortable handing over envelopes of money to various crew members, give a lump sum to the chief steward or purser at the end of the trip, with instructions on how the tips should be disbursed. One rule holds on every ship: Never offer an officer a tip, unless you feel like swimming home.

But what about traveling overseas? Let's look at the customs of a few popular destinations.

In the United Kingdom most hotels include a service charge on the final bill, which means, in theory, that the tip is built into the price of the room or the meal. Still, it's common to have the hotel waiter who serves afternoon tea explain that the included service doesn't include him. Stand firm to those who tug at your heartstrings in order to get at your purse strings. Tip above the service charge only when service is exceptional.

Since some, but not all, British restaurants add a service charge, be sure to check the menu. Otherwise

you'll have to ask your waiter, who may answer by giving a speech on the economy of post-Thatcher England.

In France, a service charge is always added to a restaurant bill. If you're pleased with the service, however, it is customary to leave a few coins on the table or to round out the bill.

Although a service charge in French hotels is typical, some additional tipping is expected. Give the bellman five francs per bag and the doorman five francs for getting a taxi.

In Spain a hotel service charge is unusual. And on the rare occasion when the bill does include a service charge, that money almost never reaches the pockets of the employees. So be prepared to tip as you go. When no service charge is included, tip 10% to 15% of the bill. When such a charge is included, plan on giving an additional 5% to 10% if service has been adequate or better.

The zest with which Italians pursue a good meal does not extend to their pursuit of gratuities. The tipping philosophy in Italy is quite relaxed. Hotels generally include a service charge of between 12% and 18% on the final bill. Most restaurants add 12% to 15% as well. If service is exemplary, additional tipping will be appreciated. More often, an enthusiastic thank-you will suffice.

Our Australian friend didn't tip

because Australians never do. Unfortunately, some tip-happy American tourists and business travelers have seen to it that service employees in Australia and New Zealand now expect their American visitors to tip. Still, it is rare for a service charge to be included there, and tipping should be reserved for very special treatment.

In Japan most hotels and restaurants add a 10% service charge to every bill. Not only is additional tipping not expected, but if you've added a tip to your credit card you may find the tip deleted from your monthly statement.

The only exception to this is in Japanese inns—not to be confused with hotels—where the room attendant should get a tip of 1,000 yen at the start of your stay. But be forewarned: It is considered rude to hand over unwrapped money. When you do tip in Japan be sure to use the special envelopes available for this purpose. Failing that, wrap the money in tissue.

And wouldn't the world be a simpler place if everyone felt as one Japanese hotelier explained it: "The high peaks of service do not come from money. They come from hospitality of the mind." ■

Nancy Star wrote The International Guide to Tipping (Berkley). Her first novel, Buried Lives (Fawcett), will be published in 1993.



"Naughty or nice? My lawyer here will respond to that."