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http://www.shermantravel.com/blogs/amenity_watch



Lounging by the pool or on the sand, where with one wave of the hand you can summon a chilled Chardonnay and club sandwich or a piña colada and nachos, is the ultimate state of vacation bliss. No matter where you are or how many stars the hotel has, I don't think the transportive indulgence and pleasure of poolside service ever wears off.

And then there are the hotels that up this game with amenities to make the experience even more luxurious – and yes, make us all lazier in the process. But hey, it's vacation. A crowning example is the sunglasses washing service offered by top-tier hotels such as Sandy Lane in Barbados, One & Only Palmilla in Los Cabos, and aboard SeaDream yacht cruises.

That's right, we're talking about a poolside staff member (sometimes referred to as a sunglasses concierge) discreetly Windexing your shades free of charge. Totally unnecessary and over the top, but also kind of awesome at the same time.

What is this summer's sunglasses concierge? I think I may have found the answer.

The newly renovated Pacific Edge Hotel in downtown Laguna Beach, Calif., has recently introduced so-called beach sherpas. Starting to get visions of yaks wearing Ray-Bans? Unfortunately, that isn't the case. Rather

the sherpas are staff members who equip guests for a perfect day at the beach. First, they set up complimentary towels, beach chairs, and umbrellas on the soft, golden sand in front of the hotel. Yes, the hotel is right on the beach, so it's not a big hike but I imagine it's nice – especially for visitors with young kids – to have someone else schlepping the gear.

From there, the sherpas are on-call to lead beach games like sand castle contests and hula hooping and can provide info such as where to rent surf boards, the location of the best tidal pools, and what else to do in town. You see, the sherpas were all born and raised in Laguna Beach, so they know their stuff. They also sell ice cream and beach necessities like sunscreen lotion and games.

While the beach sherpa service lasts only through the summer, the hotel also offers another sweet amenity year-round called an Edge Card. Every guests gets a card when checking in and these grant “VIP privileges” and discounts at 18 local restaurants and 26 local businesses.

Also worth noting is that Pacific Edge's rates are much gentler than those typical of the sunglasses concierge crowd – I found rooms starting at \$189/night in August.

As long as we're in the area, it bears mentioning that San Diego's Hyatt Regency Mission Bay Spa and Marina recently debuted a summer-related amenity of its own: skincare concierges. The gussied up name simply stands in for staff members who lather on complimentary sunscreen by the pool (presumably guests can partake of just the sunscreen and not the hands-on application if that's a little too close for comfort). While the idea might seem frivolous, the reasoning behind it – to fight skin cancer, the most common (yet preventable) form of cancer in the United States, affecting over 3.5 million people annually – is definitely not.

Practical *and* pleasurable, the best kind of amenity.