

Who's good in bed?

Our special report gives you the low-down

by Ian Jarrett

I've never been sure why Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan were Sleepless in Seattle. Maybe they booked into one of those economy motels where you get that sinking feeling as soon as you turn back the bed covers.

Luxury and budget never rub shoulders in hotel rooms; the well-sprung bed is the new battleground where hotel groups vie to give their guests the best possible night's sleep.

If you're looking for a good night's slumber in a budget hotel, dream on.

These days it's 700 thread-count sheets, mood lighting and goose down duvets that are the stuff of dreams. The cost of the fluffy duck feather pillow you sleep on can often be more than the room rate you secured off the Internet.

Earlier this year my wife and I spent a weekend break in the Sofitel in Melbourne, where the king-sized bed was so comfortable that we got down on our hands and knees to search for the maker's brand.

Two weeks and some \$2300 later, we were the proud owners of a similar bed at home.

Perhaps we should have waited. Later Sofitel hotels were offering guests the opportunity to take home their own Sofitel MyBed kit for one Euro if they stay four consecutive nights at full rate at any of more than 65 Sofitels throughout Europe. Sofitel even offered to cover the first 115 Euros of shipping fees. Ah well!

In Australia, MyBed can be comfort-driven in selected rooms at Sofitel Melbourne, Grand Hotel Melbourne, Sofitel



Dream sleep at a price.

Wentworth Sydney, Sofitel Brisbane, Sofitel Gold Coast and Sofitel Reef Casino Cairns as well as the new Sofitel Queenstown in New Zealand.

Four Seasons Singapore also sells its beds and pillows to snug-as-a-bug clients, who find they make a better take-home present for a partner than a silk scarf or tie.

The efforts made by hotels to plump up their ratings by ensuring their guests can snooze the night away in peace and luxury are limitless.

The Benjamin Hotel in New York has its own Sleep Concierge. Among her services is the provision of 11 different pillows — everything from Swedish Memory to Snore-No-More. She will also bring up warm milk at bedtime if requested.

And if guests fail to sleep as well as they do at home, the first night's accommodation at the Benjamin is on the house.

The Park Hotel Tokyo offers a profes-

sional pillow fitter who will measure guests at bedtime before suggesting the best pillow for their shape. Hotel staff are also available to discuss sleep well being with individual guests

According to the 2005 Travel Sleep Habits survey from Radisson Hotels and US bed retailer Select Comfort, 42 per cent of those interviewed said they would be more likely to stay at a hotel that provided a customised sleep surface.

"Even at home, sleeping well can sometimes seem like a dream come true," said Pete Bils, senior director of sleep innovation for Select Comfort.

"On the road — for business or for pleasure — sleep becomes even more elusive. And when long plane or car rides, varied travel times, and jet lag wreak havoc on a person's sleep schedule, quality and restorative sleep is more important than ever."

Tips for getting a good night's sleep in a hotel include spraying lavender around the room, resisting the urge to switch on the television before bed and taking your own alarm clock to avoid the worry of the early morning call being on time.

The Ritz-Carlton's Millenia Ultimate Bed is rated tops by many sleep aficionados while the Conrad Bangkok has a big following for its Shogun pillow, stuffed with Japanese igusa grass that absorbs humidity and heat.

A new kid on the block, Yotel, is likely to cause a stir when it launches in London. Yotel's 10.5sqm rooms, inspired by Japanese capsule hotels and British Airways first-class cabin, will feature a gadgets wall, rain shower, rotating bed and the choice of hundreds of downloadable mov-

ies and CDs.

Yotel chief executive Gerard Green said: "People are fed up with boring hotels. If I'm paying UKP200 a night, I want it to be at least as nice as my own bedroom."

According to Radisson's Travel Sleep Habits survey, the most frequent complaint is the hotel room's mattress, cited by more than one in four as the top contributor to poor sleep. Other factors include too much noise in the hotel, uncomfortable pillows and temperature control in the hotel room. Fifty per cent of those surveyed by Radisson would like to carry their own beds with them while traveling.

Radisson's answer has been a new bed featuring dual-adjustable air-chamber technology that allows each side of the Queen and King-size beds to be independently adjusted at the touch of a button.

In the United States the Crown Plaza brand has introduced special drape curtains to keep out unwanted light. It also offers a refund if it fails to deliver a booked wake-up call to avoid something the hotel chain terms "on-call anxiety".

On-call anxiety creates the paradox of not sleeping because of the fear that not sleeping will result in poor performance the next day.

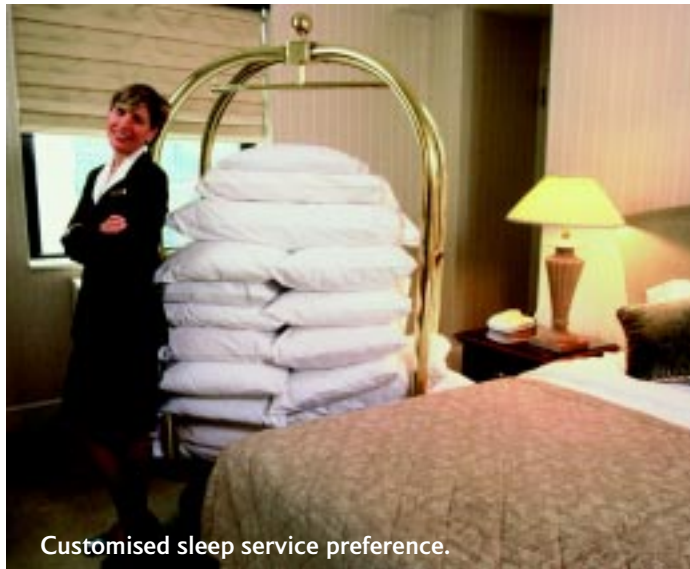
Starwood recently introduced a new bed to its Four Points brand which it labelled "a multi-layered cosy cocoon of style and comfort" They call it the Four Comfort Bed and it comes, of course, with four fluffy pillows.

Appropriately, the bed was launched on US National Napping Day, April 4, at the world's first "nap" hotel — the Four Points by Sheraton on Fifth Avenue in New York.

On hand to give the new bed a seal of approval were Bill and Camille Anthony, owners of the US-based Napping Company, an organisation that

advises business people of the benefits and strategies of napping.

Bill, a professor at Boston University,



Customised sleep service preference.

doesn't mind being caught napping. He has written books on why employers should allow their staff to doze off during work breaks.

"Whether it's intense work and travel schedules or partying until the cows come home, people are not getting enough sleep," says Prof Anthony.

Great nappers have included John F Kennedy, Bill Clinton, Winston Churchill, Johannes Brahms and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Business travellers with a heavy work schedule don't opt for luxury hotels just because they appreciate fluffy bathrobes and a chocolate on the pillow. They want a good night's sleep, which is why Westin has its Heavenly Bed and sister brand Sheraton its Sweet Sleeper Bed.

Westin will also offer your pooch the Heavenly Dog Bed. It comes with food and water bowls, floor mat, Dog-In-Room sign and a welcome kit.

Marriott International recently unveiled fresh Marriott and Renaissance guest rooms, a key component of which is new bedding. Guests can sleep blissfully thanks to a feathered mattress topper, 300-thread-count sheets, a white-sheeted duvet freshly laundered for each new guest, stylish euroshams, decorative bed scarf and extra pillows.

Marriott International's 628,000 beds at approximately 2,400 hotels worldwide, across eight brands, are getting the bedroom treatment. The global bedding makeover will utilise over 27 million metres of fabric - enough to stretch more

than two-thirds of the way around the world.

Of course, if you like what you sleep on at a Marriott, Ritz-Carlton or Hyatt hotel, you can buy the bedding on the Internet at www.pacificpillows.com

Hilton, meanwhile, has introduced Relaxation Rooms that are specifically designed to make you sleep. The rooms are divided into zones for work and relaxation with the bedroom zone making a feature of mood lighting and luxurious bedding. Relaxation albums are available for the CD player, and at the Hilton

London Gatwick guests find The Book of Alternative Therapies, Yoga and Meditation by the bed.

A Japanese manufacturer recently launched the men's 'lap pillow', a skin-coloured polyurethane soft-thigh ensemble in a red or black skirt. It resembles the legs of a kneeling woman — and is promoted as a comfy cushion for napping, reading or watching television. Don't be afraid to request it when checking-in.

And if all this pillow talk is making you feel sleepy, here are some more tips to ensure a better night's rest

1. Keep a regular sleep and wake time. Try to adhere to this every day.
2. Avoid caffeine and alcohol four to six hours before bedtime.
3. Don't exercise within two hours of bedtime. Exercising 5-6 hours before bedtime may help you sleep more soundly.
4. Avoid large meals within two hours of bedtime. If you feel hungry have a light snack at least 30 minutes prior to your bedtime.
5. Sleep in a dark, quiet room with a comfortable temperature.
6. Only associate the bed with two things, sleep and sex. Try not to get into the habit of reading and watching television in the bed.
7. Only go to bed when you are sleepy. If you cannot fall asleep within 20-30 minutes, get out of bed and do a quiet activity elsewhere and then return to bed.

Source: London Sleep Society