

Sky's the limit

By JENNY STEVENS

EVERY traveller dreads being stuck in an airport for hours, dozing on uncomfortable chairs and willing the time to advance quickly.

Throw in incessant security announcements, fractious children, cold airconditioning, smells, bad food and plastic seats with arms designed to stop you reclining, and it's a recipe for irritable passengers.

Business or first-class passengers can escape to an airline lounge where showers, food, drinks, couches, newspapers, TV and business centres make the stay as painless as possible.

But what's available for the economy passenger? Plenty.

Many big airports offer free or paid shower rooms; hotel-style day rooms; spas; masseurs; free, coin or credit card-accessed internet; games rooms; TV viewing areas; prayer rooms; hairdressing and beauty salons; children's playrooms and quiet areas.

Those who know in advance they have a bad connection can plan their time accordingly. Reserve a day or overnight room in an airport hotel, make a spa appointment, or take a day tour of the city. It couldn't be easier and needn't be expensive.

For instance, a day in Hong Kong could include taking the airport shuttle into the city (\$HK100, or \$A17 one way), a little shopping in Central and a quick bite (from \$HK80), then perhaps the Peak Tram (HK\$30 adult return) to the top of Victoria Peak for the best views of the city.

Passengers transiting Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific flights can also stay overnight on a Hong Kong SuperStop from \$A40 a night.

Details: 13 17 47, www.cathaypacific.com.au.

Some airlines offer sweeteners to fill the day, such as Gulf Air's free hotel day-room and city tour. It's available for all passengers travelling from Sydney to Dublin on the carrier's three-times-a-week service to Ireland.

Details: 1300 366337, www.gulfair.com.au

With less time, check the informa-



SLEEP ON IT: Airports are not the best place for a nap.

tion desks for pamphlets on airport facilities. Or follow the internationally recognised signs for showers and beds. A hot shower or a two-hour sleep in a horizontal position can make an amazing difference.

Here are some tried and tested stopover remedies, guaranteed to make the hours go by at popular airports.

Singapore

A contented customer is a happy traveller and Singapore's Changi is one of the best airports for comfort, shopping and services from free internet PC terminals to TV zones.

It also has Ambassador Transit Hotels in Terminals 1 and 2. Both rent rooms in blocks of six hours, with charges by the hour.

Budget rooms with shared bathrooms are from \$S40.45 (\$A34) a single, \$S64.50 (\$A54.50) twin; ensuite standard rooms begin at \$S57.75 (\$A49) single. Advance reservations advisable.

With only a short time to unwind, non-guests can use the pool and showers in the Terminal 1 hotel for just \$S13.65 (\$A11.50).

Changi also has the Plaza Premium Lounge, a 24-hour transit lounge on Terminal 2's third floor.

It's similar to a business-class

lounge, and for \$S30 (\$A25) for five hours (\$S15-child) provides relaxation in comfort, snacks of healthy food, email and internet service, free local calls and international magazines and papers.

Showers are an extra \$S8 (\$A6.70), and oxygen therapy and use of the gym \$S15 (\$A12.70) each.

There are six semi-private napping compartments with wooden partitions (\$30 for three hours) and massage therapy for \$S23-38 (\$A19-32). All the prices are plus tax.

Details: www.airport-hotel.com.sg; www.plaza-asia.com

Vancouver

HERE'S one of those rare airports — designed to function efficiently, yet please the eye and soul at the same time.

As the hub of Alaskan cruise tours, the Canadian ski fields and trips into the interior, Vancouver international is the first and last port for people travelling enormous distances and many travellers need to fill in the hours there.

If sleep is needed, the Fairmont Vancouver airport, reached by an escalator or lift from the US departures area, has a quiet zone on its already-soundproofed sixth floor.

This means normal operations such as housekeeping cease between 8am

SPLASH OUT: Vancouver Fairmont Hotel has a swimming pool, sauna and gym.

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and 8pm so that guests can snooze in total quiet.

Rates begin at \$CAD89 (\$A105) plus taxes for four hours, plus \$CAD\$10 (\$11.80) every additional hour up to a maximum of eight hours.

To get rid of the kinks from a long flight, even non-guests can use the Fairmont's Absolute Spa.

It offers unlimited use of the indoor swimming pool, sauna and gym with every spa treatment.

This means that with a personalised facial (about \$CAD125 or \$148) or a relaxation massage (\$CAD90, \$107), it is possible to spend a few glorious hours before and after the treatment in the fitness centre, relaxing by the pool or in quiet rooms near the spa.

Details: www.absolutespa.com; www.fairmont.com/vancouverairport.

Japan

Narita airport services Tokyo, but it's also a busy hub for airlines travelling to Europe, North America or Australia.

Narita is too far from Tokyo for a quick sightseeing trip, but there are 14 hotels nearby and many places inside both terminals to eat, shower and relax.



UNWIND: Vancouver's luxury spa facilities.

The airport offers free children's play areas, free TV zones, free Yahoo!Cafes and wireless LAN service, plus quiet zones with chairs that lie nearly flat.

Find out which terminal the airline uses, check out the day rooms on the web and book a real sleep in advance. Or just turn up and hope one is free.

Day rooms are nothing more than large cubicles with no windows and thin walls, but they're large enough to contain single or twin beds with a clock-radio, a vanity table and an ensuite, plus a hand-luggage trolley.

Best of all, they're scrupulously clean, with crisp cotton

sheets and warm blankets, fluffy towels and amenities.

A single day room costs 1000 yen (\$A11.40) for the first hour and 500 yen each extra hour.

A twin-bed day room is 1600 yen for the first hour, then 800 yen an hour. To just freshen up, a 30-minute shower cubicle costs 500 yen.

www.narita-airport.jp/en.

Bangkok

Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi (pronounced Su-var-na-poom) airport is five times larger than its predecessor.

The passenger terminal is claimed to be the world's largest single building structure. Passengers enjoy a vastly increased range of services compared with the old airport.

Apart from showers, massage and health facilities, the airport has the 600-room Novotel Suvarnabhumi connected to the terminals.

Until October 31, the special day-use rate is \$A95 a room; the stopover rate is \$A119 a room.

Details: Royal Orchid Holidays on 1300 369 747.

There are plans to expand the terminal to include theatres, karaoke lounges, bowling lanes, dental clinics, spas and hair salons. The sky's the limit.