PEST SHERPA

Traveler Bed Bug Pocket Checklist

Before you unpack. Luggage and bags. After you get home or off the train.



By **Greg Baumann**, pest management expert and founder of Pest Sherpa

Scan for the full 5-minute hotel guide

Full step-by-step guide with photos: **pestsherpa.org/pest-guide/bed-bugs/hotel-inspection**

"Most travelers spend too much time looking across the mattress and not enough time inspecting seams, folds, and cracks. That's where bed bugs actually hide." **Greg Baumann**

1. Before you unpack (hotel room, about 5 minutes)

- ☐ **Park luggage in the bathroom or bathtub** first. Not on the bed, sofa, carpet, or luggage rack.
- ☐ Phone flashlight on. Fold back the sheets at each corner.
- ☐ **Mattress:** seams, piping, corners, labels, buttons, under the tag.
- ☐ **Headboard:** edges, brackets, screw holes, and the gap against the wall. If you only check one place, check the headboard.
- ☐ **Bed frame and platform:** joints, cracks, side rails.
- ☐ **Luggage rack:** skip it if you can. If you must use it, check straps, joints, screw heads, and underside first.
- ☐ **Nightstand:** drawer corners, joints, back edge by the wall.
- ☐ **Upholstered chair or sofa:** cushion seams, zippers, folds.
- ☐ If time allows: picture frames, outlet covers, baseboards behind the bed.

Focus on seams, cracks, joints, and folds. Broad flat surfaces rarely tell you much.

What you are looking for

- Live bugs: flat, oval, about the size of an apple seed
- Black, ink-like fecal spots clustered in seams and cracks
- Shed translucent skins and tiny white eggs (about 1 mm)
- Rust-colored spots on sheets
- Itchy welts alone do not prove a bad room. Evidence beats bites.

If you find evidence

- Stop unpacking. Leave bags where they are.
- Take clear close-up photos. Calmly tell the front desk.
- Ask for a room **not adjacent, directly above, or directly below**.
- Do not treat the room yourself. Re-inspect the new room before unpacking.



Dark fecal spots and staining along a mattress seam.



Spotting around a wall plate: they hide beyond the bed.



A bed bug on the underside of a box spring.

Photos: Greg Baumann

2. Luggage and bags (during your stay)

- ☐ **Skip the luggage rack if you can.** Hollow metal tubes have holes you cannot see inside. If you must use it, inspect first and pull it away from the bed and wall.
- ☐ Keep suitcases closed when not in use.
- ☐ Seal dirty laundry in plastic bags.
- ☐ Keep clothing off beds, sofas, chairs, and carpet.
- ☐ Purses, backpacks, and jackets go on hard surfaces, not the bed.
- ☐ Give your luggage a quick look before you check out.

3. After you get home (or after the commute)

- ☐ Inspect bags outdoors, in the garage, or away from bedrooms.
- ☐ Check zippers, seams, handles, wheels, pockets, and interior folds.
- ☐ Washable clothes go straight into the washer. Dry on the highest heat the fabric allows.
- ☐ Vacuum suitcase seams, folds, and pockets. Empty the vacuum into a sealed bag.
- ☐ Store luggage away from bedrooms until the next trip.
- ☐ **Train or bus commuters:** set your work bag or backpack on a hard surface, not the bed or couch, and give it the same quick seam and zipper check.

Most travelers who bring bed bugs home never realized they picked one up. A simple unpacking routine is the easiest prevention there is.

Education only. General educational information from Pest Sherpa, written by Greg Baumann. No inspection can guarantee a room is free of bed bugs. Travel guidance aligns with EPA Tips for Travel.