

# A crime against good taste

*The in-room amenity that should never be found in five-star hotels*



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**H**aving stayed in – and written about – numerous five-star hotels, I like to think I know real luxury from wannabe. I have a critical eye for detail and notice the small things – things that can make a huge difference to the guest experience – and am sometimes asked if I’m a hotel inspector.

If I was an inspector, my most recent stay in a five-star, Forbes-rated luxury hotel would have seen the property losing points, because it triggered my number one pet peeve when staying at a hotel of this calibre – literally and figuratively leaving a bad taste in my mouth.

For me it is a crime against hospitality. It is decidedly not five star, and frustratingly, is not confined to this particular hotel.

Let me set a typical scene. The room is impressive, perhaps even stunning – large, with floor-to-ceiling windows, tastefully decorated and furnished. The expansive bed is extremely comfortable, maybe even designer or trademarked; the high threadcount linen is also sold in the gift shop. The bathroom most likely features a lot of marble, there is a TV in the mirror, the bath is big enough for two, and the amenities bespoke. There is a touchscreen device from which I can control everything in the room. Signs of attention to detail are everywhere.

There’s also the ability to make tea and coffee in-room, which I appreciate. It’s good to be able to have a cup of herbal tea

to soothe jet lag when I’m wide awake at 3am, or an invigorating morning cup of coffee, without having to wait for room service. It’s a small touch that can make a difference (personally, I need a coffee before interacting with the world).

At the five-star level the tea is never dust or low grade, the collection is often curated and is likely to feature elegant triangular bags made from silk-like material, containing large-leaf tea or whole flowers; you taste the quality with every sip.

So far all expectation boxes have been ticked. But turn to the coffee and this entire picture (of luxury and quality) comes crashing down as my peeve raises its dragon-like head, eliciting fiery anger and five-star swearing. Why? Because it’s mass-produced instant coffee!

Really? I say again: Really?

There is nothing “luxurious” or “high quality” about instant coffee – it tastes truly awful. This bitter, sometimes acidic drink tastes inferior partly due to the lower-quality beans used (due to the expense of processing involved), and because the processing leads to some loss of aromatics, oils and inherent sweetness.

To put it in a five-star hotel shouts “cheap” to me. Why go to all this effort and expense (even the complimentary toothbrush at one “instant-coffee hotel” was gold) only to drop

the ball? It is so out of place with the rest of the room experience that it stands out like a flashing neon sign. Instant coffee may have once been cool, but only ever due to convenience, and that time has long passed. Now there is so much better to be had.

I am not suggesting pod coffee machines in every room – they are an environmental disaster on the whole. I am suggesting what I have occasionally experienced and has impressed me: a French press/plunge pot, with ground coffee provided in sealed foil pouches – each enough for one pot. Coffee could also be provided in refillable airtight containers to be more cost-effective/ environmentally responsible.

It’s not rocket science, but it would be an important breakthrough.

And while I’m at it, please provide UHT (long-life) milk in the fridge rather than the chemical/artificial-ingredient/ sugar-laden non-dairy creamer/whitener, which is as big a crime against our palates as cheap “coffee”!

I’m no coffee snob – I just like to be able to make myself a decent cup of coffee in-room when staying at this level of luxury and quality. For me there are no excuses for not being able to – absolutely none! ■

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