

Friday, November 24, 2006

Destinations & Diversions

Holiday gifts

Down-to-earth gifts that give fliers a lift

Gift-giving is ready for takeoff — the official holiday shopping season starts today, the biggest sales day of the year. In an age of airport waits and packed planes, score points with the fliers on your list by landing a gift that makes getting there more enjoyable. USA TODAY's **Kitty Bean Yancey** scouts some new and clever offerings:



Playaway audiobook player

Price: Dozens of titles for kids and adults, \$29.99 and up, sold at Playawaydigital.com and Barnes & Noble stores

The gimmick: Listen to an audiobook via earphones on a plane, train or anywhere.

Why it flies: It's super-portable, about the size of an iPod mini, runs on a AAA battery and is perfect for whiling away the hours on a plane or during an airport delay.

Nit: Pricey — one book per player. Get friends or members of your book club to share the cost and pass each title around. But sterilize the earbuds first!



Handheld Texas Hold 'Em

Price: \$17.98 at TravelSmith.com; 800-950-1600

The gimmick: Play the hot poker game in practice games or "tournaments" on this device from Ex-calibur Electronics. Win by bankrupting opponents.

Why it flies: Hours of fun for traveling poker aficionados. And you can't lose a dime!

Nits: You need a screwdriver to insert three AAA batteries, so changing batteries on the road can be a hassle. And the tiny announcement of winning hands could annoy seatmates.

Social-Lite Large Lite Tote

Price: \$125 at Hartmann.com; 800-331-0613

The gimmick: A fashionable bag that packs easily for use on the road and toting home purchases.

Why it flies: This new collection from the reliable brand Hartmann is lighter and prettier than many totes. It comes in a variety of colors and patterns.

Nits: No inner pockets or clasp (just a ribbon tie). And the well-pressed take note: Some wrinkling occurs after the bag is folded for packing. Heavier fabric choices such as SugarDaddy and Domino (pictured) stay more wrinkle-free.



Hideo Wakamatsu Easel roll-aboard

Price: \$209 from HideoStore.com; 415-253-3029

The gimmick: Created by a Tokyo designer, the bag comes with removable artwork on one side that can be replaced with your favorite photo.

Why it flies: Adios, look-alike confusion — especially when you are trying to spot it at the luggage carousel. It's hard-sided and head-turning. A combination lock is nice for keeping property safe in your hotel room.

Nits: Not a lot of room for clothes (a larger size is available), and the area surrounding the artwork is translucent, revealing the top layer of what you pack.



Turbo iPod charger

Price: \$34.85 at Magellans.com; 800-962-4943

The gimmick: Keep your favorite tunes coming on long plane rides when away from a power source or your laptop.

Why it flies: A bit larger than a tube of lipstick, it works on a single battery (included, isn't that nice?) and charges in an hour.

Nit: iPod Shuffle owners, you're out of luck. It doesn't work on that model.

Scanner bag

Price: \$24.85 with leather trim, from GadgetDuck.com (vinyl models start at \$12.85)

The gimmick: A luggage tag with zippered mesh bag tucked inside that unfolds to hold cellphones, wallet and charge for going through airport security checkpoints.

Why it flies: You save time by stashing valuables in the bag while waiting in line at the checkpoint; your items stay together attached to a carry-on or briefcase; your business card or name and phone number on the luggage tag are insurance should you leave the bag behind.

Nit: Reloadable cards (such as subway or Starbucks cards) should be kept away from the magnets that close the tag. Credit/debit and ATM cards are unaffected.