



Hoteliers, take my advice

I'VE been staying at the Paradise on Earth that is Cobblers Cove in Barbados, a family-owned hotel decorated by the novelist and designer Sam Angus: a place in which every single thing is beautiful. We lived the miraculous day on which you take a train from Clapham Junction in the morning and are swimming in the Caribbean by teatime. Now, home again, I need to look at the photographs to convince myself it wasn't a dream.

Of course, we lapped up and relished the luxury of it all, lolling on chaise longues on our verandahs with views over the ocean, eating delicious food and drinking rum punches and sorbet-like fruit punches to refresh body and soul. I kept trying to find excuses to 'ask at reception' because it gave an excuse to walk through the thickly lush, exquisite garden, which was just as magical when the path was lit by flares.

It wasn't only the luxury that made it so heavenly; it was the small touches—things that don't cost a great deal to provide, but make all the difference to the experience of being a guest. Here's my 10 tiny things I wish some of our dreary hotels in Britain and Europe could emulate.

Looking pleased to see you when you arrive. Our arrival was greeted with rapture, a scented

cold flannel and drinks, fulfilling the human need to feel loved on arrival and in marked contrast to so many hotel lobbies, where the person behind the desk hardly looks up and just asks you to 'sign here'.

No TVs on wall brackets. I didn't even notice the absence of televisions until the manager,

‘More large towels: I've been known to use the bathmat in desperation’

Will Oakley, pointed it out to me. Of course! No *Big Brother*, which is just what those oppressive TVs feel like. No background noise of CNN. I now long to go into every hotel room in Britain and wrench the hideous things off the walls.

A small shelf of books in each bedroom, which gives a lovely staying-with-friends feeling.

Keys rather than plastic cards. How I hate cards, which never seem to go from red to green, whichever way you insert or swipe them.

Rooms with names rather than numbers. The 42 suites at

Cobblers Cove are all named after places in Barbados: ours were Bannatyne and Boscobelle. So friendly compared with the deadening 529.

A three-hour window for breakfast—much nicer than having a woman with a spatula looking cross if you come down sheepishly at 8.55am.

Breakfast cooked individually for you, rather than mummified mushrooms laid out under lights. I see that this is expensive to provide, but I'd rather have a small menu cooked especially for me than a vast array of items cooked an hour ago.

Complimentary afternoon tea. A lovely small touch that assuages any homesickness.

Enough large towels. Who was the miserable hotelier who started the convention that towels are allowed to be a pathetic size? I've been known to use the bathmat in desperation. Here, you get two long, wide ones in the bathroom, plus two candy-striped swimming towels and as many more as you like from the cupboard by the sea.

A checkout time of noon. This is a kind touch that makes the usual 10am departure rule seem brutal. We were in denial on our last morning, dreading expulsion from this Garden of Eden, but at least we could have a lei-

surely breakfast and an extended swim before packing.

Is there a world record for the longest time between the beginning of Eucharist to *sursum corda*? At St Peter's, Speights-town, Barbados, it was a staggering one hour and 43 minutes. When that 'Lift up your hearts' moment came at last, it merely signalled the beginning of the actual Holy Communion part of the service—at least another half-hour still to go.

I didn't mind, as the service was a delightful feast of vigorous Victorian hymn-singing. There are too many padded-out Church of England services when I start looking at my watch as the prayers drone on for 10 minutes and the vicar reads out all the notices that are already on the leaflet: 'On Wednesday at 10.30, the mothers and toddlers group will meet in the church hall.' Get on with it!

I applaud seasoned Catholics, who get a whole Mass done and dusted in 22 minutes. 

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Next week Kit Hesketh-Harvey

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