



Illustration by Adam Graff.

**This is the first of lifestyle + travel's Travel Pixie columns, which, each issue, convey the guffaw-provoking rants of a single-white-female writer and frequent traveller who we will get to know simply as the Travel Pixie...**

### Simple Bare Necessities

Blame 9/11, market slumps, world wars and virulent plagues emanating from ducks, civets or feral wombats - the era of hotel freebies is evidently no more.

I noticed this at an un-named five-star hotel recently where I had to dry myself with a two inch square piece of cardboard that I found under the roll-out camp bed's wonky leg.

Remember turn-down gifts? Those heart-shaped, champagne-cream filled Swiss chocolates signed by the GM himself, placed alongside a Yeats poem lovingly engraved on a Tiffany bracelet, next to the silk Kimono?

They are no more. Cut backs, down-sizing (and sometimes sheer managerial meanness) has kissed goodnight to pillow sweeties and bedside lamps with a luminescence over 20 watts.

When did you last see a cough sweet - let alone a soft-centred Godiva - on your pillow? Pre- 1980, I bet. Those kimonos are now chained to the bathroom door so you can only go as far as the bathroom cabinet (that used to hold a TV but now has a transistor radio in it) without ripping out your shoulder blades.

Paper slippers must be signed for then returned to the Front Desk on check-out. As for toilet paper... no, let's not go there. Fluffy towels are down to one grazed cotton hankie per six rooms.

And it's not only the hotels depriving us of our bare travel essentials either. Those once generous airline gift packs that were pressed upon every class of passenger have now shrunk from a well-stocked Hermes pouch of goodies to a Ziploc bag with a cake of used soap and the note PLEASE RETURN TO THE PURSER AFTER USE on it. And that's in First Class!

Last time my sister put her young kids on a flight, the cabin attendant asked if they would like a 'special present.' She half expected the staff to bring out a piece of sticky tape and tape their mouths shut; no, it was a pencil, bright blue - just the one - to be shared between them (for eight hours). Is it any wonder some children grow up to be hijackers?

If we are to believe that airlines and hotels really do want us back, the industry will need to do some serious rethinking of budget allocation.

Firstly, bring back the chocs; even if it's just a half-eaten Kit-Kat finger. We need to know they care. Secondly, we need soap. No, really, we do, especially for aqua-phobic French men who feel that to wash themselves with it somehow contravenes UN Human Rights.

Thirdly, stop spending money on advertising [umm, except in this magazine! - Ed] Just put free beer and tubes of Pringle crisps on every flight in ALL classes. That will solve the plummeting share prices. Trust me, I'm a journalist and I don't touch solids.

Hotels have absolutely no need to waste precious funds on experienced chefs and uneconomical F&B outlets. It's a well known fact that if you put in a phone link direct to Pizza Hut and a live downlink from Premier League Soccer to the telly, the male species are happy, meanwhile the P&L report lurches into the black.

Ladies, I admit, may like a bit more in a hotel room; a bed for example, is always appreciated. OK, I can see efforts are being made - when a flight attendant offered me the use of the Captain's toothbrush on a short-haul flight last week. That was nice of her, but I passed on the noble gesture as I had noted the fleck of spinach on its tip.

As for budget airlines - forgive me while I break into uncontrollable laughter - soon one will have to bring their own fuselage. In this new era of abstemious travel, no matter what class I travel in I now pack my own food, iPod and soap; as for travelling with kids, I recommend sticky tape - you know, I've never slept so well on a flight since. 🍀