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The truth about:

Hotel loyalty schemes

With a little know-how, everyone can earn while they sleep, says **Jill Starley-Grainger**

Myth: You don't get anything right away

Truth: They don't shout about it, but many chains offer their loyalty-scheme perks from the second you hand over your email address. For instance, lots of chains charge for in-room wi-fi, but tempt guests to sign up as members by instantly waiving that fee. Expect this from Hilton (hiltonhonors.com), IHG (ihgrewardsclub.com), iPrefer (iprefer.com), Marriott (marriottrewards.co.uk), Wanup (wanup.com) and Wyndham (wyndhamrewards.co.uk).

Myth: It's only worth it for frequent travellers

Truth: You don't have to be a weekly business traveller — with some schemes, you can earn free nights fairly quickly, after eight nights booked with IHG, for example, 10 with hotels.com and 13 with Hyatt (goldpassport.hyatt.com).

Myth: It's just the odd 'free night' when you've already paid for dozens

Truth: There's more to it than that. Plane departing at an awkward time? Lots of hotels will let you pay to use your room longer, but loyalty-scheme members of iPrefer, booking.com and Wanup can check in early or late for free at many properties. You can skip the line at check-in, too: Wanup, Hilton and Marriott all have fast-track queues for members. Better still, iPrefer members get an automatic upgrade at check-in.

Myth: Unless you're staying in a big chain, forget it

Truth: That favourite hotel you think of as a one-off may well be part of a global empire, so you could earn points whether you're at the beach or in town. Conrad is part of Hilton, and Ritz-Carlton, Edition, W Hotels, Element,

Autograph and Design Hotels are all part of Marriott. Several loyalty schemes cover independent hotels, too, including hotels.com, Wanup, iPrefer and Best Western (bestwestern.co.uk/rewards).

Myth: You can only earn points from hotel stays

Truth: Many schemes let you rack up points through affiliates — typically car-hire firms, airlines and restaurant groups — so keep your loyalty number handy. You can also get bonus points by referring friends and with special offers from branded credit cards, including Hilton (barclaycard.co.uk/Hilton).

£109

is the average cost, per night, of a hotel room in London, according to a study by Hotel Info (hotel.info). Comparatively, the average cost of a room in Paris is £93, and in Berlin £69.

Myth: You have to book direct — which is pricier

Truth: There's a way round it! Most schemes do require you to book directly to earn rewards, but it's never worth paying an 'official' rate that's higher than one on a website such as laterooms.com just to gain points. Find the cheapest rate for your chosen hotel on the internet, then call or email the hotel to see if they'll beat it. The majority will at least match it, and they'll often throw in extras — free breakfast or a room upgrade — which means you'll get the cheapest rate, earn the points and get the best perks.

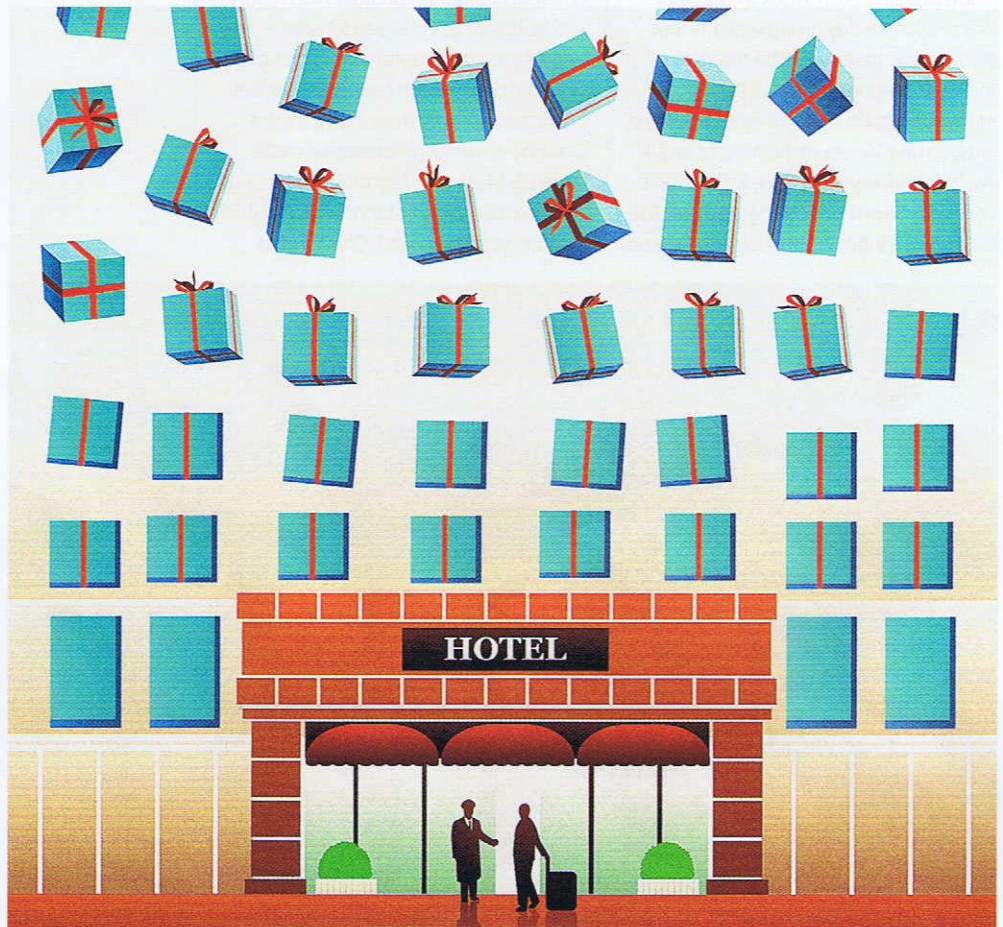


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