

Booking System for the Overlook Hotel

The Case for SEP1, Spring 2022

The Overlook Hotel is a small but luxurious hotel with a rich history stretching back to the 17th century. It has been owned by the same family for generations.

Guests come to the hotel for the history and the atmosphere, and there is a strong emphasis on tradition everywhere from the rooms to the exterior. For this reason, the owners have been hesitant to use equipment like computers and other conveniences, to remain as true to the hotel's past as possible.

However, they now feel that their lack of a proper booking system is holding the business back and have decided that the time has come to get one. We have arranged an interview with the manager of the hotel, Stuart Ullman, to talk about the requirements for the booking system.



The Interview

"Please tell us about the Overlook Hotel, Mr Ullman."

Mr Ullman: "We are a family-owned hotel with a long history. We consider ourselves very successful, and especially during the summer the hotel is often fully booked. Our guests arrive from all over the world to enjoy our luxurious, traditional accommodation. We only have 37 rooms, distributed on the first 2 floors of the hotel, and 5 suites of various sizes on the top floor, so you can understand why it is important to book in advance."

"How do you register your bookings?"

Mr Ullman: "We write everything in an old ledger that we keep at the front desk: Guest name, address, phone, date of birth, and nationality. Also, which room is booked at which price, and the dates, of course: arrival and departure."

"Is that working well?"

Mr Ullman: "Not really to be honest, even though it is how it has been done here for generations. For some reason we have had too many problems lately, both with double bookings and with refusing guests when we would have had room for them. I guess they just do not make hotel receptionists like they used to... Since we do not want to continue having these kinds of problems, we would like you to create a more efficient booking system for us, that can run on a computer that we will install at the front desk".

"Will it be an online booking system, so the customers can make their own bookings from home?"

Mr Ullman: "Customers? I suppose you can call them that, but here we like to refer to them as our *guests*. Nevertheless, we do not want to start out with an online booking system. What we need now is just that single computer at the front desk with a program on it, so that whoever is at work can make the booking. We can manage to answer the phone like we have always done."

“Okay, so anything else you can say about the system you want?”

Mr Ullman: “I do not know much about these things, but I am expecting some sort of standard looking program that we can use with a keyboard and mouse. You know the kind: Some fields to enter the data and some buttons and menus to do things: Saving and searching and what have you. We want no accidents with unsaved bookings.”

“Let me just check that we understand the booking part. You register information about the customer...”

Mr Ullman: “Guest.”

“Yes, of course... guest. So you register information about the guest. Furthermore you need the arrival and departure date. I’m guessing also the type of room, so you can choose which room number to book?”

Mr Ullman: “Yes, and some guests book more than one room, of course.”

“I see. What about the price? Do the rooms have a fixed price?”

Mr Ullman: “Well, the rooms *do* have standard prices, but sometimes we rent them out at a reduced price. We make a note of that in the ledger when they make a booking.”

“So the price could be higher or lower?”

Mr Ullman: “Not higher. We have a list of the prices shown at the front desk. What would the guests think if their prices were higher? If somebody enters a higher price, it is a mistake. Usually we charge the standard price, sometimes lower, but never higher.”

“Anything else you would register in a booking?”

Mr Ullman: “An extra bed, if required, and if we know how many guests to expect, we will put that down as well.”

“But you only register the name of the person that makes the booking.”

Mr Ullman: “Yes, the other guests are not registered until check-in.”

“What do you register at check-in?”

Mr Ullman: “Name, home address, phone, date of birth, nationality, room number, arrival date, expected departure. For all guests.”

“Isn’t the arrival date already on the booking?”

Mr Ullman: “If there is a booking. Sometimes people just arrive to see if we have a room available. We usually do not, but sometimes we do. Maybe someone booked a room and never showed up. That happens quite a lot.”

“What if they are just late?”

Mr Ullman: “If it is after 18:00 we might rent the room to someone else - unless they have notified us in advance of a late arrival.”

“If they do have a booking, I suppose you must find that booking when the guests arrive?”

Mr Ullman: “Yes. Every morning we go through the ledger and make a list of the day’s expected arrivals and departures. That is the part I am looking most forward to get rid of. It is a big hassle and we make way too many mistakes. Mind you, we still need the lists, but I am really glad we can get a computer to do that work.”

“I’m trying to picture the check-in process. A family arrives at the front desk; one of them steps forward and says ‘I’ve made a booking for some name’. Then what?”

Mr Ullman: “We use the information to look up their booking information, then we hand out a registration form to each member of the group, and ask them to fill out the information I told you before. Those registration forms go into our file cabinet now, but in the future, they will of course go into the computer somehow.”

“What happens at check-out?”

Mr Ullman: “Not much. We register the departure date and calculate the price.”

“I thought you already knew the price?”

“Guests might leave early, so we cannot give a price until they have left. As a matter of policy, we only charge for the nights people actually stay in the hotel. While it almost never happens, it could also be that a guest was not completely happy with their stay here, in which case we might offer them a discount at check-out. Just yesterday, one of our guests said he did not “like the atmosphere” in room 217 where he was staying, so we had to move him to a different room. Room 217 is a perfectly fine room, but the guest is always right, and upon check-out tomorrow we will give him a small discount, probably 5%, as our way of apologising for his bad experience.”

“Let me try to summarize: You need to be able to register a booking, see expected check-ins and check-outs, search for a booking, register check-in, and register check-out. Am I missing something? I suppose you need to cancel or change a booking.”

Mr Ullman: “Certainly, and we also need to be able to see the availability of the rooms for a certain period. In fact, it would be nice if we could just tell it the price range, time period, and/or room type and it could show the available rooms.”

“What room types do you have? You mentioned suites. What about smoking or non-smoking?”

Mr Ullman: “We have 3 single bedroom suites at €259 a night, a 2-bedroom suite at €339, and a 3-bedroom suite at €399. Our 10 single rooms cost €129 a night, and our double bedrooms cost €169 a night. We have 27 double bedrooms, 22 with a king size bed and 5 with twin beds. In principle, the entire hotel is non-smoking these days, but we do actually allow smoking in two of the suites, for some of our frequent guests, if they accept paying an extra fee to cover the additional cleaning that is necessary afterwards.”

“I’m sure all this could change from time to time. Should we add functionality to edit the prices or maybe the types of rooms?”

Mr Ullman: “That would certainly be nice to have, but it is not really a priority. Just keep in mind when you make your program that sometimes we might change the room prices.”

“Do you want an administration module to create users and passwords for your employees?”

Mr Ullman: “I do not see the need. There will always be someone at the front desk, and I trust all my employees. Do not waste time with usernames and passwords and all that. Whoever is there, will just use the system.”

“Okay, then I think we have everything we need. When should the new system be ready?”

Mr Ullman: “Since we are most busy during the summer holiday, then I would really like the system to be ready in time for that, so please have it finished at the beginning of June.”

“That’s not a lot of time, but if we work hard, then we can finish it in time.”

Mr Ullman: “Great.”

“Now just to be absolutely sure, you don’t want your custo... err... I mean guests, to also be able to make bookings online? I’m sure it could save you a lot of time.”

Mr Ullman: “Yes, I am sure. Like I said, we do not want an online booking system at the moment. Perhaps we might be interested in it sometime in the future though, but for now, let us see how this regular booking system turns out... but actually, now that you are talking about all these online things...”

“Yes?”

Mr Ullman: “We have a website for the hotel to let people know we exist, and to give potential guests some idea about what we have to offer. It was made a long time ago, and during the last couple of years more and more guests have been complaining that it does not work well on their phones. Apparently, there are also some moving things on the website called jifs, or something like that, which many guests say are no longer popular. So, I think we need a new website. If you have the time, could you also make one of those for us?”

“Err... there really isn’t much time to even do the booking system, but I guess if it’s just some info about the hotel that needs to be on the website, then yes, we can do that as well.”

Mr Ullman: “That is perfect. So yes, just a website with some general info about the hotel and the rooms and other facilities we have, plus maybe introducing some of our lovely hotel staff. Now that I am thinking about it, it would also be very nice if it could take some data out of the booking system you are making, so that it is possible for the guests to see the booking status of the rooms we have. Then fewer guests would call us to book a room when none is available.”

“That last part is not easy, but yes we can do it. I think we have everything we need now, and we will get started on the system right away.”

Mr Ullman: “Well, actually there is one more thing. My niece told me that she has recently started to learn something that has to do with computers. I think it is called Jawas...”

“That’s some weird little aliens from Star Wars, so maybe she said Java?”

Mr Ullman: “Yes, I think that’s it! She told me that it is very nice, so maybe you could try to use some of that when you make the booking system for us?”

“We will make sure to do that. Thank you for your time, Mr Ullman.”

Mr Ullman: “No problem, I will look forward to our new booking system and website.”