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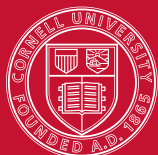
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What Is a Gateway City? A Hotel Market Perspective



By: Jack Corgel, Ph.D.
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Glenn Withiam, *Director of Publications*

Center for Real Estate and Finance
Cornell University
School of Hotel Administration
389 Statler Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

Phone: 607-255-6025

Fax: 607-254-2922

www.cref.cornell.edu

What Is a Gateway City?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Acknowledging the importance of international arrivals to foreign exchange, an empirical analysis identifies eight cities in the United States as “gateway cities,” where real estate investments have an arguably higher rates of return, in part due to a generally stronger economic climate. Using 2010 figures, the analysis takes into account the number of enplanements and overall visitation by international travelers, as those figures relate to the number of hotel room-nights sold in a particular market. The eight gateway cities thus identified are New York, Miami, San Francisco, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. Each of these received over 1 million visitors in 2010. By comparison, although Orlando and Las Vegas are major markets for international travelers, they tend not to be the entry point for visitors, who are more likely to touch down in Los Angeles (for Las Vegas) or Miami (for Orlando). While the empirical methodology relies on certain assumptions, it is also true that hotel operations in these eight cities have shown stronger performance in terms of revenue per available room than other top cities that are not gateways.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Corgel, Ph.D., holds the Robert C. Baker Chair of Real Estate and is a full professor at the School of Hotel Administration (jc81@cornell.edu). He served as the first director of the school's Center for Hospitality Research from 1992-1994. He has been a visiting scholar at the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Washington, D.C., and is a fellow of the Homer Hoyt Institute. He also is a senior advisor to PKF Hospitality Research where he is helping to develop new products for the hotel industry based on property-level financial performance information. He has published over 65 articles in academic and professional journals, mainly on the subjects of real estate finance, investment, valuation, and hospitality real estate, in such journals as Real Estate Economics, Journal of Urban Economics, Journal of Risk and Insurance, Journal of the American Business Law Association, Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, and International Journal of Hospitality Management. In addition, he has written for nearly every national journal read by real estate professionals. His textbook, “Real Estate Perspectives” (with



Smith and Ling) was used throughout the nation for introductory real estate courses.

This article benefited from comments by Crocker Liu.

What Is a Gateway City?

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“Tourists are a special kind of stimulus. They spend their money here and head back home without imposing costs for health care or education on taxpayers, essentially allowing the United States to siphon some of the prosperity in developing countries, where there have been large, albeit uneven, wealth explosions.”¹

The United States Office of Management and Budget designates 366 American cities as metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs).² Fifty of these 366 MSAs contain the majority of the nation’s hotel rooms. For purposes of investing in these locations, hotel capital suppliers rely on *ad hoc* taxonomies to organize geographic markets along quality lines with labels such as top-tier cities, secondary and tertiary cities, coastal cities, and gateway cities. Although high quality hotel investments exist in many markets, the presumption is that assets in top-tier and gateway cities exceed others as IRR generators. Despite widespread acceptance of common taxonomies, definitions that allow for inclusion and exclusion of cities among the various categories are fuzzy at best. More precision regarding the organization of metropolitan hotel markets might promote research on relative pricing of hotels and investment return premiums available in these markets and generally assist the industry in differentiating MSA hotel markets.

¹ Josh Boak, “U.S. Looks to Tourism for Revenue,” *Politico*, March 27, 2012.

² The same governmental agency defines Combined Statistical Areas (CSA) as a collection economically and geographically connected MSAs.

This article focuses on the definition of gateway cities in which hotel investment occurs. Beyond the likely disagreements about which cities qualify for gateway city status, the idea of the gateway city transcends the hotel industry in the domestic economy and has an international context not associated with the top-tier and coastal labels.³ My intention in preparing this article is simply to further the understanding of a term often applied to describe hotel investment strategies targeted toward a certain type of geographic market. Despite the general popularity of the gateway city moniker, surprising little has been written about these cities as a distinct category. Also, few comparative analyses have been performed on economic and financial performance aspects of gateway cities relative to non-gateway cities. I report here on results from a literature search that uncovered a few studies that differentiate gateway cities from others. The definitions used in these studies, while approaching the task from different directions, have common threads. Relying on these common threads and hotel metrics, I propose a definition of gateway city for hotel investment purposes and propose eight cities for this designation.

Gateway to What?

“Gateway” takes on different meanings as a spatial concept through history, and its meaning changes depending on particular economic or social contexts.⁴ Omaha, Nebraska, was once known as the “Gateway City” because of its geographically vast linkages in the western U.S. and economic power therein.⁵ Similarly, St. Louis has long been described as the “gateway to the west” symbolized by the famous arch. As Cronon points out, these designations were not bestowed because cities served as central places in the classical economic sense, but instead, because they served as “the entrance and exit linking some large region with the rest of the world.”⁶ For decades, New York’s Ellis Island was a gateway to a “new world” for hopeful immigrants. The rest of the world, once confined to the continental U.S., now comprises the nations of the world. The present-day application of this term may have begun with U.S. airlines referring to gateway cities as the final stop before flights leave for international destinations.

³ The gateway city distinction recognizes that some cities have relatively important international linkages between their economies and those in other countries. Also, a gateway city might not be considered a top-tier city or be located on a coast.

⁴ This section benefited from the review of ideas regarding gateway cities by Drennen (1992).

⁵ L. Eaton, *Gateway Cities and Other Essays* (Ames IA: Iowa State Press, 1989).

⁶ W. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton 1991), p. 307.

Immigration-Based Definition

In a series of studies, economists study U.S. immigrant population migration patterns and housing tenure choices within the U.S.⁷ These studies define gateway cities as metropolitan areas in which immigrants begin U.S. residency and accordingly have the largest and proportionally largest immigrant populations. The following three criteria are applied to define a gateway city:⁸

- (1) The top 10 metropolitan areas with the largest immigrant population.
- (2) The top 20 metropolitan areas with the largest immigrant share of the metropolitan population.
- (3) Less than 45 percent of the immigrant population entering as new arrivals (approximately the past 10 years).

A further delineation occurs among gateway cities as to whether they “have made it” (i.e., become established) or fall into an emerging category. The list of five established and fourteen emerging gateway cities is as follows.⁹

Established gateway cities: New York CSA, Chicago CSA, Miami CSA, Los Angeles CSA, and San Diego MSA.

Emerging gateway cities: Atlanta MSA, Boston CSA, Dallas CSA, Denver CSA, Houston CSA, Los Vegas MSA, Orlando MSA, Philadelphia CSA, Phoenix MSA, Sacramento CSA, Seattle CSA, Tampa MSA, Washington CSA, West Palm Beach MSA.

Similar to other definitions of gateway cities, this definition relies on geographical linkages, and as with other definitions of modern vintage, these linkages are international. Unlike the tourism-based airline definition, however, residency of travelers to the destination gateway is at least semi-permanent. Residency-based definitions of gateway cities imply different local impacts than tourism-based definitions. The economics of gateway cities defined according to immigration residency relate more to personal services and housing markets than hospitality.

Global Cities

The term globalization has been popularized in most disciplines. In fields of geography and urban studies, the idea of a global city emerged to recognize a network of places linked

⁷ G. Painter and Z. Yu, “Leaving Gateway Metropolitan Areas in the United States: Immigrants and the Housing Market,” *Urban Studies*, Vol. 45, Nos. 5 & 6 (2008), pp. 1163-1191; G. Painter, S.A. Gabriel, and D. Myers, “Race, Immigration Status and Housing Tenure Choice,” *Journal of Housing Economics*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (2001), pp. 150-169; and G. Painter, L. Yang, and Z. Yu, “Heterogeneity in Asian American Homeownership: The Impact of Household Endowments and Immigrant Status,” *Urban Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2003), pp. 505-530.

⁸ Painter and Yu, 2008, *op.cit.*

⁹ Only the first city listed for each CSA is shown here.

in finance, trade, and a variety of socio-economic factors.¹⁰ Academic study at Loughborough University in the U.K. during the late 1990s led to the publication of *GaWC Research Bulletin 5*, which was subsequently published in *Cities*, that includes a roster and ranking according to an Alpha, Beta, and Gamma scale.¹¹ The following list of U.S. global cities comes from the 2010 edition of this publication:

Alpha ++: New York.

Alpha +: Chicago and Los Angeles.

Alpha: San Francisco, Washington, Atlanta, Boston, and Dallas.

Alpha-: Miami and Philadelphia.

Beta +: Houston.

Beta: Seattle, Cleveland, Denver, and Detroit.

Beta-: San Diego, St. Louis, Baltimore, Charlotte, and Cincinnati.

Gamma +: Portland, San Jose, Columbus, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Phoenix.

Gamma: Pittsburgh and Tampa.

Gamma-: Orlando and Richmond.

Among other efforts to rank global cities, *Foreign Policy* in 2008 published a Global City Index that recognizes the world's most interconnected cities and global hubs.¹² Six U.S. cities made the top-30 list. These are (rank in parentheses): New York (1), Chicago (6), Los Angeles (7), San Francisco (12), Washington (13), and Boston (19).

Comparative Analyses

The only analysis I found that compares either economic or financial metrics across cities defined as gateway and non-gateway is by Drennen.¹³ The study recognizes the growth in importance of producer services (e.g., communication, banking, and insurance) to the U.S. economy and as exported services. The four gateway cities in Drennan's analysis—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco—accounted for between one-quarter and one-third of U.S. producer service output during the late 1980s depend-

ing on the measure used. More important, exports of these services are elastic with respect to domestic production. The implication of the research is that gateway cities emerge and prosper because the goods and services they produce for domestic consumption also are highly demanded in other parts of the world.

Defining Hotel Gateway Cities

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that to achieve the objective set forth at the beginning of this article—that is, to differentiate gateway city hotel markets from other markets—a definition must be rooted in international tourism as it relates to hotel markets. The following definition published in the *Travel Industry Dictionary* partially satisfies this condition:¹⁴

gateway city. 1. A city that serves as a departure or arrival point for international flights. 2. A city that serves as an airline's entry or departure point to or from a country.

Although most international tourists to the U.S. arrive and depart via airplane, arrivals and departures via Canada or Mexico may involve either land or water conveyances. Essentially, international travel can occur from any country to the U.S. over water or land, as well as by air. To account for international tourism irrespective of the mode of travel, as well as its impact on the city's hotel market, a revised version of the *Travel Industry Dictionary* definition is constructed as follows:¹⁵

hotel gateway city. 1. A city that serves as a departure or arrival point for international travel regardless of either transportation mode or country of origin and destination. 2. A city in which international tourism is meaningful to the local hotel market.

The revised definition gives rise both to a broad interpretation of the hotel gateway city and to a narrower interpretation. Because the revised definition includes all arrivals and departures, the broad interpretation counts U.S. residents who arrive or depart from the gateway in addition to international travelers arriving or departing through the U.S. gateway, that is, all international enplanements. A narrower interpretation only accounts for international arrivals, that is, international visitations.

Exhibit 1 presents data from three sources—U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism

¹⁰ The global city classification systems presented in this section is not meant to be exhaustive, but instead representative.

¹¹ J.V. Beaverstock, R.G. Smith and P.J. Taylor, "A Roster of World Cities," *Cities*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (1999), pp. 445-458. *Research Bulletin 5* is available here: www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/rb/rb5.html. This analysis also includes cities that are developing world status.

¹² www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/11/the_global_cities_index_2010.

¹³ M.P. Drennen, "Gateway Cities: The Metropolitan Sources of U.S. Producer Service Exports," *Urban Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1992), pp. 217-235.

¹⁴ <http://www.travel-industry-dictionary.com>.

¹⁵ Marketing firm Clairvoyix provides the following definition of gateway city that recognizes other modes of transportation (www.clairvoyix.com/files.doc/terminology2.pdf):

Gateway or Gateway City—A major airport, seaport, rail, or bus center through which tourists and travelers enter from outside the region.

Travel and hotel room supply data for 24 large American cities

	City	2010 Rooms Available	2010 Annual Room Nights	2011 Enplanements	2010 Visitation	Enplanements / Rooms Nights	Visitation / Rooms Available
1	Las Vegas	148,386	54,161,040	1,094,368	2,425,000	2.02%	4.48%
2	Orlando	117,667	42,948,389	1,575,765	2,715,000	3.67%	6.32%
3	Chicago	107,544	39,253,407	5,305,202	1,134,000	13.52%	2.89%
4	Dallas	106,457	38,856,699	2,520,873	343,000	6.49%	0.88%
5	Washington	103,103	37,632,661	3,181,143	1,740,000	8.45%	4.62%
6	Los Angeles	97,490	35,583,879	7,660,713	3,348,000	21.53%	9.41%
7	New York	94,598	34,528,226	12,045,964	8,462,000	34.89%	24.51%
8	Atlanta	93,977	34,301,707	4,597,526	712,000	13.40%	2.08%
9	Houston	71,165	25,975,262	4,161,021	448,000	16.02%	1.72%
10	Phoenix	60,571	22,108,543	1,058,772	N/A	4.79%	N/A
11	San Francisco	51,385	18,755,452	4,278,259	2,636,000	22.81%	14.05%
12	Boston	50,052	18,268,980	1,869,712	1,186,000	10.23%	6.49%
13	Miami	46,778	17,073,824	8,324,983	3,111,000	48.76%	18.22%
14	Tampa	44,381	16,199,229	194,041	343,000	1.20%	2.12%
15	Philadelphia	43,110	15,735,114	1,874,553	633,000	11.91%	4.02%
16	Detroit	41,033	14,977,165	1,462,423	N/A	9.76%	N/A
17	Seattle	40,130	14,647,355	1,347,417	475,000	9.20%	3.24%
18	Denver	39,281	14,337,642	988,059	N/A	6.89%	N/A
19	Minneapolis	38,035	13,882,687	1,146,921	N/A	8.26%	N/A
20	Baltimore	32,331	11,800,786	201,317	N/A	1.71%	N/A
21	Charlotte	31,853	11,626,509	1,313,128	N/A	11.29%	N/A
22	Honolulu	29,020	10,592,212	1,775,840	1,634,000	16.77%	15.43%
23	Portland	26,014	9,495,084	242,115	N/A	2.55%	N/A
24	Salt Lake City	20,763	7,578,404	233,951	N/A	3.09%	N/A

Notes: List includes only Continental U.S. and Hawaii, Newark, New Jersey, excluded due to proximity to New York; Ft. Lauderdale excluded due to proximity to Miami.

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, U.S. Department of Transportation,

Industries (OTTI) for visitation to U.S. cities by international travelers; U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) for enplanements in U.S. cities to international destinations by both U.S. and non-U.S. citizens; and Smith Travel Research (STR) for the number of available hotel rooms in these cities. The OTTI data allow for identifying and ranking gateway cities in conformance with the narrow interpretation of gateway cities. Similarly, the BTS data conform to the broad interpretation that counts U.S. citizens departing from the gateway. The STR data allow for scaling visitation and enplanement data by the size of the hotel market to judge its relative importance to that market.

Before I present the data, I note the following problems with these definitions:

- (1) With the broader interpretation, departing U.S. residents have far less reliance on hospitality services than international travelers do; and
- (2) The visitation data underlying the narrower interpretation include all modes of transportation, but do not include visits from Canada and Mexico—the two countries with the most visitors to the U.S.

The 24 cities that appear in Exhibit 1 (listed in order of hotel room inventory) experienced the largest number of enplanements among U.S. cities in 2011.¹⁶ Note the wide

¹⁶ Cities in U.S. Territories and one small city that appeared on the original list are excluded from this analysis.

EXHIBIT 2**Hotel gateway cities, broadly defined by enplanements**

Rank	City	Enplanements/ Room-Nights
1	Miami	48.76%
2	New York	34.89%
3	San Francisco	22.81%
4	Los Angeles	21.53%
5	Honolulu	16.77%
6	Houston	16.02%
7	Chicago	13.52%
8	Atlanta	13.40%
9	Philadelphia	11.91%
10	Charlotte	11.29%
11	Boston	10.23%
12	Detroit	9.76%
13	Seattle	9.20%
14	Washington	8.45%
15	Minneapolis	8.26%
16	Denver	6.89%
17	Dallas	6.49%
18	Phoenix	4.79%
19	Orlando	3.67%
20	Salt Lake City	3.09%
21	Portland	2.55%
22	Las Vegas	2.02%
23	Baltimore	1.71%
24	Tampa	1.20%

Sources: U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Smith Travel Research.

variation in enplanements, ranging from less than 200,000 to over 12 million. Note as well that the visitation data are not as complete as the enplanements data, with eight mostly smaller cities missing these data. Visitations also exhibit considerable variation (i.e., 343,000 to over 8 million). In the two columns on the far right of Exhibit 1, enplanements and visitations are scaled by the annual number of hotel room-nights (i.e., average daily number of rooms available times 365). These ratios provide a gross notion of the potential occupancy contributions from enplanements and visitations, but more specific to ranking hotel gateway cities, the ratios relate enplanements and visitation totals to the size and importance of international travel to these cities' hotel markets.

EXHIBIT 3**Hotel gateway cities, narrowly defined by visitation**

Rank	City	Visitation/ Room-Nights
1	New York	24.51%
2	Miami	18.22%
3	Honolulu	15.43%
4	San Francisco	14.05%
5	Los Angeles	9.41%
6	Boston	6.49%
7	Orlando	6.32%
8	Washington	4.62%
9	Las Vegas	4.48%
10	Philadelphia	4.02%
11	Seattle	3.24%
12	Chicago	2.89%
13	Tampa	2.12%
14	Atlanta	2.08%
15	Houston	1.72%
16	Dallas/Fort Worth	0.88%
17	Detroit	N/A
18	Charlotte	N/A
19	Minneapolis	N/A
20	Phoenix	N/A
21	Denver	N/A
22	Portland (OR)	N/A
23	Salt Lake City	N/A
24	Baltimore	N/A

Sources: U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Smith Travel Research.

In Exhibit 2, the cities are ranked according to number of enplanements during 2011 scaled by available hotel room-nights. This approach to determining and ranking hotel gateway cities is both revealing and distorting. The relationship between international enplanements and available room-nights, especially in Miami, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, demonstrates the importance of their airports for moving international travelers—hence potential hotel guests—through these cities. By contrast, Las Vegas and Orlando, the two largest hotel markets in the U.S., appear to depend little on international arrivals and departures to the local airport for hotel business. A likely path for international travelers to Las Vegas, for example, involves a

EXHIBIT 4

Hotel gateway cities: Composite ranking

Rank	City	Composite Rank Score
1	New York	3
1	Miami	3
2	San Francisco	7
3	Honolulu	8
4	Los Angeles	9
5	Boston	17
6	Chicago	19
7	Philadelphia	19
8	Houston	21
9	Washington, DC	22
10	Atlanta	22
11	Seattle	24
12	Orlando	26
13	Las Vegas	31
14	Dallas	34
15	Tampa	37

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism, U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Smith Travel Research.

trip through Los Angeles and thence to Las Vegas. Similarly, Orlando international visitors may arrive in the U.S. at the Miami airport.

The relative number of visitations to hotel room-nights produces the ranked list presented in Exhibit 3. Many of the cities that appeared at the top and at bottom of the enplanement/room-night list show up on this list at approximately the same rank. However, Las Vegas and Orlando rank much higher on this list. In addition, large cities in the southern U.S.—Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, and Tampa—experience low international visitation relative to the size of their hotel markets.

Finally, a composite ranking of cities is produced by adding the enplanement and visitation ranks and re-ordering the cities, as shown in Exhibit 4. Unfortunately, Detroit, which ranked 12th in the enplanement ranking, could not be included in the consolidated list because of missing visitation data. This composite ranking balances the broad and narrow interpretations of the hotel gateway city definition I proposed at the outset.

True Hotel Gateway Cities

The following cities qualify without reservation as hotel gateway cities: New York, Miami, San Francisco, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. Philadelphia is not included in this group largely because of relatively low visitation. The eight hotel gateway cities on the list all received over 1 million international visitors in 2010,

EXHIBIT 5

RevPAR and income growth comparisons: Hotel gateway cities and other top-25 markets

Performance Measure	Eight U.S. Hotel Gateway Cities	Seventeen of the Top 25 U.S. City Hotel Markets Excluding Gateway Cities	All U.S. Hotel Markets
RevPAR Percentage Change—10 Years			
Upper Price	4.7%	1.6%	2.2%
Lower Price	4.4%	1.5%	2.0%
RevPAR Percentage Change—5 Years			
Upper Price	-1.1%	-2.1%	-1.9%
Lower Price	-0.8%	-2.7%	-1.6%
Real Personal Income Percentage Change			
10 Years	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%
5 Years	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%

Sources: Moody's Analytics, PKF Hospitality Research, Smith Travel Research

while Philadelphia received 633,000 visitors. Even though Orlando and Las Vegas are important destinations for international visitors, they are not included for the reason cited above—their large hotel markets are not heavily dependent on international enplanements. Also because of low relative visitation by international travelers, Houston, Atlanta, Seattle, Dallas, and Tampa do not appear on the list. Detroit might have been included as a hotel gateway city had its visitation data been available.

Limitations and future study. A couple of disclaimers are in order. First, my selection of eight hotel gateway cities relies on simple empirical methodology and considerable judgment. Therefore, the list cannot be held out as the result of scientific inquiry. Second, I cannot make well substantiated claims that either the periodic financial performance of these eight cities or their property value growth is any different from those of other large American city hotel markets without completing a formal research project. Exhibit 5 presents data to suggest that a scientific study may find that the hotel gateway cities I selected outperform other hotel markets on a RevPAR growth basis. During the past ten-year period covering an entire cycle, gateway city RevPAR growth well exceeded other markets, including the seventeen remaining cities in the top-25 markets (Las Vegas excluded) and all U.S. hotel markets. During the past five-year period, which was dominated by a severe downturn, the gateway cities experienced more modest RevPAR declines than other major markets. These differentiated outcomes occurred with the same real personal income growth rates across the U.S. To confirm that hotel markets in gateway cities perform better than other hotel markets, controls need to be introduced for fundamental factors such as size, chain scale mix, supply growth, and other economic variables in addition to real personal income. ■

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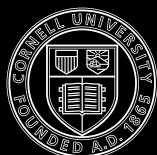
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Cornell University
School of Hotel Administration



Cornell University
School of Hotel Administration
Center for Real Estate and Finance
389 Statler Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853
USA
607-255-6025
www.cref.cornell.edu