

Amazing Amenities

Mermaid lessons?
Robot room service?
These Texas hotels have
something different to
offer guests.

By Cynthia J. Drake



Illustrations by Sarah Ferone

If you've stayed in many hotels and motels around our state, you've probably had your fair share of Texas-shaped waffles at free continental breakfasts. But these days, some Texas hotels are going way beyond basic breakfasts and offering unique, unusual—and often Instagrammable—amenities and services. Here are nine examples worth checking out by, well, checking in.





1 Get room service from a robot

At **Aloft Dallas Love Field**, hotel guests can order front desk items to be delivered by Botlr, a bowtie-wearing robotic butler who can shuttle various items, such as hand towels, drinks, or snacks. Guests receive a call when Botlr arrives, and the robot is programmed to deliver the goods when guests open their hotel door. Instead of a tip, just leave the robot a review on its touchscreen—it might do a little celebratory jig. [No joke.]




2 Dial M for margarita

At the **Four Seasons Hotel Austin**, you can order a margarita from your room phone. Simply press the “margarita cart” button [yes, it’s an actual button, between “wake-up call” and “emergency”], and within minutes, a bartender with a tequila-stocked cart will materialize, ready to handcraft a marg, shaken or blended to your exact specs.



3 Hunt for hotel ghosts

Galveston’s historic **Hotel Galvez and Spa**, which is rumored to be haunted by several resident ghosts, offers complimentary EMF [electromagnetic field] meters by request for guests to use on self-guided ghosting expeditions. They’re the tool of choice for serious supernatural enthusiasts. You can download a free audio tour to your smartphone or join a weekly concierge-led ghost tour.



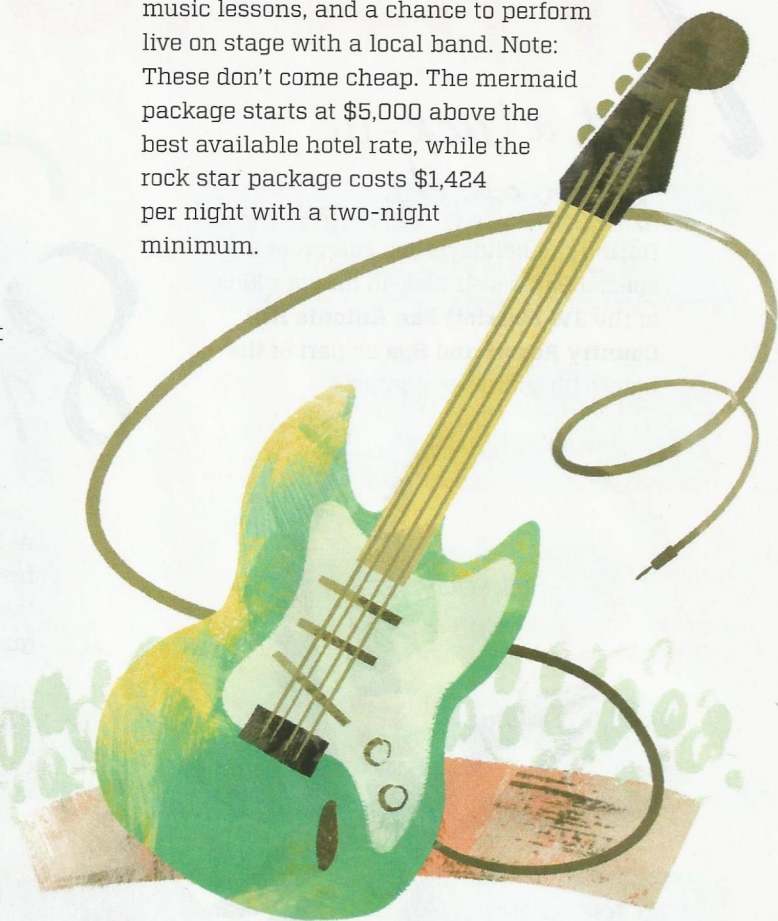
4 Cement your superfan status

Stay at the **Omni Frisco Hotel** and you just might bump into your favorite Cowboy. The hotel is attached via a walkway to the Dallas Cowboys' practice facility and was created in collaboration with team owner Jerry Jones. Cheerleaders work out at Cowboys Fit, the team-branded fitness center that guests can use with the purchase of a day pass. And throughout the property, you'll see nods to all things Cowboys. Don't miss the Charlotte Jones Collection boutique, where, among other things, you'll find a custom Cowboys Swarovski crystal-encrusted kids' motorized truck.



5 Transform into a mermaid or a rock star

At the **Westin Austin Downtown**, you can take mermaid lessons with your own custom tail, followed by an underwater mermaid photo shoot at the rooftop pool. Or rent out a guitar that you'll find waiting for you in your room. You can get music lessons, and a chance to perform live on stage with a local band. Note: These don't come cheap. The mermaid package starts at \$5,000 above the best available hotel rate, while the rock star package costs \$1,424 per night with a two-night minimum.



6 Enjoy breathtaking art inside your hotel

In **Dallas**, the **Hilton Anatole** is part hotel, part art museum. In fact, the property says it has the largest collection of art and antiques of any American hotel. Among the most photographed highlights: two sections of the Berlin Wall.



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Get a tuck-in from an elf

During the holidays, you can order a special Santa's elf tuck-in for your kids at the **JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort and Spa** as part of the hotel's Christmas festivities.



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Prepare for liftoff

At **Hotel ZaZa in Houston's** Museum District, you can reserve one of 10 "concept suites," each with a unique theme. In the "Houston, We Have a Problem" suite, guests share the living space with a life-size NASA space suit prop and other space-themed decor, such as lava lamps and framed photos of space missions.



Wake up with antelopes

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At the **Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Glen Rose**, overnight visitors staying in rustic cabins or the lodge have the chance to see rare sable antelope and other animals gathered at the watering hole in the evening and early morning. Visitors can enjoy their coffee while watching herds of deer and hear wolves howling before bedtime.

Austin-based writer **Cynthia J. Drake** is anxiously awaiting her mermaid transformation.