

Lifestyle/ Travel & Leisure

Workout equipment rental for people in quarantine an opportunity too good to pass up for hotels, gyms, and a nimble entrepreneur

David Lee resorted to lifting chairs and the bed (too heavy) in Singapore hotel quarantine. It gave the entrepreneur a business idea

His company, as well as gyms and hotels in Asia Pacific, rent out workout gear such as treadmills, weights, and exercise bikes to people who are confined



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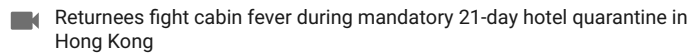
Hong Kong's Dorsett group enables guests isolating in its properties to rent workout equipment via the Dorsett Mart online platform.

Given the restrictions being imposed on people around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic, it can be difficult to stick to a regular fitness regime.

Doing so at home is hard enough, let alone while confined to a tiny hotel room. But this is the challenge faced by many people, hotel quarantine now being mandatory for travellers arriving from overseas in many countries.

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With the average hotel room measuring around 20 square metres, running is out of the question, while online HIIT and yoga classes can quickly lose their appeal.

In response, hotels, gyms – and some entrepreneurs – are renting out exercise equipment to travellers looking to shake up their quarantine fitness routines.



Happy SHN is an online platform in Singapore that rents out everything from coffee machines and air purifiers to sporting equipment.

In Singapore, David Lee Kuo-liang, who is in his thirties and was renting out Airbnb properties in South Korea until that business dried up, launched Happy SHN in December, after undergoing not one but two hotel quarantines. During these enforced stays, he found out how difficult it can be to keep fit in a hotel room.

“I ended up doing static exercises and lifting the room chairs. I even attempted lifting the bed, but it was too heavy,” he says. “I contemplated buying the things that I wanted online, but it didn’t make economic sense to pay full price for something that I was only going to use for 14 days.”

New Hong Kong hotel The Hari in Wan Chai

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This sparked the idea for Happy SHN, an online platform through which Lee rents out everything from coffee machines and air purifiers to sporting equipment.

“Having served two Stay-Home Notices [SHNs], I know what items will bring value and convenience to people in quarantine,” he says. SHNs, issued under Singapore’s Infectious Diseases Act, require a person to remain at home or in a dedicated facility, including quarantine hotels.

Lee offers exercise bikes, walking treadmills, weights and even a soft archery set, with rental fees from S\$3.50 (US\$2.60) per day for a kettlebell. He also tries to accommodate requests, recently procuring a pair of 30kg dumbbells for a customer. “The hotel concierge’s face when he saw those dumbbells was priceless!” he recalls.



A guest exercises at the Hong Kong Dorsett Wan Chai.

In Hong Kong, the Dorsett group enables guests isolating in its Mong Kok, Wan Chai, Tsuen Wan and Lan Kwai Fong Hotel @ Kau U Fong properties to rent workout equipment via the Dorsett Mart online platform. This includes dumbbells, stepper machines, stationary bikes and even an all-in-one gym set complete with an ab wheel, a resistance band and a push-up stand.

Also available is a Nintendo Switch console, which comes loaded with Ring Fit Adventure – a video game within which real-world movements are mimicked as in-game actions, effectively doubling as a workout.

“We are very passionate about our guests’ physical and mental well-being, especially during such stressful and uncertain times,” says Yi Li Dawson, senior marketing manager at Dorsett Hospitality International. “We want to provide them with the tools they need to stay motivated and to keep moving while they are undergoing their quarantine.”

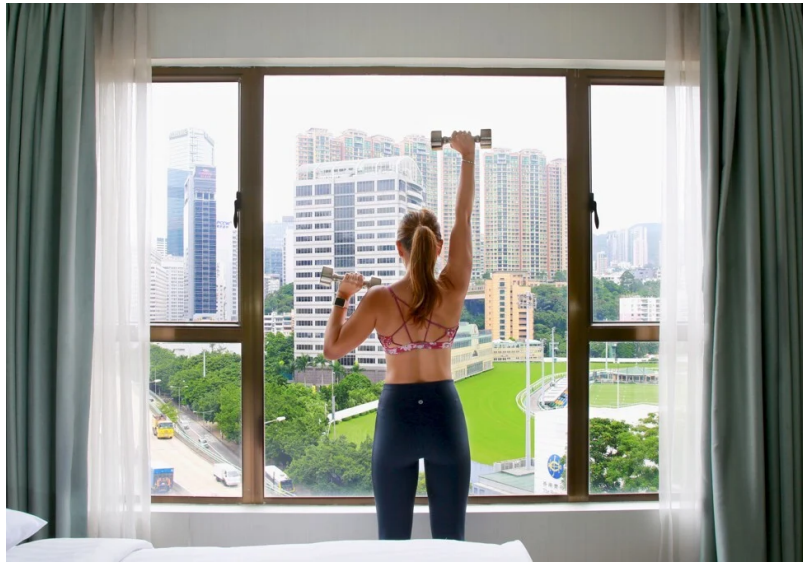


There are many stories of people getting a bit depressed and not sleeping well during quarantine, but exercise can improve mood and ensure a good night’s sleep
Steven Sun, who rented an exercise bike for his recent quarantine at the Fairmont Singapore

The equipment can be rented for a fixed number of days – or, in the case of the Nintendo Switch, in three-hour blocks – and is delivered directly to the room of a customer within 30 to 40 minutes of being booked. Prices start from HK\$80 (US\$10) a day for a pair of dumbbells, rising to HK\$2,730 per 21 days for a stationary cardio bike or a walking pad. It is the bike and the walking pad that are proving most popular.

“Since they are both forms of low-impact exercise, they are something that guests can do every day,” says Dawson.

In Sydney, Australia, indoor cycling gym Turbo Studio has both regular and commercial-grade spin bikes for hire. It also offers a virtual cycling set-up, comprising a smart bike and a turbo trainer (a device that enables the bike to be ridden in situ) that can be synced to online training platforms such as Zwift and RGT Cycling.



Entrepreneurs and gyms are renting out exercise equipment to travellers in hotel quarantine.

“An existing client was coming to Sydney from the US and asked if she could rent a trainer and bike while in quarantine, and [our equipment hire service] rolled out from there,” says Joanne Palazzetti, director at Turbo Studio. The gym has since expanded its offering to include treadmills, dumbbells, walking pads and rowing machines.

“We have between 60 to 70 units rotating between Sydney hotels every month, and thanks to our rapport with the brilliant concierge staff of each hotel, we have a daily delivery service,” says Palazzetti.

When it comes to rental equipment, hygiene and safety are paramount, especially during a pandemic. Thorough sanitation protocols are observed by Dorsett and Turbo Studio, they claim. And Lee says: “Every inch [of his products] are wiped down and sprayed with hospital-grade alcohol disinfectant.”

Although fitness equipment rentals are proving lucrative, Lee says his greatest satisfaction lies in knowing his service is appreciated. One happy customer is Steven Sun, who rented an exercise bike for his recent quarantine at the Fairmont Singapore.



Steven Sun rented an exercise bike for his recent quarantine at the Fairmont Singapore.

“There are many stories of people getting a bit depressed and not sleeping well during quarantine, but exercise can improve mood and ensure a good night’s sleep,” says Sun, who is in his late 40s. “The bike was central to my efforts in maintaining a regular fitness routine.”

Essy Prita Cinta, a 34 year-old mother of two, rented an exercise bike from Happy SHN on the third day of her quarantine at Swissôtel The Stamford.

“I tried walking 5km inside the hotel room on the first two days, but you can imagine how big the room was! The spin bike was helpful, as it did not require a lot of space,” she says.



Essy Prita Cinta rented an exercise bike from Happy SHN on the third day of her quarantine at Swissôtel The Stamford in Singapore.

“Daily exercise keeps me sane, so it was important for me to keep the routine, especially during a potentially stressful period like quarantine.”