

Tourists “stealing” stuff

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Abstract

Hotel guests are sometimes confused as to what they can take from their hotel room. Passengers are sometimes confused as to what they can take from their flight. When passengers take a flight and hotel guests pay for a room, what items are they entitled to? It is not so clear. This research explores this issue. The economic value of these items can be quite prohibitive and represents a direct economic loss to these tourism businesses. The focus of previous research on theft in the tourism and hospitality industry focuses on tourists being robbed or employees stealing from their employers. This research assesses the self-reported incidence of tourists taking items from hotels and airlines and investigates the relationship between tourists taking both free and not-complimentary items and self-reported ethical tourist behavior. Further, we segment and profile the types of tourists who take items from hotels and airlines. We achieve these research objectives by undertaking a quantitative survey through 538 completed questionnaires captured via an in-person intercept method in commonly frequented tourist hot spots in Hong Kong. The incidence of theft is relatively high for some items, but tourists generally know which items they are entitled to and which they are not. There are three segments of tourists in terms of their self-reported behavior of taking items from hotel rooms and off flights: Honest, Impulsive, and Habituals.

Keywords

consumer misbehavior, crime, ethical dilemma, ethics, honesty, hotels, theft

Introduction

When passengers take a flight and hotel guests pay for a room, what items are they entitled to? It is not so clear. Sometimes it is clear, but passengers and guests take them anyway. Depending on the items, and the specific hotel and airline, there exists a continuum of “taking-stealing” actions. Some tourists take these complimentary items. Some tourists steal items from hotel rooms and planes. Some do neither and some do both. Apart from this ethical dilemma of taking/stealing,

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another factor is that tourists may not know which items are complimentary and which items are not. This research addresses this issue.

The American Hotel and Lodging Association estimates that theft can cost hotels US\$100 million a year (Leasca, 2017). Hotel guests steal items from their hotel rooms (Traveller.com, 2019). Air passengers remove items that belong to the airline from the flights they catch (The Washington Post, 2018). In Leasca's (2017) interview with David Elton, partner of Home Grown Hotels in the United Kingdom "People will steal just about anything they can . . . bathrobes, coat hangers, bed linen, mattress covers, towels, pillows, toilet-seat covers—pretty much everything in a room." Some hotels want guests to take the small hotel-branded items offered in hotel rooms as it reminds guests of the enjoyable stay they had at the hotel the next time they use that item, potentially stimulating another visit in that hotel (Leasca, 2017). Some hotels put this pilfering down to the cost of doing business (Yaeger, 2009). As noted by Yaeger (2009), some hotels acknowledge that guests will take items so Chic & Basic budget hotels in Amsterdam and Barcelona place the following sign on their toiletries "This is the cutest soap that you will steal from a hotel. Enjoy it."

But, as confirmed by the UK Metropolitan Police, "It's a crime" (Leasca, 2017). Any allegations of theft need to be followed up by the authorities. The following incident highlights this: in 2010, a woman was sentenced to 3 months in prison for stealing two towels from the Transcorp Hilton Abuja Hotel, Nigeria (Leasca, 2017). Other repercussions of theft among hotel guests are that those caught stealing items of significant value can be blacklisted, via the online networked reservation system, when trying to make future bookings with hotels with the same brand or company. Other hotels will charge the guests for the item if they are sure the guest took the item and did not pack it by mistake. Yaeger (2009) spoke with one hotel manager who sorted through their guests' left luggage (and found) an antique cup and saucer that was missing from their room.

Much of the research on theft surrounding the tourism and hospitality industry focuses on tourists being robbed while on vacation or hotel employees stealing from their employers. For example, Holcomb and Pizam (2006) found that 32% of a random sample of US citizens had experienced a personal theft while traveling and 68% knew someone who had been the subject of a personal theft while traveling. Brunt et al. (2000) report that 18% of British holidaymakers were the subject of a crime, predominantly theft, on their latest trip. Theft is perceived by tourists as being a barrier to travel (Fuchs and Reichel, 2006; Millar et al., 2017) and impacts the destination decision-making process (Brunt and Shepherd, 2004). Safety and security are perceived as being important attributes of a destination (George and Booyens, 2014; Shin, 2005). Kennedy (2016) notes that employee theft is a common and serious problem, especially in the hospitality industry. The motivations for hotel employees engaging in theft are the adrenaline rush, to supplement low wages, revenge for unfair treatment, and a "why pay when its free" mentality (Goh and Kong, 2018).

Victims of hotel-related crime can be guests, employees, or the hotel business itself (Gill et al., 2002). There is a significant body of literature on theft in hotels, either by employees or with the hotel guest as the victim (Greenberg, 1990; Krippel et al., 2008; Poulston, 2008). Perpetrators may include guests, employees, or the general public (Gill et al., 2002). There is little literature on the hotel guest as perpetrator (Jones and Groenenboom, 2002). There is a reluctance in the hospitality industry to discuss issues of crime as it reflects negatively on the image of the individual hotel and in the industry in general (Jones and Groenenboom, 2002). The general issue of customer misbehavior has received less attention (Gursoy et al., 2017).

Hotels are particularly susceptible to crime, and theft in particular, due to some of their characteristics (Gill et al., 2002; Huddart, 1998). Hotels are quasi-public places where the public can enter and remain up to 24 h a day. Factors affecting the incidence of hotel theft include the location of the hotel, proximity to other hotels, design of the property, and quality of the hotel security (Jones and Groenenboom, 2002). Schiebler et al. (1996) note that crimes against tourists are more likely to occur in areas where a high level of crime already exists. Buzby and Paine (1976) highlight that thieves target higher quality and luxurious hotels. Theft by nonguests of hotel or guests' possessions has decreased in recent decades with the increase in technology. Electronic room key systems, room safes, credit card authorizations and verification, and closed-circuit television (CCTV) have helped reduce theft in hotels (Jones and Groenenboom, 2002). Jones and Groenenboom (2002) do note, however, that up to 90% of alleged theft reported by hotel guests turns out to be a mistake on behalf of the guest, where they have misplaced items. Further, reported theft from hotel rooms committed by staff is difficult to establish.

Given the business costs associated with theft from airlines and hotels and the lack of research on this topic, this study provides a useful contribution to both theory and practice in this area. Specifically, the aims of this exploratory research are (1) to assess the self-reported incidence of tourists stealing items from hotels and airlines; (2) to discover which items are most subject to theft; (3) to investigate the relationship between theft by tourists and self-reported ethical tourist behavior; (4) to investigate the relationship between theft by tourists and perceived economic value; and (5) to segment and profile the types of tourists who take items from hotels and airlines.

Theft by tourists

In terms of the nexus between tourism and theft, Brunt et al. (2000) summarize the literature by noting themes across several domains: tourist precincts as areas of high crime; tourists as victims; tourists as offenders; tourism generating higher levels of deviant or illegal activity; and policy responses to tourism and crime. Concerning "tourists as offenders," there is little research in this area. It is in this lacuna, this research contributes.

Hotel guests pilfering items from their room is one example of customer misbehavior. It is typical of the behavior of "jaycustomers." Lovelock (1994) coined the expression "jaycustomers" to refer to those who deliberately act in a manner that is thoughtless or abusive and may cause problems to other customers, employees, and businesses they are dealing with. A significant amount of literature has been undertaken since Lovelock's work on deviant or dysfunctional consumer behavior. Jaycustomer behavior may result in other-customer dissatisfaction (Lovelock, 1994) and financial losses (Krasnovsky and Lane, 1998). Jaycustomer behavior, including shoplifting, can be a coping mechanism to dissatisfactory or stressful service experiences (Mattila and Ro, 2008) and can be a retaliatory strategy (Huefner and Hunt, 2000).

In Lovelock's (2001) six types of service jaycustomer behavior, thieves are those customers who have no intention of paying for goods or services. So, theft from hotel rooms would be misbehavior directed against a business' merchandise and financial assets (Fullerton and Punj, 2004). Fullerton and Punj (2004) argue that, although these behaviors are clandestine, they are commonplace. In Harris and Reynold's (2004) parlance, these deviant hotel guests would be *property abusers*. Harris and Reynolds (2004) refer to these thieves as trophy hunters, whereby customers remove items from rooms to acquire "souvenirs." Hotel guests may boast to their family and friends about acquiring these souvenirs. This jaycustomer behavior is performed deliberately

and covertly. Many of these reported incidents in the literature occur in hotels, restaurants and bars (Fullerton and Punj, 2004), and casinos (Fong et al., 2017).

In Gill and colleagues' (2002) list of crimes in hotels, theft is noted, along with fraud (e.g. duplicitous insurance claims or credit card fraud), prostitution, crime by nonguests, and disorderly conduct charges (e.g. violence or excessive consumption of alcohol). Stealing items from hotel rooms is a form of shoplifting. There is a significant amount of research into shoplifting. But taking things from hotel rooms is a particular type of shoplifting. Cameron (1964) would define hotel guests who steal as *snitchers* (those who steal goods for their use) rather than *boosters*, who are professional thieves. In Moore's (1984) category of shoplifting, hotel guests who steal would more likely be *impulse* or *occasional* shoplifters rather than *amateur*, *semiprofessional*, or *episodic* shoplifters. Bernstein's (1985) shoplifters would more likely be *impulse* shoplifters or even *habituals* rather than *professionals*, *alcoholics*, or *kleptomaniacs*. McShane and Noonan (1993) would be more likely to classify hotel guest thieves as *enigmas* or *infirms* than *rebels* or *reactionaries* as these hotel guests would tend to be middle-aged (rather than youths) and have sufficient funds (rather than stealing for economic needs) and less likely to have a criminal record.

Taking "souvenirs" is listed as one of the annoying tourist behaviors as noted by Loi and Pearce (2015) among Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese tourists to Macau. This routine problem for hotels has been termed "shrinkage" (Gill et al., 2002). Jones and Groenenboom (2002), in their study interviewing hotel security managers in London, find a wide range of items that have been stolen from hotel rooms. Apart from the commonly cited minibar items, towels, and bathrobes, guests have taken chandeliers, tables, chairs, mirrors, and even parts of a grandfather clock. Gill et al. (2002) add other items to the list of stolen goods, such as ashtrays and cutlery.

As noted by Gill et al. (2002) and confirmed with informal conversations this researcher had with a Room Division manager of a five-star hotel in Hong Kong, theft of goods such as bathrobes or towels is tolerated depending on the existing relationship with the guest and how economically valuable that guest is to the hotel. However, the hotel makes a point of letting the guest know that the hotel knows that an item was taken without paying for it. Other techniques to recover some of this "shrinkage" are to subtly place signage in the room informing guests that they can pay for certain items. This reinforces the ownership of the items but provides a small revenue stream for the hotel and a legitimate channel with which the guest can acquire the items.

Much of the previous literature is descriptive and provides a typology of tourists who steal. The next section provides a theoretical basis for understanding theft by tourists.

Unethical tourists

There is now an increasing body of research that examines the unethical actions of individuals who value morality but behave unethically when they have an opportunity to cheat (Gino, 2015). In the words of Bersoff (1999), good people sometimes do bad things. The traditional explanation for why people cheat, deceive, misbehave, or commit a crime, based on neoclassical economic theory (Becker, 2000), suggests that the extent to which people are dishonest or might commit a crime is that they undertake a psychological cost-benefit analysis by considering several external factors. In the theory of crime and punishment, the cost-benefit analysis specifies that the frequency and magnitude of an individual's dishonesty is dependent on the size of the payoff or reward (benefit), and the probability of getting caught and the degree of the punishment if caught (cost) (Lewicki, 1984). However, this model does not accurately describe why people with the ability to pay for certain items are dishonest in a range of life domains such as paying taxes and shoplifting.

Recognizing that morality is dynamic and flexible (Monin and Jordan, 2009) and that morality is cultural and influenced by context, Mazar et al. (2008b) propose an alternative explanation. They argue people care about their self-concept, that is, the way they view themselves. People who value honesty have a strong belief in their morality and want to maintain their esteemed view of themselves. The internal psychological factor of people desiring a positive self-image, that is, perceiving themselves as a moral person, should also be included in the cost-benefit analysis. Hence, people face a dilemma in gaining from cheating versus maintaining their self-perception as an honest person (Mead et al., 2009). Individuals resolve this dilemma by finding a balance between these two opposing motivations. This balance can be thought of as another application of bounded rationality (Simon, 1990). Individuals' ethical norms change from circumstance to circumstance. People cheat when they have an incentive and an opportunity (Mazar et al., 2008a). Jaycustomer behavior is not necessarily irrational. This behavior can be an expression of deeper emotional and cognitive responses to a consumer's needs or desires (Harris and Reynolds, 2004). In practice, examples of this are frequently found. Hsee et al. (2003) note that it is deemed less dishonesty to steal a pen than to take the cash equivalent of the pen from the same person.

Mazar et al. (2008b) use the term *categorization* as the mechanism by which people categorize their actions in more compatible terms and rationalize their actions. Others have called this *neutralization* (Chatzidakis et al., 2006; Cromwell and Thurman, 2003). But this categorization process has in-built thresholds, after which the individual would then consider themselves dishonest. Rick and Loewenstein (2008) highlight that individuals are very good at rationalizing their unethical behavior. People tend to associate what is fair, as well as what is ethical, with their interest. Further, there is evidence to suggest that once an individual has undertaken unethical practices then further and more unethical behavior will follow (Milgram, 1963).

The issue of ethical behavior has often arisen in the context of responsible tourism (Weeden, 2013). The decisions tourists make and their subsequent behavior is not value-free. Their action determines, in part, the extent of responsible tourism. Caruana et al. (2014) note the underlying ethical component of responsible tourist behavior. Tourism as a context is also important in determining the extent of ethical behaviors and social norms (Pearce, 2019). Tourism is a liminal experience where tourists may act differently to how they behave at home (McKercher, 2015). Individuals, out of their usual environment, such as on vacation, are more likely to behave unethically than they would at home (Tolkach et al., 2017).

Tourists often face ethical dilemmas. Given the low probability of being caught and punished, should they take an item of relatively low value? Just because they have paid for something or it is included in the price, should they take it, even though they may not use it? The answer to these questions is dependent on tourists' moral decision-making, guided by their underlying ethics (Fennell, 2015). Some tourists may follow moral absolutism which states there are universal rights and wrongs. An example of this would be "stealing is always wrong." Relativism, on the other hand, infers that right and wrongs are relative, dependent on the context while subjectivism implies that ethics are personal and it is up to the individual to decide for themselves what is right and wrong (Fennell, 2006). People who think of themselves as honest are more likely to engage in limited dishonest behavior. Given the above discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H_{1a}:** Tourists who perceive themselves to be more ethical, are less likely to remove items provided by the airline.
- H_{1b}:** Tourists who perceive themselves to be more ethical, are less likely to remove items provided by the hotel.

In Rick and Loewenstein's (2008) discussion on dishonesty, they argue that dishonesty can be associated with the motivation to avoid losses rather than a simple desire for gain, echoing Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) work on loss avoidance. In this research, we ask whether the tourist felt they received good value for money, acceptable value for money, or poor value for money from their hotel stay. Based on Rick and Loewenstein's (2008) conjecture, we test whether those who received poor value for money were more likely to participate in dishonest behavior (theft), as a response to perceived poor service or as a retaliatory strategy. Controlling for trip expenditure, we derive the following hypothesis:

H₂: Tourists who perceive themselves to receive poor value for money are more likely to remove items provided by the hotel.

Methodology

The most appropriate methods to answer the research objectives are to conduct a quantitative survey.

Research instrument

The questionnaire is comprised of four parts. The first part of the questionnaire captures pretravel expenditure (airfare, prepaid tours, accommodation, etc.) and in-destination trip expenditure (accommodation, transportation, shopping, food and beverages, entertainment, etc.). The second part of the questionnaire adopts Kang and Moscardo's (2006) set of 14 attitudinal statements about tourist behavior. On a five-point Likert-type scale (where "strongly agree" = 5 and "strongly disagree" = 1), participants were asked to rate their level of agreement on a range of tourist behaviors that included 3 statements about pre-trip behavior and 11 statements while the tourists are traveling. This set of questions has been tested and verified for internal validity in previous studies. This set of questions assesses the tourists' self-concept. This construct will be used to assess tourists' self-concept while traveling. This construct measures how "good" a tourist believes she/he is. The third part of the questionnaire asks tourists the frequency with which they have taken 14 different items from their hotel room or from a flight they have caught. The range of items asked about is derived from previous literature (Gill et al., 2002; Jones and Groenenboom, 2002; Leasca, 2017; Yaeger, 2009).

Participants are asked the frequency in which they take both complimentary items from hotels such as toiletries and complimentary slippers to non-complimentary items such as bathrobes and towels in hotels. Participants were also asked the frequency with which they took six items from airlines. These items are cutlery, pillows, blankets, headphones, food, and toiletries. In the author's discussion with several airline staff about whether passengers were allowed to remove these items from a plane, there is some ambiguity about what would be classified as stealing. For example, plastic cutlery would be acceptable to take but metal cutlery would not. Headphones are not allowed to be removed but toiletries in individually wrapped packets would be acceptable to take. Pillows and blankets are not allowed to be removed but airline staff do allow passengers to take these items if they ask permission (although not official airline policy). Individually wrapped food is allowed to be taken from the plane from an airline perspective, however, removing food from an airline nearly always contravenes customs and quarantine laws in the destination country. Given that dishonest behavior is not absolute and can vary from situation to situation, the response codes to this question are measured on a five-point Likert-type scale where "always" = 5, "often" = 4, "sometimes" = 3,

“rarely” = 2, and “never” = 1. This is more appropriate than a definitive dichotomous response code of yes/no. The final section contains a set of standard demographic questions such as age, gender, marital status, employment status, the highest level of education, and importance of religion in the respondent’s life and travel behavior questions capturing purpose of the trip, length of stay, party size, country of origin, package type, and first-time or repeat visitor.

Sampling and data collection

The target population is tourists in a popular tourist destination (Hong Kong). The data collection took place in 2017, before the pro-democracy demonstrations occurred and therefore can be thought of as occurring in a relatively stable and “normal” tourist situation. The data collection involved in-person intercept surveys, in commonly frequented tourist hot spots in Hong Kong. These hot spots included the Hong Kong International Airport, The Peak, Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry, and other public areas. The data were collected by a team of student helpers who have been trained in interviewing techniques. The interview was conducted in English, however, multilingual student helpers were able to assist Cantonese and Mandarin-speaking participants when clarification was needed in their native tongue.

To ensure a representative mix of tourists, a stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representative samples based on age and gender. Target proportions for tourists were obtained from the Hong Kong Tourist Board annual report (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2017). Same-day visitors to Hong Kong were screened out of the sample so that overnight tourists only were included. Participants were screened to ensure they were 18 years or above and completed the survey individually, if they were traveling as part of a group. Potential participants were informed of the aims of the research and asked to participate. Potential participants were told they had every right to withdraw from the study before or during the survey process without penalty of any kind. These potential participants were informed that all information captured in the survey would remain confidential. As the survey instrument contained questions about dishonest behavior, potential participants were informed that no individually identifiable data would be collected.

A total of 538 completed surveys were collected and used for data analysis. This sample size has a maximum sampling error of $\pm 4.23\%$. A profile of the sample can be found in Table 1. The sample shows that a broad range of tourists was surveyed. As noted above, age and gender were targeted via the stratified sampling process. Almost half of all participants (49.1%) had a bachelor’s degree or above in terms of education. Over half of the respondents were married (53.9%). Three in five (60.6%) were employed with another 14.9% were self-employed, suggesting this sample had the financial means to acquire the items they might have stolen. The importance of religion in this sample varied. The region of origin shows a mix with a quarter of the sample coming from Mainland China. Almost half of the sample were first-time visitors to Hong Kong and two in three tourists were on vacation (68.3%). For in five (80.0%) of tourists organized their travel independently. The mean party size was 2.50 persons, and the mean length of stay was 3.97 nights, matching the overall tourist population.

Data analysis

We use a variety of analysis methods to address the research objectives. Descriptive analysis is used to assess the self-reported incidence of tourists stealing items from hotels and airlines and to discover which items are most subject to theft.

Table 1. Profile of tourist sample.

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Usual place of residence</i>	
Male	44.0%	Mainland China	25.3%
Female	56.0%	North Asia (Korea, Japan)	15.4%
<i>Age</i>		Taiwan	14.1%
18–34 years old	47.9%	The Americas	14.0%
35–54 years old	39.3%	Europe, Africa, and the Middle East	12.4%
55 years or older	12.8%	South and Southeast Asia	10.8%
<i>Highest level of education</i>		Australia, New Zealand, and South Pacific	7.4%
High school graduate or below	26.2%	Other	0.7%
College credit or trade/vocational training	24.7%	<i>Trips to Hong Kong</i>	
Bachelor's degree or above	49.1%	First time	47.3%
<i>Marital status</i>		Repeat visitor	52.7%
Single, never married	41.3%	<i>Purpose of trip</i>	
Married or domestic partnership	53.9%	Vacation	68.3%
Widowed/divorced/separated	4.9%	Visiting friends/relatives	18.3%
<i>Employment status</i>		Business/meetings/convention	11.2%
Employed full-time/employed part-time	60.6%	Other	2.2%
Self-employed	14.9%	<i>Travel arrangements</i>	
Student	13.2%	Free independent travel	80.0%
Unemployed or retired	11.3%	Group inclusive travel	20.0%
<i>Importance of Religion</i>		<i>Length of stay (nights)</i>	
Not important at all	12.8%	3.97	
Not too important	27.9%	<i>Party size</i>	
Important	29.6%	2.50	
Fairly important	18.6%		
Very important	11.1%		

To examine the relationship between self-reported ethical tourist behavior and theft by tourists, we first create indices for ethical tourist behavior, hotel theft, airline theft, and hotel and airline theft together. Taking the individual items, we create the indices to be between 0 and 100 in the following way

$$\text{Ethical tourist behavior index} = 100 \times \frac{\Sigma - \text{Maximum}}{\text{Maximum} - \text{Minimum}}$$

where Maximum is the maximum score possible (14 items \times 5 (strongly agree)) = 70, Minimum is the minimum score possible (14 items \times 1 (strongly disagree)), and Σ is the sum of each respondent's ratings on the 14 tourist behaviors. The higher the index, the more ethical the tourist reports to be. Hotel theft index, airline theft index, hotel, and airline theft index are calculated analogously. The higher the index, the more frequently the tourists report to take items. This is a basic tool but we do this so that we can compare like with like as the number of items differs between airline and hotel. We then perform correlation analysis to assess the relationship between theft by tourists and self-reported ethical tourist behavior. The more ethical the tourist reports to be, the higher the value. The more frequently the tourist reports to take things, the higher the value. Therefore, we would expect a negative correlation coefficient between these two variables. We

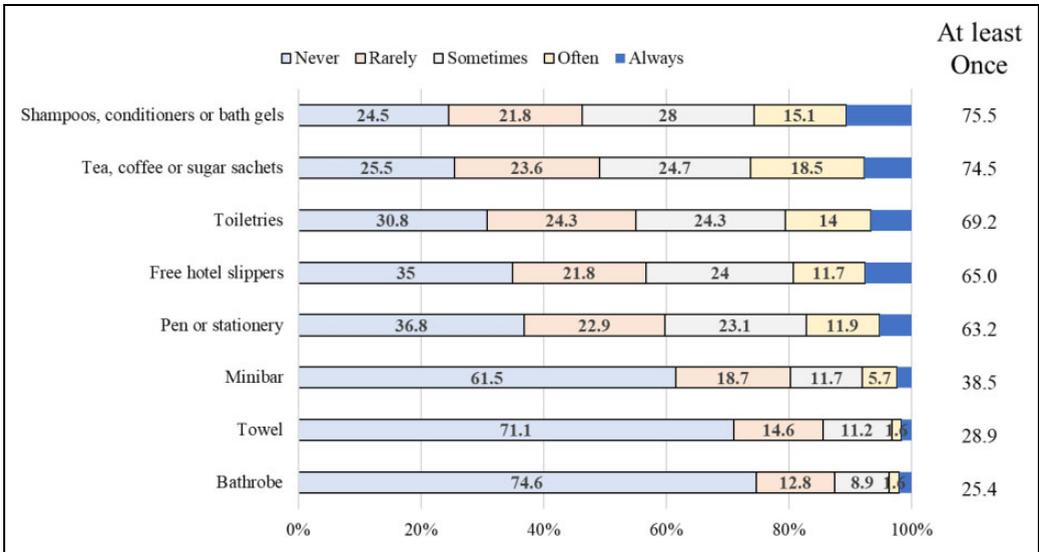


Figure 1. Self-reported incidence of items stolen from hotels.

then run a mean-equality test for two groups to test differences between the propensity to taking items and perceived value for money from the accommodation.

To segment and profile the types of tourists who take items from hotels and airlines, we first perform a cluster analysis. We undertake a two-step cluster analysis on the hotel and airline theft index described above whereby the first step of the cluster analysis involves a hierarchical cluster analysis based on the squared Euclidean distance (Stylidis, 2018). The squared Euclidean distance measure places progressively greater weight on objects that are further apart. The agglomeration schedule and the dendrogram plot (not shown) were inspected. Dendrograms can be used to assess the cohesiveness of the clusters formed and can provide information about the appropriate number of clusters to keep. It is a visual representation of the steps in a hierarchical clustering solution that shows the clusters being combined. The plot suggests three clusters based on the connected vertical lines designating joined cases. We then undertake *k*-means clusters designating three clusters. *K*-means clustering moves respondents between those clusters to minimize variability within clusters and maximize variability between clusters (Hair et al., 2010). We then test the difference in the profile of the clusters using analysis of variance (ANOVA), where the *F*-statistic shows whether there are significant mean differences between groups and Tukey’s honestly significant difference (HSD) test is employed to identify where exactly the mean differences lie (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

Findings

Figures 1 and 2 show the self-reported incidence of theft of different items from hotels and airlines, respectively. Tourists were asked how frequently they took eight items from hotels. In general, tourists understand which items are included with the room rate and which items should be paid for. Toiletries, tea and coffee, slippers, and pens and stationery are perceived to be included. Over three in four (75.5%) took shampoo, conditioners, and bath gels from the room at least once before;

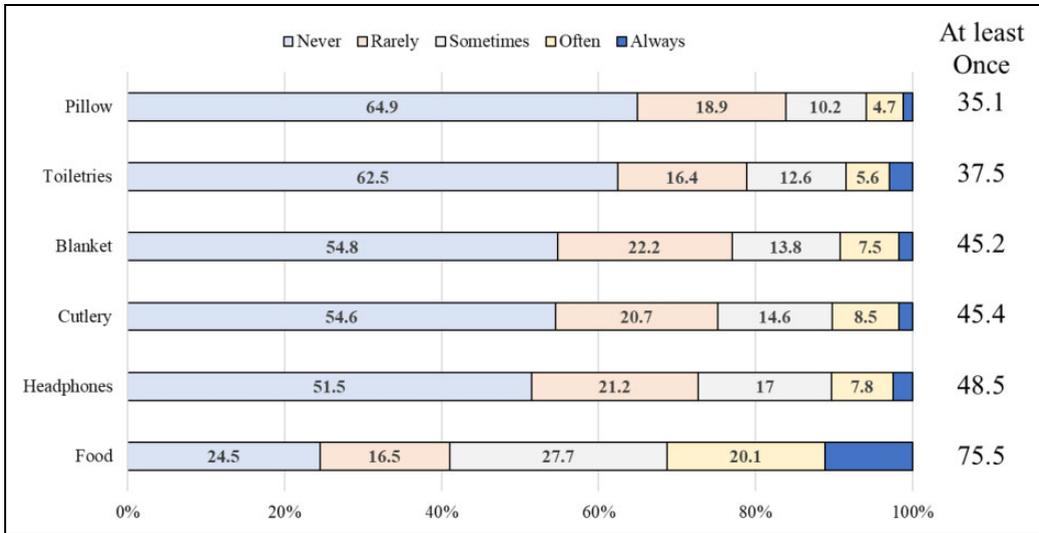


Figure 2. Self-reported incidence of items stolen from a flight.

a similar incidence to tea, coffee, and sugar sachets, and other toiletries. Bathrobes, towels, and items from the minibar were the least likely to be taken although almost a quarter (25.4%) had taken a bathrobe from the hotel at least once before and 38.5% had taken something from the minibar at least once. Conversely, almost three-quarters of tourists had never taken a bathrobe, 71.1% had never taken a towel, and 61.5% had never taken something from the minibar.

Figure 2 shows the self-reported incidence of items stolen from a flight. From the least likely to the most likely items to be taken, tourists are less likely to take the pillows, toiletries, blankets, cutlery, and headphones. The most likely item to be taken is food. Three-quarters of tourists (75.5%) report taking food at least once from their flights. Despite being the least likely to be taken, over a third (35.1%) of tourists reported taking a pillow from the plane. Almost half of the tourists report taking a blanket (45.2%), cutlery (45.4%), and headphones (48.5%) at least once in their travels.

Denoting the frequency of how often items were taken from hotels or airlines and plotting the mean scores on a spectrum, it can be visually seen there are three clusters of items (Figure 3). The first cluster of items includes bathrobes, goods from the minibar and towels from hotel rooms, and all items from flights except for food. These items are the least taken.

The second set of items is stationary, slippers, and toiletries from rooms. These three items are taken more often and are taken based on needs but on average are “rarely” taken. The last group of items is coffee/tea and shampoos from rooms and food from flights. These items are generally offered as complementary and are “sometimes” taken.

Table 2 presents a negative relationship between ethical tourist behavior and theft, that is, the more ethical the tourist reports to be, the less likely they are to report taking items from a hotel, a flight, or either a hotel or a flight. The correlations show a medium strength of association. This provides support for H_{1a} and H_{1b}.

Previous research had suggested that stealing from a company may be related to whether the individual perceived they were getting value for money or not. If the individual felt they were not

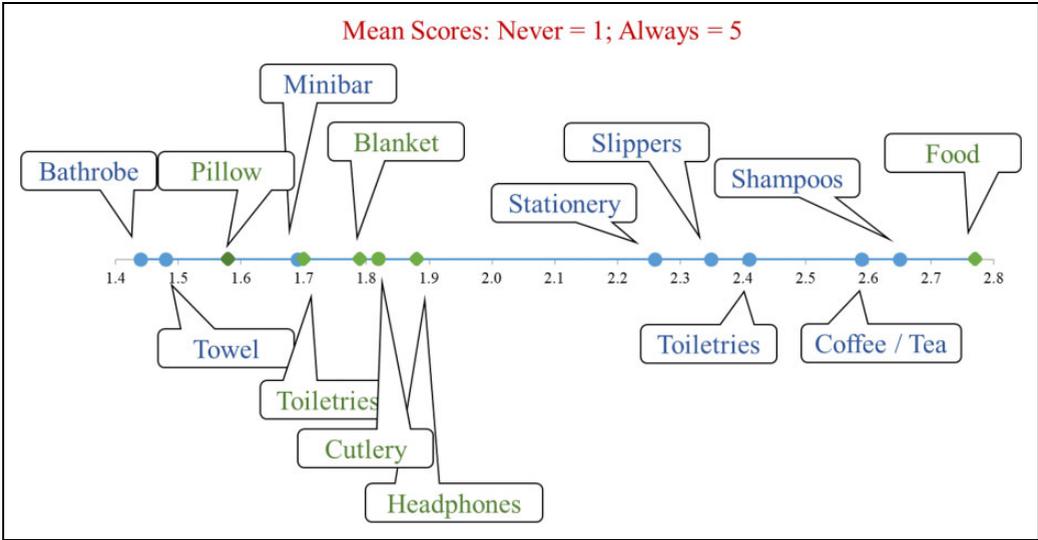


Figure 3. Frequency of taking items—Mean scores.

Table 2. Correlations between theft and ethical tourist behavior.

	Hotel theft index	Airline theft index	Hotel and airline theft index
Ethical tourist behavior index	-0.341	-0.228	-0.326
p-Values	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$

Table 3. Hotel theft and perceived value for money from accommodation.

	Low accommodation expenditure			High accommodation expenditure		
	Acceptable/good	Poor	p-Value	Acceptable/good	Poor	p-Value
Value for money	27.7	31.1	0.429	27.5	30.3	0.572
Hotel theft index						

getting a good deal, then they might be more likely to steal as a form of compensation. Therefore, we investigate the relationship between hotel theft by tourists and how they rate the value for money they received from their hotel during their stay. We collapse respondents' good and acceptable value for money rating into one category and compare their hotel theft index with those who perceived they received poor value for money on their accommodation. Having captured their hotel expenditure, we are able to control for accommodation expenditure.

T-tests are performed to test the difference in hotel theft index between those who perceived they received good/acceptable value for money with their hotel and those who received poor value for money from their hotel. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups regardless of whether their accommodation expenditure was above (0.429) or below the average (0.572) (Table 3). Although there is indicative evidence, as the hotel theft index was higher (more frequent stealing of hotel items) when value for money was perceived to be poor.

Table 4. Hotel and airline theft clusters.

Frequency of items taken (mean scores)	Honest (N = 243; 45.1%)	Impulsive (N = 198; 36.8%)	Habitual (N = 97; 18.0%)	F-statistic	p-Value
Free hotel slippers	1.54	2.63	3.82	213.602	<0.000
Complimentary toiletries	1.57	2.71	3.92	263.782	<0.000
Complimentary shampoos, conditioners, or bath gels	1.81	3.03	3.98	190.337	<0.000
Complimentary tea, coffee, or sugar sachets	1.76	2.93	3.98	211.581	<0.000
Hotel room pen or stationery	1.49	2.46	3.75	229.032	<0.000
Minibar without paying	1.19	1.78	2.74	111.057	<0.000
Bathrobe from the room without paying	1.05	1.43	2.43	128.319	<0.000
Towel from the room without paying	1.05	1.47	2.57	171.368	<0.000
Cutlery from the plane	1.18	1.94	3.17	220.166	<0.000
Blanket from the plane	1.24	1.91	2.90	133.521	<0.000
Headphones from the plane	1.42	1.97	2.86	77.595	<0.000
Pillow from the plane	1.15	1.63	2.57	113.733	<0.000
Food off the plane	2.05	3.15	3.77	98.18	<0.000
Toiletries off the plane	1.13	1.84	2.84	137.741	<0.000

This can be seen in Table 3 when comparing the index for those who rate the value for money of their accommodation as poor compared to those who rate the value for money as acceptable or good. One limiting factor in this analysis is that only 8.6% of the sample ($n = 46$) rated their hotel value for money as "poor." Nevertheless, based on this analysis, we do not find support for H_2 .

Table 4 presents the mean scores (on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 is *never* and 5 is *always*) on each of the possible taken items from hotels and airlines, as well as the size of the clusters. The results of the cluster analysis show that almost half of all respondents (45.1%) are honest, taking items very rarely from either hotels or airlines. Over a third (36.8%) are impulsive, taking rarely and sometimes from hotels and airlines while 18% are habitual items somewhere between sometimes and often. Across all items, the mean scores of the frequency of taking items are statistically significant whereby the Honest cluster takes items less frequently than the Impulsive segment who in turn are less likely to take items than the Habitual segment, as shown by the ANOVA tests in Table 4. This means it does not matter what the item necessarily is, the Habituals are more likely to take it compared to the Impulsive group, who are more likely to take any item than the Honest group.

Having segmented tourists on their proclivity to take items from hotel rooms and flights, we now profile the sociodemographic and travel characteristics of the three segments: Honest, Impulsive, and Habituals. Table 5 presents the comparison of each segment across different sociodemographic and travel characteristics. We undertake a series of one-way ANOVAs to test the statistical significance between the characteristics. The table reveals that for both socio-demographic and travel variables, there are significant differences between the types of Honest

Table 5. Profile of hotel and airline thieves.

	Honest N = 243	Impulsive N = 198	Habitual N = 97	F-statistic	p-Value
Gender				7.615	0.001
Male	41.2%	53.7%	31.1%		
Female	58.8%	46.3%	68.9%		
Tukey's HSD: Male: Impulsive > Honest, Habitual; Female: Honest, Habitual > Impulsive					
Age				9.797	0.000
18–34 years old	56.4%	45.7%	31.0%		
35–54 years old	35.9%	36.9%	53.2%		
55 years or older	7.8%	17.4%	15.8%		
Tukey's HSD: 18–34: Honest, Impulsive > Habitual; 35–54: Honest, Impulsive < Habitual; 55+: Honest < Impulsive, Habitual					
Highest level of education				21.025	0.000
High school graduate or below	15.6%	35.0%	34.7%		
Some college credit or trade/vocational training	21.0%	26.8%	29.6%		
Bachelor's degree or above	63.4%	38.2%	35.7%		
Tukey's HSD: High school graduate or below: Honest < Impulsive, Habitual; Bachelor's degree and above: Honest > Impulsive, Habitual					
Marital status				10.325	0.000
Single, never married	46.9%	41.3%	27.2%		
Married or domestic partnership	51.8%	53.3%	60.3%		
Widowed/divorced/separated	1.4%	5.4%	12.5%		
Tukey's HSD: Single, never married: Honest > Impulsive, Habitual; Widowed/divorced/separated: Honest < Impulsive, Habitual					
Employment status				3.677	0.026
Student	15.1%	15.3%	4.3%		
Self-employed	15.2%	13.3%	17.2%		
Employed full time/employed part time	61.2%	58.8%	62.6%		
Unemployed or retired	8.5%	12.5%	15.9%		
Tukey's HSD: Student: Honest, Impulsive > Habitual					
Place of residence				9.822	0.000
The Americas	18.2%	13.1%	5.3%		
Europe, Africa, and the Middle East	13.0%	11.0%	13.6%		
Australia, New Zealand, and South Pacific	9.5%	4.4%	8.3%		
North Asia (Korea, Japan)	17.2%	14.6%	12.6%		
South and Southeast Asia	10.9%	11.1%	9.8%		
Taiwan	14.5%	16.0%	9.2%		
Mainland China	16.8%	27.9%	41.2%		
Other	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%		
Tukey's HSD: The Americas: Honest, Impulsive > Habitual; Mainland China: Honest, Impulsive < Habitual					
Trips to destination				8.041	0.000
First time visitor	56.0%	43.2%	33.7%		
Repeat visitor	44.0%	56.8%	66.3%		

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

	Honest N = 243	Impulsive N = 198	Habitual N = 97	F-statistic	p-Value
Tukey's HSD: First time: Honest, Impulsive > Habitual; Repeat Visitor: Honest, Impulsive < Habitual					
Purpose of trip				2.845	0.059
Vacation	73.5%	68.2%	55.7%		
Visiting friends/relatives	9.1%	23.7%	30.3%		
Business/meetings/convention	15.7%	6.9%	8.7%		
Other	1.7%	1.2%	5.3%		
Tukey's HSD: Vacation: Honest, Impulsive > Habitual; Business: Honest > Impulsive, Habitual VFR: Honest < Impulsive, Habitual					

Note: HSD: honestly significant difference; VFR: visit friends and relatives.

Boldface values represent statistically significant differences between segments.

tourists, Impulsive tourists, and Habitual tourists who take items. This can be seen in the summary of the post hoc Tukey's HSD tests in Table 5.

Consider sociodemographic characteristics, males are more likely to be impulsive thieves whereas females are more likely to be habitual or honest. Younger tourists (18–34 years) are less likely to be Habituals whereas older tourists (55+ years) are less likely to be Honest. Those in the middle age category (35–54 years) are more likely to be Habituals. Tourists with lower levels of formal education are more likely to be impulsive or habitual while those with a bachelor's degree or above are more likely, to be honest. Tourists who are single or never married are more likely to be honest while those who are widowed, separated, or divorced are likely to be less honest. Students are less likely to be habitual item takers.

There are differences in travel characteristics. First time visitors to the destination are less likely to be habitual takers of items while, conversely, repeat visitors are more likely to take items. Visitors from the Americas (USA, Canada, Central and South America) are less likely to be Habituals whereas tourists coming from Mainland China are more likely to be Habituals. Those who are on vacation are less likely to take items (Habituals). Visit friends and relatives (VFR) tourists are less likely, to be honest.

Discussion and conclusions

Discussion

This research sought to answer the extent to which tourists admit to taking items from their hotel rooms and from their flights, some of which are included and some of which are not. Anecdotally, a lot of different items are taken out of hotel rooms and from flights (The Washington Post, 2018; Traveller.com, 2019). Cumulatively, these items are worth a significant amount of money and impose additional costs on hotels and airlines (Leasca, 2017). We find that there is a relatively high incidence of tourists taking many items at least once on their trips. For hotels, a high minority of guests have taken something from the minibar without paying (38.5%), a towel (28.9%), or a bathrobe (25.4%). The complimentary items of shampoos, toiletries, coffee/tea, slippers, and stationery are taken more frequently. These items are free and included in the room rate. Guests may take these items home and use them at a later date or guests may leave the unopened items in

the room so that hotels may provide them to future guests. Less sustainable would be the hotels discarding these unused items for every new guest.

From the flights, a relatively high proportion of tourists take food from the plane (75.5% have taken food from the plane at least once). Depending on the destination, airlines make announcements that “Food supplied onboard must be left onboard. Do not take it with you” as it presents a biosecurity risk (Australian Government Department of Agriculture, 2019:8). Australia, for example, has very strict quarantine rules. If the maximum penalties are imposed, travelers bring in undeclared food to Australia (breaking the 2015 Biosecurity Act) can be fined Australian \$420,000 and jail time of up to 10 years. In 2018, an American tourist was fined US\$500 for bringing an apple off the flight on her return flight from Paris to Minneapolis (Calder, 2018). A random check by US Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service officials discovered the apple the traveler took from the Delta Airlines flight. This issue of biosecurity is an under-researched area in the tourism literature but may become more important with the outbreak of diseases such as the deadly Covid-19 virus (Hall, 2011, 2015).

Travelers recognize that the other items (pillows, toiletries, blankets, headphones, and (metal) cutlery) can be cleaned, sterilized, and reused on future flights. Taking these items is essentially stealing.

The research tested the relationship between ethical tourist behavior and theft, that is, the more ethical the tourist reports to be, the less likely they are to report taking items from a hotel, a flight, or either a hotel or a flight. We found there is a relationship between self-report ethical tourist behavior and self-reported theft. This demonstrates that beyond the usual three economic, sociocultural, and environmental dimensions, ethical behavior is another dimension to the responsible tourist, as noted by Hultsman (1995) and Macbeth (2005), among others.

We examine the relationship of the likelihood to participate in dishonest behavior (theft), as a response to perceived poor service or as a retaliatory strategy. We do not find evidence of a significant relationship. This could be because, in this sample, few respondents perceived the value for money they experienced in their hotel room as poor and hence there was not the statistical robustness with which to examine this issue more in-depth. It also may be that the issue is more complicated and revolves around the concepts of value for money, entitlement, and the value of “free” (Shampanier et al., 2007).

We segment and profile the customer misbehavior, specifically tourists who take items from their hotel room and off their flight. Lovelock (1994) calls these consumers “jaycustomers.” The cluster analysis reveals three segments: Honest jaycustomers comprising 45.1% of the sample; Impulsive jaycustomers who make up 36.8% of the sample; and Habitual jaycustomers are the remaining 18.0% of the sample. These categories align with Bernstein’s (1985) categories of impulse shoppers and habitual shoppers as well as Moore’s (1984) category of impulse or occasional shoppers. Impulsive and habitual jaycustomers would both fall into Cameron’s (1964) definition of *snitchers* (those who steal goods for their use) rather than *boosters*, who are professional thieves.

In terms of the profile of those who are likely to take items more frequently, habitual jaycustomers tend to be middle-aged, with lower levels of education, and more likely to be widowed/divorced/separated. McShane and Noonan (1993) also note hotel guest thieves are more likely to be middle-aged. They are less likely to be 18–34 years and students and from the Americas but more likely to be from Mainland China. Tolkach et al. (2017) also note that Mainland Chinese tourists who are less educated are found to be less ethical than those with higher education. Habitual jaycustomers are more likely to be repeat visitors and those on VFR trips are more likely to take items. This confirms that ethical behavior is in part, cultural (Fennell and Malloy, 1999).

Implications

From time to time, we observe unethical behavior. It is important to have a clearer understanding of consumer behavior in different situations, such as tourism to determine the mechanisms for this behavior. This research further adds to the body of knowledge in the area of customer misbehavior. The issue of hotel guests and air passengers essentially shoplifting is not examined in much detail and could be considered a taboo subject. The issue of dishonesty is complex, influenced by individual characteristics such as their sense of morality and ethical standards as well as influenced by external factors such as cultural norms (Tolkach et al., 2017). What is more difficult is understanding the self-concept of tourists (Sirgy et al., 2018). Added to the difficulty is these factors can change when individuals are out of their normal environment by being a tourist (McKercher et al., 2008; Selanniemi, 2003). This exploratory research has laid the basis for future work in this area.

There are notable practical implications of this research. With the high incidence of food being taken from flights and the possibility of biohazards and the mobility of invasive species as a result, authorities need to revise the way their messages are communicated so the messages “cut-through.” If airlines and hotels are concerned with the volume of non-free items taken from flights and rooms, the strategies to minimize these external costs and maximize the benefits need to be implemented. Room attendants and air stewards need to be vigilant in collecting headsets, pillows, and blankets. Travelers need to be aware of what items are for sale and what items are complementary.

Limitations and areas for future research

Like any research, there are several limitations to this work that provide areas for future research. Firstly, the tourists are self-reporting their incidence of taking items from hotel rooms and flights. In research of this type where behavior is illegal or unethical, those interviewed can either underreport their stigmatized behavior (“I’d never steal anything—I’m an upstanding member of my community”) or exaggerate their behavior (“I always steal”). This may have occurred in this research, however, the questionnaires were anonymous and interviewers did not collect any names or other information that could link self-reported theft with any individuals. There was no way these tourists could be identified by police or immigration officials. Further, apart from asking the respondent, there are few alternatives to capturing the incidence of theft among different items. Therefore, the respondents had little incentive to lie to interviewers. The context of the research occurred in one location, Hong Kong, which is a well-known tourist destination. The sample profile shows a broad range of tourists. Nevertheless, it is only one destination. Results may differ at different locations.

The survey instrument asked about a generic hotel. Further research might investigate differences in stealing behavior among different classes of hotels. Are hotel guests more or less likely to take items from a budget hotel compared to a luxury hotel? In the post-COVID-19 era, it would be interesting to examine the stealing habits of air passengers and hotel guests. For example, would hotel guests seek to take hand sanitizers if provided in hotel rooms? Will air passengers be more likely to take spare face masks off flights? Or will tourists be less likely to take items because they might not be sure these items were properly sanitized after being around previous tourists? This would be a useful avenue for further research. The survey instrument captured first-time and repeat visitors to Hong Kong, however, future research might capture a broader measure of travel

experience to see how “stealing behavior” relates to high/low frequency of travels (experienced or novice travelers). While this research captured the incidence of taking items and typecast tourists in terms of the frequency with which they took items from hotel rooms and airlines, future research using qualitative methods would provide insights into the motivations and rationalization of the reasons why tourists taking items or the reasons why they don’t remove items from their rooms or flights. Research of this type could also help researchers understand why we did not find any relationship between tourists’ perceptions of value for money and removing items from hotel rooms. Lastly, the list of items asked of respondents was based on a review of the mainstream and academic literature. A qualitative study could also explore other items that people took from rooms and airlines.

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Supplemental material

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