

FRENCH HOTEL CLASSIFICATION REFORMED



New hotel classification system was launched in France introducing 5-star category. Renovation of many hotels is estimated at 10 billion Euros.

At the end of December the French government approved a new tourism law reforming the hotel classification system in the country. **The reform will impact 18,000 hotels (600,000 rooms) that promote their stars they gained based on a ranking system from 1986.** A quarter of the rooms to be re-assessed is considered obsolete and not fulfilling the general expectations of international hotel guests.

To keep their stars, many of the hotels will have to undertake substantial renovations. **The total amount to be spent on refurbishment is estimated by the industry leaders at 10 billion Euros.** “Faced with a two-star hotel in France, the guests often do not know what to expect,” said Genevieve Balher, president of Synhorcat representing hospitality (National Union of Hoteliers), reported *Le Quotidien du Tourisme*. “A hotel classified in 1986 may very well never have been renovated and still can promote its stars to the tourists.”

According to the reformed system, the ranking will be valid for five years and attributed by accredited auditors instead of a government agency. Also, the criteria according to which the hotels are awarded their stars will be regularly reviewed. “Consumers are well aware that even one star of a hotel should ensure hygiene, safety and good equipment,” explains Michele Le Poutre, who negotiated the new classification on behalf of Synhorcat.

The most substantial change the new law introduces is the new five-star category, which was already claimed by 60 hotels such as the world-class Paris Ritz or the Hotel Negresco in Nice. The new category is expected to help the downturn stricken French hospitality industry to improve its position on the international market.

However, not all tourism professionals are satisfied with the new system. “Nobody discussed the classification criteria with the consumers,” says Mark Watkins, chairman of the Committee for Modernizing French Hotels. “Even the new criteria are old-fashioned and don’t correspond with other classification systems applied abroad. For instance, en suite bathrooms are only compulsory for three-star hotels and you will have to go to a four-star to get international channels on television,” he said. According to him the new system would benefit mostly hotel chains and that independent hotels will have it difficult to satisfy the criteria.

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