

# THE MINIBAR

By Andi Teran

"A bottle of juice costs how much?" Ah, the famous first words that greet a minibar — a.k.a. The Little Fridge with Attitude — in a hotel room upon arrival. You might also hear, "Look, Dad, free candy bars!" or "I'm too tired to wait for room service ... how about a quick nightcap with this \$86 bottle of vodka right here?"

Long considered a modern amenity for the Western business traveler (and favorite of closet boozers and sugar-toothed kindergarteners alike), the minibar offers a variety of refreshments in the comfort of your room — all for a pretty price. Convenient though they might be, you'll be hard-pressed to find a half-can of Coke that doesn't cost 10 times what a full can costs at the deli across the street. Conceived by the German company Siegas in the early 1960s, the first minibar was a small refrigerator that contained a variety of snacks and drinks. The idea was simple and hasn't changed much since: offer guests handy "necessities" such as beer or peanuts for in-room consumption but at a considerable markup. The guest is always pleased by this "complimentary" service and the house always wins with the extra revenue generated.

While fans of the minibar come in all suits and states of jetlag, perhaps their most devoted fans are rock stars. Jefferson Starship's Grace Slick, alone in her hotel room and in desperate need of a pick-me-up, proceeded to enjoy the entire contents of her minibar prior to performing one night. While the result ended in an erratic blitz onstage, she got what she craved, as did the hotel when compiling the final bill. Slick indeed. The cool cube is inspiring endeavors outside of the hotel room, too. Head to Scottsdale, Ariz., where you'll find an entirely different option. Giligin's bar employs two midget mixologists at a three-foot-tall bar known as "Chuey's Mini Bar." They'll do their best to make the place a home away from home, but we suggest you ask before reaching over for that beer.

For those who realize their mistake after a minibar binge, be forewarned that replacing items with store-bought counterparts or water from the tap for the clear stuff — otherwise known as "The Ol' Switcheroo" — no longer flies. Las Vegas impresario Steve Wynn, for one, has installed state-of-the-art sensors in his hotels' minibars that charge you for simply moving an item from its spot. Not only does this method charge your bill automatically, it alerts the hotel when restocking is necessary, rendering room attendants obsolete and putting housekeeping room parties to bed for life.

So, what's next for the little wonder? Well, the minibar of today is also bent on killing the gift shop. Nationwide, W Hotels and Omni Hotels offer extended "dry bars" that feature various sundries such as T-shirts, CDs, pantyhose, or socks, and, for those caught in the heat of the moment, an "Intimacy Kit" — allowing you to play it safe despite the trouble those mini bottles got you into in the first place.

ILLUSTRATION BY JULIA ROTHMAN

