

Review: SuperInn (sarktech.com)

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Overview

SuperInn markets itself toward Bed & Breakfasts, small inns, cabins, boutique hotels and the like, rather than the larger properties such as resorts and hotels. It is an entirely web-based technology, which allows it to be used without regard to operating system (Windows, Mac, Linux). As with most web-based systems, some features are either not present, or of rather limited capability. SuperInn provides the basic spectrum of features needed, though is priced higher than some competing products with more features and more intuitive interfaces.

User Interface

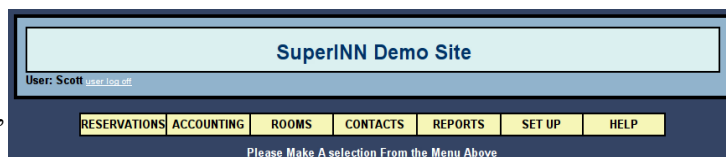
There have been a number of newly-released reservation/booking/guest management systems in the past year or so. All the newer systems we've seen have been web-based (as opposed to a stand-alone system you install on your own computer), most have a clean, simple appearance, and seem to be easy to use. Next to them, the SuperInn interface appears very dated and cumbersome to use – though no doubt quite serviceable when the user becomes familiar with it.

In evaluating the user interface, we consider the layout of the screens (or web pages), ease of navigating the program, ease of entering (or changing) booking or guest information, the usability of “snapshot” or calendar views of bookings, and availability of sorted and filtered guest lists (for marketing purposes).

SuperInn has been around for quite some time.

Unfortunately, in the fast-changing world of internet software, that means that the technology is quite dated, and the administrative screens feel cumbersome and are not intuitive.

Upon signing into the system, the screen at right presents a series of menus. Exploring the menus, you quickly discover that some entries do not mean what you might expect. For example, you might expect that you could click on the Setup menu to enter your rooms and rates. You would be mistaken. The setup menu is primarily for system and overall inn information, such as contact information, taxes, and the like. Rooms are set up and priced under the Rooms menu. Packages and add-on items are set up under the Setup menu by selecting the rather cryptic entry “Transaction Types.”



When you make a selection from the menu, your next screen typically has choices such as date, report type, or other selections appropriate to the area of the program you are in, then you finally go the the actual area you are seeking. There you'll usually find a large button (left) which returns you to the Main Menu (except that sometimes it takes to the section menu, instead, and sometimes that button is replaced by a text link. Don't be misled by the “Exit Program” language – you are not actually exiting the program, but returning to the previous menu. These are the signs of a system that has grown, unevenly, over time.

There are several ways to create a reservation. Each requires clicking through several screens, but the most logical way to create a booking is from the calendar view (below). To create a booking, click the rate in the row for the desired room. You are then presented with fields to enter the number of nights, number of guests, then move forward to a new screen, where it feels like you are starting over. Despite having selected a rate from a specific room row, you are presented with all rooms available for the dates chosen, and a screen which says “To



To Book a Room From Chart: Click On An Available Day:

Room	Previous 20							Next 20													
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
C	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2	300-2
Pac	149	149	149	149	169-2	169-2	149	149	149	149	149	169-2	169-2	149	149	149	149	149	169-2	169-2	149
St.V	109	109	109	109	119-2	119-2	109	109	109	109	109	119-2	119-2	109	109	109	109	109	119-2	119-2	109
Jane	149	149	149	149	169-2	169-2	149	149	149	149	149	169-2	169-2	149	149	149	149	149	169-2	169-2	149
Mark	Smith	Ab	250	250	265-2	265-2	250	250	250	250	250	265-2	265-2	250	250	250	250	250	265-2	265-2	250
Nat	350	350	350	350	425-2	425-2	350	350	350	350	350	425-2	425-2	350	350	350	350	350	425-2	425-2	350
Ern	165	165	165	165	185-2	185-2	165	165	165	165	165	185-2	185-2	165	165	165	165	165	185-2	185-2	165
Stein	165	165	165	165	185-2	185-2	165	165	165	165	165	185-2	185-2	165	165	165	165	165	185-2	185-2	165
Room	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun

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reserve a room – Click on the number”. The following screen asks for detailed guest information, and completes the reservation. Somewhat oddly, entering a guest from another country leaves the US state list, so that even a country like Australia, which has states, displays US states.

SuperInn doesn't appear to have a sortable guest list – at least we were not able to find it. There are several guest

lists, but they are date-related or reservation-related lists, not lists of all guests. You can get a list of guests by US state, or lists of the last 150 reservations. Generally, the reports generated by SuperInn are meant to be used on the screen. They can be copied and pasted into a word processor or spreadsheet, but they are not directly exportable.

Rate Capabilities

Booking systems should allow for different rates for each room, seasonal rates, specials or discounts, packages, additional items to add to a reservation, and have a way of handling bookings for multiple rooms, such as a group booking. If larger properties are also to use the booking system, the group booking capability becomes even more significant, and there should also be the ability to create rates by room type.

Since SuperInn is not intended for larger properties, only those small properties who like to work with room types will object to the absence of that type of rate structure in this booking system. SuperInn allows for individual room rates, seasonal rates, and, via the Transaction Types menu, add-on purchases, packages, discounts, specials, and group rates can be configure. SuperInn scores moderately well in the rate capabilities area.

One particularly thorny problem is with packages. SuperInn allows the guest to book a room, and to purchase add-on items. It does not allow you to select a package, which would include multiple items with a room reservation, perhaps for a different rate than the individual items would total.

Guest Communications

Modern booking systems allow for a number of guest communications to be sent from within the system – usually as emails. The most common are confirmation emails, cancellation confirmations, reminder and follow-up emails, invoices, and marketing emails. We feel that all these items, with the possible exception of marketing

1	Confirmation E-Mail/Letter
2	Payment Reminder E-Mail/Letter
3	Payment Received E-Mail/Letter
4	Thank you for staying with us E-Mail/Letter
5	Welcome Letter
6	Customize E-mail Stationery
7	Policies
8	Cancellation Email/Letter
9	Registration Form
10	Inquiry Response/Letter
11	Confirmation email/Letter #2
12	Custom Emails/Letters

emails (due to the common use of stand-alone email marketing programs, such as *Constant Contact* and others), are sufficiently important that they should be included in the booking system.

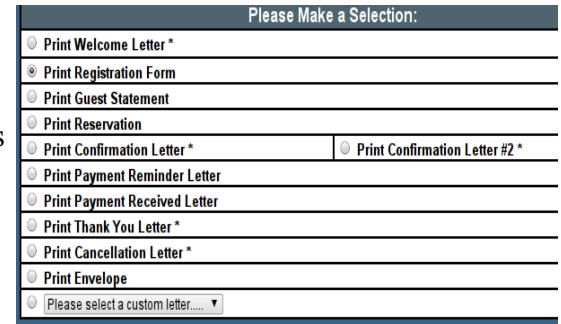
SuperInn includes most of these types of guest communications. Some vendors charge additional fees for these features. To its credit, SuperInn includes them in the cost of the product.

SuperInn provides email booking confirmations, confirmation of payments, requests for payment balance, reminder emails, and thanking guests for their stay (follow-up emails), as well as cancellation emails. They add inquiry response letters, which most will find unnecessary, since

Illustration 1: SuperInn email templates

the original inquiry email will not be processed through SuperInn, but through the innkeepers' own email program.

Creating a guest invoice or folio is far from intuitive, but it can be done. You must first locate the reservation (from the Reservation menu, the availability calendar, or however you find it easiest to locate), then click the Print button. This brings up a selection of items which can be printed, from emails to payment history (right). After selecting Print Guest Statement, the invoice/folio appears as an html page, which can be printed.



The screenshot shows a menu titled "Please Make a Selection:" with the following options:

- Print Welcome Letter *
- Print Registration Form
- Print Guest Statement
- Print Reservation
- Print Confirmation Letter * Print Confirmation Letter #2 *
- Print Payment Reminder Letter
- Print Payment Received Letter
- Print Thank You Letter *
- Print Cancellation Letter *
- Print Envelope
- Please select a custom letter..... ▾

Reports

To evaluate a property's performance, report taxes, and track marketing results, reports are a key source of information for the innkeeper. Different booking systems provide for different numbers and types of reports. Of course, if the system doesn't capture the information in the first instance, it will never be able to report on it. At a minimum, a booking system should be able to generate reports of reservations for the coming month/day/week/year, revenue for specified periods of time, occupancy (total and by room) for specific periods of time, and revenue by date (and by room). Many innkeepers also require reports of gift certificates sold or redeemed, housekeeping issues, and additional financial reports, such as taxes collected.

As with most web-based booking systems, reporting is not the strongest area of SuperInn. SuperInn offers a seemingly vast array of reports, listing nearly 40 reports under the Reports menu, and an additional 30+ under the Accounting menu. However, looking over the reports a bit more carefully, most of the occupancy and revenue reports are useful. They would be more valuable, however, if there was an option to export them to a spreadsheet, either directly, or via a comma delimited file.

Many of the other reports available are simply variations of the basic reports, making them by room, by guest, by date (or week, month, year), by geographic location, etc. The number and types of reports suffer for lack of an organized method of accessing them (such as categorizing them more narrowly), but they far exceed the reporting capability of most web-based systems. They are nearly as complete as the better systems which require a local computer installation.

Accounting

Most booking systems provide some way to use the revenue data in an accounting or bookkeeping system, such as Quickbooks or Peachtree. In a few cases, the revenue data is directly linked to the bookkeeping product, but most booking systems export the data to a file, which can be imported into the bookkeeping software.

Most likely due to targeting smaller properties, and the older technology employed by SuperInn, exporting the reports to bookkeeping software, or to a CSV file, is not supported.

Online Booking

Modern web-based booking systems generally provide their own online booking interface, and rarely interact with other online booking systems (such as *Webervations* or *Availability Online*). By contrast, most stand-alone

guest management systems will interact with third-party online booking systems, even if they provide their own online booking module as an option. A significant drawback to not interacting with other systems is that the property is precluded from taking advantage of group booking and availability opportunities, unless they pay an additional fee for a second system.

For example, *BBOonline.com* shows availability (using *Weberervations*) for all properties in a locality who use *Weberervations*. If a property uses another system, their availability will not appear on *BBOonline.com* unless they purchase a subscription to *Weberervations*, and keep it up-to-date, as well as their own booking system.

SuperInn requires the property to link to SuperInn's site (in other words, the guest must leave the property's web site) to check availability and complete the booking. They do customize the SuperInn pages so they do look like the property's web site, and the visual impact is less of a concern.

Somewhat cumbersome in its approach, SuperInn requires the guest to select a room and date from the availability calendar, then select a check-in date and number of nights and guests, then click again on a link labeled "Click here to RESERVE", then complete their information and select any add-on items, before completing the booking. The booking is a confirmed reservation, not a request for a reservation, meaning the guest receives an immediate confirmation email. Some innkeepers prefer that the guest booking create a request for a reservation, so they can review the details and confirm after reviewing it themselves.

Pricing

Sark Technologies, makers of SuperInn, provide very little information about themselves on their website, and no pricing information, at all. When requesting a demo of the product, we asked about the pricing for a 7 room B&B, and were told in the email granting demo access that the monthly rate would be \$60 per month.

Final Thoughts

On a positive note, SuperInn can do all that most small properties ask of their property management and online booking system, and provides much better than average reporting capabilities. On a less positive note, the cumbersome interface, poorly organized menus and lists of reports, and relatively high price compared to similar products with similar features will make this a poor choice for most innkeepers.

There is no question that, when it comes to managing guest reservations and bookings, one size does not fit all. Most systems provide an evaluation copy of the software, or a free trial account. We strongly urge anyone considering purchasing a booking system to evaluate several different products before making a decision.