

Five-star fleeces

Posh hotels have sneaky tricks for getting more money out of you. **John Malathronas** knows how to beat 'em

1. Resort fees

The rub: Thought you booked that five-star for its plush gym, spa and pool? Daily 'resort fees' of £8-£20, charged to cover use of these facilities, are common in beach spots favoured by Americans, including the Caribbean and Florida, and they're nearly unavoidable in Las Vegas. An example? Ritz-Carlton Orlando charges £18 a day, plus tax.

Travel's tip: Before booking a hotel, call to see if a resort fee will be added. If so, consider booking elsewhere.

2. Car parking

The rub: 'Parking available' on a hotel's website doesn't always mean it will be free. City five-stars such as the Hotel François 1er in Paris charge around £25 a day to use their car park — and double that for the valet-parking option.

Travel's tip: Google to find cheaper car parks nearby. Or when you pull up to the hotel, tell the staff who'll be waiting to whisk your car away that you want to park it yourself, and then you'll at least save on the hefty valet-parking charge.

3. Internet access

The rub: At budget hotels, wi-fi is typically free. But at five-stars? Expect to pay £15 for 24 hours' in-room access at Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas — and if you want wi-fi on two devices, you'll have to pay double.

Travel's tip: Most five-stars have free wi-fi in the lobby, so download emails there before heading up to your room.

4. Phone calls

The rub: Want to make a restaurant reservation? You'll pay as much as £1 per minute for local calls if you use the in-room phone in five-stars, and triple that for international calls.

Travel's tip: Arrange an international call package with your mobile operator before you leave the UK and use that — rates may be high, but they'll be lower than the hotel's. For local reservations, ask the concierge to make them for you.

5. Welcome drink

The rub: You've been left a bottle of claret in your room with a cute welcome



FIVE-STAR PERKS WE HATE

Icy air-con

You turn it off, leave the room and return to find that housekeeping have flipped it back on so that the room is sub-zero. In ski resorts, the reverse is true. You'll feel like you are in a sauna as the snow drifts past

Complicated showers

It's early in the morning, you're sleepy, and you just want a scrub. Good luck trying to get two, sometimes four shower heads to work, let alone determining how to get the water to a temperature that isn't scalding or freezing

Guestroom tours

We have just arrived, we are tired and the last thing we want is a lesson in how to live in the room we've paid for. Here's a thought: design a room that doesn't require a 'tour' to understand it

note in front of it. It's only when you check out that you realise it wasn't free. One of our writers knocked back a glass of sherry at the Nare Hotel in Cornwall (from an unmarked carafe in her room) and was charged £5 per shot on leaving.

Travel's tip: Unless it has a label on it that says 'free', don't assume it is — call reception to ask. And beware: often a bottle of water with the 'free' tag will be placed by your bed. You glug away, and then want more, but the same bottle of water from the minibar will cost you.

6. Ironing

The rub: Five-stars rarely provide irons in their rooms, offering instead an expensive, slow service (up to £10 per shirt and a day's wait). Some may send an iron and board to your room, but it can take hours to arrive, and you'll be expected to tip. Other hotels, such as Badrutt's Palace in St Moritz, will refuse point-blank, citing fire regulations.

Travel's tip: Take a travel iron (from £4 at currys.co.uk), which can weigh less than 500g. Or call ahead to ask if an iron can be waiting in your room on arrival.

7. Service charge

The rub: You've been tipping the bellboy, room service, housekeeping and the bartender throughout your stay at the Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok. Yet at check-out, you find a 10-15 per cent 'service charge' added to your bill.

Travel's tip: You're not obliged to pay this in some countries (it's best to check which ones in advance), so you can ask to have it removed.

8. Breakfast

The rub: Humble B&Bs might throw in a full English, but five-star rates are typically 'room only'. If hunger strikes, you'll have to pay about £20pp (£30 at the Hilton Athens) for the full buffet, even if all you want is toast.

Travel's tip: When you check in, confirm whether breakfast is included. If it isn't, it can actually be cheaper to upgrade to a breakfast-included rate at reception rather than paying the full whack per day when you check out. ■

