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The Great Amenities Race

By Josef Aukee

The selection of a hotel is rarely based on what shampoo I might find in a guest room, but that is oddly one of the most memorable attributes of any stay—for better or for worse. Amenities is one of those notoriously overused words attached to everything from a hotel spa or type of bedding to an in-room ironing board and a spare toothbrush when one goes unpacked. And airline carry-on regulations have encouraged travelers to covet mini-size personal care products from hotel rooms for easy packing in luggage.

For our purposes here, we'll define them as personal care products that are included in the room rate or resort fee. While we couldn't look at every hotel's amenity profile, we found several interesting trends and approaches to guest satisfaction in this arena. And many hotels and resorts save their best products for their spa facilities.

Developing a product mix that fits and reflects the local community and clientele remains the strongest trend in amenity procurement. In Scottsdale, Ariz., for example, the Talking Stick Casino & Resort developed an original line of bath products created using local plants such as prickly pear. Other upscale chains aim for consistency across brand properties. "Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts has a core, standard selection of products offered across all hotels. Decisions are made on a property level [based on] whether they would like to opt in to the brand-wide products [including L'Occitane, Aqua di Parma and Bulgari], or would like to use local products that are also fitting with the brand positioning of the hotel in the local marketplace," says Michele Sweeting, senior vice president, capital planning and procurement for the hotel company. "More and more, Four Seasons is finding that hotels and resorts prefer to use a local approach, offering unique products for their guests."

Customization and private branding parallel the trend toward well-known brands for everything from men's shaving cream to bath oils in luxury hotels and, naturally, ever-expanding deluxe spas. The Ritz-Carlton Hotels, for example, use both approaches, with their own custom bathroom amenity line in standard rooms and Bulgari products for rooms on club floors and suites. Products

typically included are shampoo, hair conditioner, shower gel, body lotion and soaps. At resort properties, where guests tend to book longer stays, some products are distributed in larger sizes.

Independent luxury hotels often opt for name-brand products to lure repeat visitors and can offer these because they aren't required to standardize services across multiple locations. In some cases, quality products, or otherwise well-known brands, are disguised by use of custom labels for an individual hotel. The Seaport Boston Hotel stocks Gilcrest and Soames bath amenities and The Alex Hotel in New York City splurges for the L'Occitane signature line. Sofitel properties often stock Roger & Gallet products. In many cases, higher-end products are made available for sale directly in the room or from the spa or lobby gift shop.

Midscale hotel brands, such as Best Western's new Plus and Premier categories, are also elevating bath amenities with national brands such as Pantene. Crabtree & Evelyn bath and body care product lines are used at more than 400 Embassy Suites Hotels and DoubleTree by Hilton properties across North America. "We're constantly exploring ways to enrich our guests' experience and keep it fresh," says Jim Holthouser, global head of full-service brands, Hilton Worldwide. "We're pleased to share this vibrant new Crabtree & Evelyn partnership by introducing some of the most innovative products the company currently offers."

Embassy Suites Hotels offer the line Naturals by Crabtree & Evelyn. The products are 99% naturally derived from botanicals. The avocado, olive and basil formula is geared to both women and men. Citron is the new line that will be carried at DoubleTree by Hilton. The line features a Mediterranean influence incorporating natural extracts of lemon, honey and coriander, as well as products containing fruits, purifying herbs and skin-conditioning ingredients. The new amenities replace Neutrogena products. Free of any harsh ingredients such as parabens, mineral oil and phthalates, both lines include shampoo, conditioner and body lotion, in addition to botanical facial and bath soap bars.

While you may not use personal care products as a primary criteria for choosing your next event site, your attendees may be able to give you feedback on what they like. "In terms of personal care amenities, local products truly provide added value to the guest experience. Our travelers are sophisticated and appreciate a sense of place; they like to feel that they're connected," Four Seasons' Sweeting adds. "Some guests discover a new favorite product during their stay, giving them a personal connection to our properties long after their visit. The trend of local, natural amenities continues, but our aim is always, first and foremost, to provide a fantastic product."

The amenities race continues as hotels balance cost, quality and image when it comes to stocking bathrooms with products that appeal to both male and female attendees—and keep them coming back for more.



Roja Dove toiletries at the Four Seasons

SAMPLE AMENITY BRAND CHOICES

The following lists which hotel offers what brand of personal bath products. Many hotels are using a house-branded bath and body line.

- Ahwahnee (Yosemite National Park) – **Custom label from Earth Wisdom**
- Hotel Bel-Air (Los Angeles) – **La Prairie**
- Beverly Hills Hotel – **Custom label**
- The Breakers Palm Beach – **Sunpitals**
- The Drake (Chicago) – **Peter Thomas Roth**
- Hotel del Coronado – **Seaside**
- Hotel Teatro (Denver) – **Aveda**
- Gaylord Opryland (Nashville) – **Custom label**
- Mandarin Oriental, San Francisco – **Molton Brown**
- Mayflower Renaissance Washington, DC Hotel – **Aveda**
- Soho Grand (New York) – **Malin+Goetz**
- St. Regis New York – **Laboratoire Remède**