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7 Odd Things Hotels and Airlines Will Loan You

By Catey Hill

Though travelers have resigned themselves to being nickel and dimed by fees, there's also a more encouraging trend at work. Hotels and airlines increasingly will lend out items as varied as curling irons, Crock-Pots, neckties, and iPads — and in one case, even a pet goldfish.

In October, Southwest announced it would lend fliers iPads on some of its routes, joining a handful of other airlines that already do this. Earlier this year Hyatt unveiled the “Hyatt Has It” program, letting guests borrow beauty items, humidifiers and more; Kimpton has a similar program called “Forget It? We’ve Got it!” And Candlewood Suites, a chain of 309 hotels, has a formal borrowing program to lend guests items that they might not have had room to pack in their suitcases, like kitchenware and games.

For their part, hotels — which most commonly lend borrowers beauty items like flat irons and hairdryers — say they are adding many new items to the list. Robert Radomski, the vice president of brand management for Candlewood Suites, says that their Lending Locker program was created to spare guests the annoyance of bringing items like kitchenware. “It’s a way to enhance customer loyalty at a cheap price,” says Andy Brennan, an analyst at IbisWorld.

Most of the airlines, on the other hand — where the newer borrowing programs are largely limited to iPads unless you’re a first-class passenger — are doing the lending for an entirely different reason: it’s a cost effective way to entertain guests without having to retrofit the planes with fancy televisions, says Brennan. In Southwest’s case, the iPad borrowing program is part of a partnership it’s doing with Dish network, its satellite TV partner.

To be sure, you’ll still get slapped with fees when you travel — especially by the airlines. Last year, airline fees just for luggage and reservation changes rose 7% to a record-high of \$6.1 billion — and experts say that airline fees will likely climb in the coming years. Hotels — even those with seemingly generous lending policies — are also known for hefty surcharges, as anyone who’s had a \$5 bottle of water or a \$6 bag of nuts from the mini bar can attest to.

Still, if you’re savvy about where and how you travel, there’s plenty of cool stuff you can borrow.

iPads and Kindles

In October, Southwest Airlines announced that it will let customers flying between Chicago Midway, Denver and Oakland borrow iPad 2s; passengers check out the iPad from a special terminal at the airport and then return it to another terminal upon arrival. It joins airlines like OpenSkies and Qantas that have also experimented with iPad borrowing programs. Some hotel chains like Hilton’s Conrad have iPads in rooms for guests, and many hotels have chargers for

guests to borrow. At other hotels, like the Inn by the Sea in Cape Elizabeth Maine — a member of Preferred Hotel Group, which has 650 hotels globally — guests can borrow Kindles that are pre-loaded with short stories and poetry.

Pet items

In addition to letting guests borrow beds and bowls for their pets, Kimpton also lets them borrow a goldfish for their stay. As part of its “Guppy Love” program, at some of Kimpton’s 50 hotels, guests can request a live goldfish to stay in their rooms with them (guests don’t have to do anything to care for the fish; hotel staff feed them). The hotel says “research has proven that watching colorful fish swim gracefully to-and-fro actually calms nerves, reduces anxiety and lowers blood pressure.”

Kitchenware

Candlewood Suites, a chain of 300 hotels, allows hotel guests to borrow kitchen gear like blenders, waffle makers, rice cookers, George Foreman grills and Crock-Pots. The hotel chain says that of guests who borrow items, roughly half end up borrowing kitchen gear to use in their in-room kitchens.

Beauty products

In February, Hyatt began lending customers things like curling irons, flat irons and hair dyers . Kimpton lends out those items, as well as makeup mirrors. And a number of independent hotels lend out beauty products too. At The Townsend Hotel in Birmingham, Mich. guests can borrow curling and flat irons, nail polish and makeup remover and hair pins.

Clothing and fashion accessories

A number of hotels will lend out clothing and accessories to guests. At The Jefferson in Washington, D.C., both male and female guests can borrow basic black belts for the day or evening; at The Townsend Hotel, they can borrow men’s ties; at the Willows Lodge near Seattle they can borrow cuff links and tan dress socks; and at the Montage Deer Valley near Park City they can borrow ski clothing.

Xboxes and games

In many of its hotels, Candlewood Suites offers its guests games like Scrabble, Monopoly (the most-borrowed game by guests, the hotel says), and The Game of Life via its lending locker, and a handful of its hotels also offer guests the opportunity to borrow an Xbox for their stay.

Exercise gear

A number of hotels near golf courses — including the Montage Beverly Hills and the Candlewood Suites in Mooreville, N.C. — let guests borrow golf clubs rather than having to rent them at the course. At the Jane Hotel, Maritime Hotel and Bowery Hotel in New York City, as well as at Kimpton Hotels, guests can borrow bikes free of charge. And at Sheraton Hotels & Resorts guests can call the front desk to get a complimentary workout kit that includes mat, resistance band, massage stick, foam roller and book filled with exercises.