

Shh ... Luxury Hotels for Less

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Club-sale travel web sites — which offer marked-down prices on top hotels to their members — have arrived in Russia two years after appearing in the United States. The services cater to Russians looking to travel internationally, but they also offer deals on hotels in Russia.

The club-sale discount model, which was used in Russia initially to sell fashion products, is a win-win for travelers and hotels: Hotels shed excess inventory without the embarrassment of a public sale (only club members can see the sales, and becoming a member usually requires knowing one), while travelers get steep discounts and the satisfaction of being "in the know."

The sites specialize in top-notch hotels that are otherwise too expensive for the average traveler. Offers usually run from 7 to 10 days.

Hipclub.ru, the first such web site to hit the Russian travel scene, offers hotel rooms at discount rates and is the only Russian site to offer complete travel packages to international destinations. The club currently lists sales on the Marriot Royal Hotel in Moscow and on Marco Polo Hotels in St. Petersburg, as well as on hotels in Nizhny Novgorod, Suzdal and Kiev.

It also currently offers full-package tours to the Maldives, the Dominican Republic and Vienna.

Tablethotels, a U.S.-based web site, recently launched its Russian-language version, Tablethotels.ru, which offers Russian travelers the opportunity to book international hotels at special rates. Tablethotels is famous for its rigorous quality control and travel guides.

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