



For Immediate Release

HOJO Canada comments on validity of online hotel reviews

Oakville, ON. Feb 11, 2010 – The world’s hotel industry has quickly responded to a series of “worst properties” lists which were recently published in a variety of leading global media outlets, including an article in the Toronto Star.

Glen Blake, President of Howard Johnson Canada said today, “We are not concerned that these lists exist, in fact, the common opinion among the industry is that these lists, if constructed properly, can provide a great service to the public. Our concern is the trend that reviews are completely anonymous, and don’t even require a proof of stay before people can post negative comments on sites such as TripAdvisor.”

A recent article, which appeared in the UK’s The Independent newspaper, highlighted that leading European hoteliers felt that a number of negative reviews were posted by jaded employees, bitter competitors and people out to make general mischief. Not discounting general complaints, interviewed hoteliers believe "people with complaints are far more likely to post their opinions on-line which may not reflect the actual condition of the property." “In Toronto for example, a relatively busy property received less than 100 reviews in the last four years. That’s about one percent of guests who stayed at that Howard Johnson," explained Blake.

The Canadian article in question, which ran in the Toronto Star January 29th, described how an investigative journalist followed up on negative reviews and found no basis for several of the negative reviews. “At the Howard Johnson, the carpet, bed and bathroom were clean, furniture and wallpaper in good shape,” stated the article.

Rather than simply dismissing negative comments about the Howard Johnson properties which made the Canadian list, Blake commented, “We admit that in a few properties there is work to be done by our franchisees and we stand behind those who have made the commitment to complete the work required. In that regard, Howard Johnson Canada recently recognized their Quality Assurance Award winners for 2009, a total of 19 locations achieved the HoJo Gold Medal status. Blake said, “We are very pleased that we have fantastic support from our franchisees, who are working with us as we continue our “Fresh Approach” program. So far in 2010 no less than 11 renovation programs are underway with more to be completed by our franchise owners, all of which will continue to enhance our brand across Canada.”

Howard Johnson Canada developed the “Fresh Approach” to their business model in 2007, where all properties became subject to a new set of operating standards. “It is understandable that a period of economic challenges has delayed some planned improvements,” stated Blake, “we know we are heading in the right direction.”

On the positives found in the article, Blake concluded “I think that it supports the opinion that some of these travel sites should not be explicitly trusted, and that the consumer and our guests need to know that if a property can make it to a list like TripAdvisor with as few as 5 comments, then there is something very wrong with the system. We have become an age of electronic commentary, emails, and on-line social networking, all of which can destroy a business, just by pushing the enter key. We encourage each and every one of our franchise owners and operators to practice excellence in customer service and satisfaction; this includes resolution of any guest issues that have arisen during their stay.”

At the end of the day, three locations on a list that can be described as questionable, does not reflect an entire system. As the Hotel Association of Canada has stated it supports quantifiable and measurable rating systems delivered and inspected by Third Party organizations including CAA/AAA and Canada Select.

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