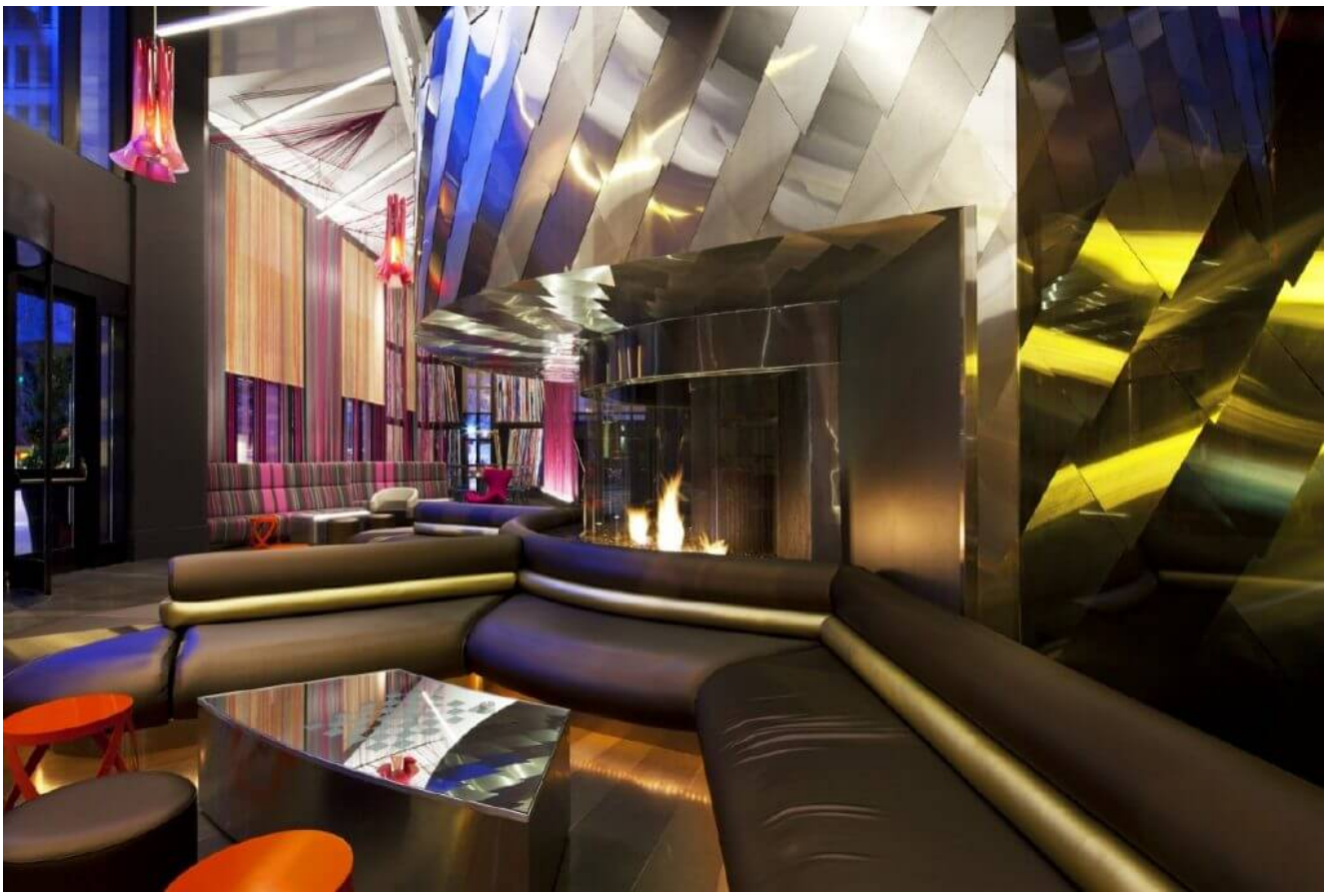
REVIEW: The W Hotel in Seattle has the BEST BED in the world

I always check out the W hotel in whichever city i'm in, and now that Marriott and SPG have merged, points can be transferred between the two – making life much easier if you're a fan of both brands.

The W in Seattle is an older property, but was recently renovated (in 2016). How is it now? Pretty darn good. Why would one choose the W Seattle with the dearth of luxury hotels in the city you ask? Well, the views are one reason, and two, the service.

I couldn't recommend the W in Seattle up until this year because it was getting a bit long in the tooth, but now with its renovation – it's one of the go-to's in Seattle.

When you enter, you're greeted by the expansive lobby which organically melds into the bar and the lounge area. It's a cozy space with an oversized fireplace and lots of secluded seating.



The Lobby, it’s nice

The rooms themselves are a nice size, which is hard to find in downtown Seattle. They’re also renovated and have some of THE comfiest beds i’ve ever experienced (Yes SPG, your beds ARE Heavenly). Now i’ve slept in Heavenly bed setups at other SPG properties, but this one was exceptional. I don’t know if it was because the rooms were so new, or because they had a different mattress top at this one but i’d love to hear reader’s opinions!

Now if you wanted to see what the views looked like check out the pic below. The combination of great location and height of the building makes this one of the nicest properties around for expansive views of the beautiful Seattle skyline. There’s only a handful of luxury hotels with views like this and the W Seattle is one of them. The icing on the cake is that most of the rooms at the W have a view because of how the building is situated on a hill.



That’s the renovated room there

The service is impeccable at this property, the gym has new equipment now, and did I mention the bed or the views?

PROS:

- VIEWS VIEWS VIEWS!
- Service is impeccable – I think it was on par with some Ritz-Carlton’s i’ve stayed at
- The remodel did this hotel good

CONS:

- It has low ceilings – I really had to reach here

SECRETS:

- If you’re an SPG member ask them for drink tickets, they’re usually pretty accommodating here!

REVIEW: The Best Hotel in Copenhagen – the Nimb

So you wanna go to Copenhagen and you’re looking for the perfect place to call home for a few days? Look no further than the NIMB hotel. Denmark is ostensibly the happiest country in the world (Google “Happiest country on Earth”), and to top that off – the Nimb Hotel is located at the entrance of Tivoli Gardens – which is one of the happiest places in Copenhagen. Combine the two and you get a winning combo.



Why they chose to build this as a Moorish Mansion i'm not quite sure – but it's pretty awesome nonetheless

There's not that many choices in Copenhagen, especially if you want something luxurious and want to stay in a centralized location. With those two parameters in place you have the Nimb Hotel, and the Hotel D'Angleterre. When you enter the Nimb, you do so from the street side, and the hotel is unassuming. It's a small lobby with some oversized lanterns and decor you would most likely see in someone's countryside Mansion. However, with 17 suites in total, that's exactly what you're getting at the Nimb.



That's the lobby. Small and cute – not unlike the hotel itself

The service is impeccable, everyone speaks perfect English, the front desk receptionist has excellent advice, and it's all very personable. They recognize each guest, and everytime you

enter and exit you give the front desk your key (no electronic keycards here!). Think of it as a very fancy full service B&B. The rooms are large, have beautiful wood flooring, Bang & Olufsen equipment throughout, and my favorite feature – heated floors in the bathrooms!



Any room with a fireplace is great in my book!

The rooms themselves also have fireplaces and so should you choose to use them, the front desk will send an employee to come open the flue and light it up for you. I highly advise visiting Copenhagen in the winter time – and though it's a city that is great year round, the holidays seem to have an extra abundance of Christmas spirit. There's a saying in Denmark which is called Hygge (it's the warm fuzzy feeling you get from good friends, winter sweaters, and a cup of hot chocolate), and there is nothing more Hygge than being at the Nimb with a glass of Glogg, sitting in front of the upper lobby fireplace, overlooking Tivoli Gardens.



Grab a seat, grab a drink, and have some great conversation with friends new and old in the upper lobby bar – overlooking Tivoli Gardens

PROS:

- Location is amazing – its across from the main train station which has direct access to the airport, and it has direct access to Tivoli Gardens
- Great personalized service with 17 rooms and suites, personable and highly knowledgable staff members
- Everything about the property screams high quality and makes you feel like you're in a bed & breakfast with all the amenities of a full service hotel

CONS:

- This is really nitpicking – but there's no late night room service

SECRETS:

- If you ask the front desk, they will supply you with free tickets to Tivoli Gardens which is attached to the Nimb. They're free and in the winter it's the largest Christmas market in town (and possibly in the world). It's dare I say – magical.

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- If there was one thing that really stood out to me in Copenhagen it was the cuisine. This place is a foodie paradise, the seafood is incredibly fresh and served in some really unique methods. Take advantage of this and check out all that the city has to offer (food wise).

A Travel Gift Guide from an Award Winning World Traveler

I may have made that part up about award winning. However, I do consider myself a pro traveler by this point.

It's that time of year, where everyone is scrambling to figure out what to give their friends, family, and loved ones. Being an avid gear aficionado and (unfortunately) a spender when it comes to those categories, I have had the pleasure of purchasing and using many different types of travel gear. Here are my favorite choices, and why I chose them!

SUITCASE:

Light hard sided suitcases with 4 wheels are all the rage, and for good reason. They are light, durable, expandable, and come in sizes that fit most carry on regulations. They are

also very easy to move around. My all time favorite is the ones built by Delsey. Sure you could spend more on a Samsonite, or a Tumi, but having owned all three, my Delsey has done the job time and again and taken me on dozens of trips through all sorts of rough and tumble luggage handlers and excursions.

Click here to check it out on Amazon



Simple, cheap, and awesome

THE CARRY ON BAG:

The Carry on bag also known as the overnighter, is usually a small bag that will carry your toiletries, your electronic gadgets, and maybe a single change of clothing. Although I carry on all my luggage there are those times when you need to check in your rollaway and can only carry one bag on board. As a result, everything that I MUST have on my trip, ie: toiletries, phones, cameras, passport, are all carried within this carry on bag. In my opinion, there is only ONE company worth buying soft sided bags from, and they are Filson. For those not familiar with Filson, they are a purveyer of heavy duty travel goods located in Seattle. Their stuff is nearly indestructible – it isn't cheap but it's not Louis Vuitton expensive by a long shot, and i've put my Filson bags through over 10 years of abuse and they keep on running like I purchased them yesterday. My favorite is the standard Filson Small Duffle here. It's just the right size to fit a jacket, maybe a t shirt and underwear, a toiletry bag, laptop, and even some shoes along with my electronics bag (mentioned below). Even filled as so it will easily drop into an overhead compartment on a small regional jet, or fit under the seat in front of you.



Damn near indestructible, and damn pretty

PACKING ITEMS:

It’s always a pain in the ass when small electronics items such as memory cards, chargers, accessories get lost in the inevitable black hole of larger bags. To avoid this, I carry two of these bags below. They fit all my gadgets and charging cords, and are a must have when organizing your life on the

go. They are also padded, so you don’t get the odd crushed charger prong or broken iphone. They’re cheap and can be purchased here



They’re perfect for putting in anything small and delicate

PACKING CUBES:

Packing cubes are nothing new, but not all packing cubes are created equally. If you’re serious about using these, I highly recommend getting COMPRESSION packing cubes. They

allow you to stuff more items into the cubes themselves and are a great way to get the most out of your luggage space. Regular packing cubes – move aside. Check them out here.



Compress those undies!

THE CAMERA:

I could wax poetic for ages about what you should bring for a travel camera, but being a video and photography nut and having owned dozens of different cameras and lenses I would have to say the ultimate travel camera (other than your cell phone) is the Panasonic GH4. For many reasons, its weatherproof and tough, it creates incredible 4K video, you can just bring 1 wide angle lens (the 7-14mm) and you'll be able to take incredible video and photo no matter where you go. Now I usually bring 2-3 cameras on each trip each for a different purpose, but heck, you can't go wrong with the Panasonic GH4 – it would be my 1 go to camera if I had to pare down to the basics. Click here for the camera and here for the lens.



The man, the myth, the uhh… camera

If you're not ready to splurge on a full camera, I highly recommend buying lenses for your existing camera. These do wonders for any iPhone or Android, giving you the ability to take wide angle or telephoto shots with your camera phone. Just remember, take photos SIDEWAYS!! No one shoots vertical anymore. Especially in video. There's quite a few models but I have always liked the Aukey.



It’ll do wonders for your smartphone

THE DRONE:

I often bring my drone with me for some incredible sky-selfie shots, cool video of the surrounding areas, and pretty spectacular footage that you really just can’t get anywhere but with a drone. Unfortunately up until recently drones have been large and a pain to carry. This changed recently with the DJI Mavic Pro. It’s a tiny drone that folds up to the size of a water bottle, yet has the capability to take extremely high quality 4K footage that would look good in any

feature. I can’t state enough how this tool will make your vacations way more fun as you create memorable footage and photographs from the sky and get a completely new vantage point of the world around you.



Its a bird, its a plane, NOPE – it’s a Mavic Pro!

HEADPHONES:

Whenever i’m waiting at the airport gate, sitting on the plane, riding to and from the airport, or basically am in transit, i’m wearing these. They’re not cheap, but they’re incredibly comfortable, block out almost all external noise, and have incredible sound quality. I’m not even a Bose fan, but I have to say that my Bose Noise Cancelling In-Ear headphones are my favorite accessory for travel. They’re a MUST HAVE. I also used to have the over-the-ear model but they took too much room in my luggage, and frankly weren’t as comfortable as the in-ear model. Click here to get them.



Bose Noise Cancelling In Ear Headphones. A must have!

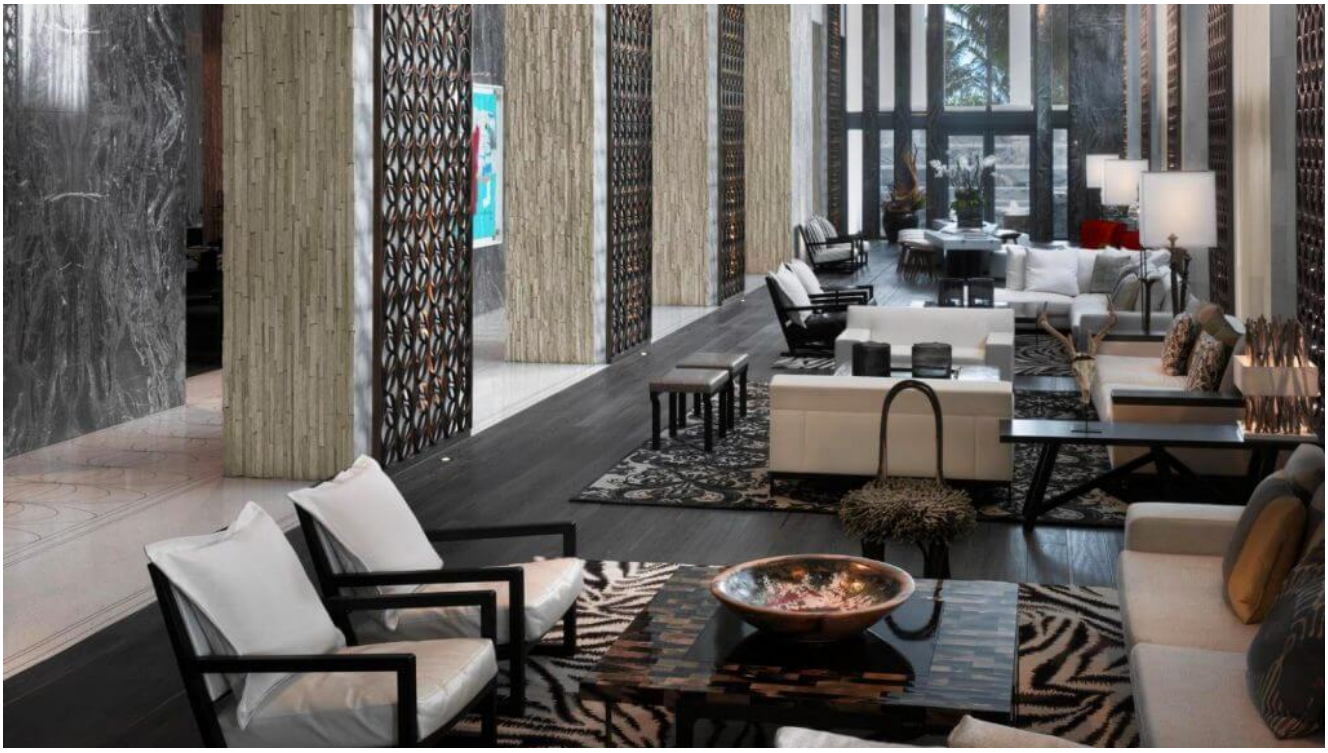
REVIEW: The W Hotel in South

Beach

So I visit South Beach quite often, and most of that is driven by the fact that there are so many cool hotels to explore and stay at. Yes, the beaches are nice, the scenery isn't too shabby, and the food and entertainment scene really are about as close to Ibiza as you can get without hopping over the Atlantic, but I really have to give it up to the choices of hotels in Miami Beach.

The W Hotel there is no exception, and it is probably one of my favorite W's that i've visited. There's two reasons for that – the room selections, and the incredible pool area.

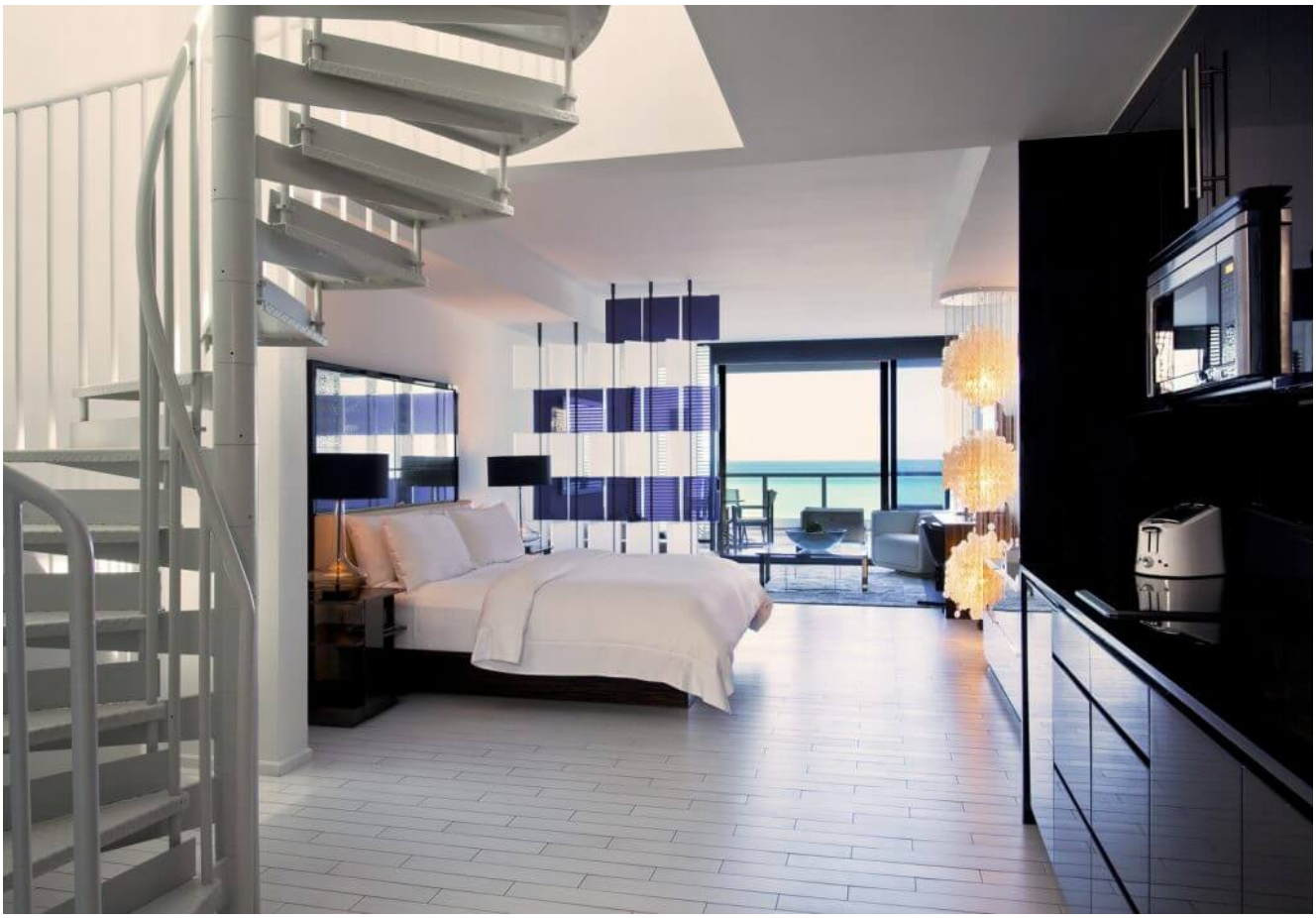
Lets start with the lobby – it's a marble affair with plenty of seating areas and one of my favorite restaurants – Mr. Chow's. The ceilings are magnificently tall, and there is a definite air of modern opulence that you feel the minute you walk in.



That's the lobby, it's pretty

However, lets get to the bread and butter – the rooms. It's

no secret that i’m usually a bigger fan of hotels that have a uniqueness to them. This can often be tough to find in chain hotels, but the W manages to do this quite often even while still instilling a “W-ness” to a property. At the South Beach location, you get a choice of over a dozen types of room categories. The result is some really cool floorplans including ones with staircases that lead to rooftop jacuzzis, and other rooms with their own gardens or multiple balconies. They do all possess the same styling, however, which is not a bad thing because the white wood and gloss black furniture gives a futuristic look to the hotel keeping in line with the Asian-mod-deco look of the entire place.



Check out that spiral staircase which leads to…



…a sweet rooftop jacuzzi

The other favorite feature of mine is the enormous pool and the surrounding pool deck area. There seems to always never be enough space to lounge around at most South Beach hotels, but this has never been a problem for me at the W. If you want a cabana, they've got plenty of those, and if you just want a chair, well they have plenty of those as well. The lush greenery, the dining tables spread amongst the palm tree forest, these are all calming and relaxing features that make this one of my favorite pools in South Beach.

PROS:

- Pool area is one of the best in a South Beach hotel
- Rooms are spectacular, great views and incredible floorplans

CONS:

- Often incredibly expensive, you do get what you pay for,

however

SECRETS:

- If you are an SPG member, the combo points + cash works really well at this property for securing great deals

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Check out my other South Beach articles to read more about this! I've covered it extensively in my review of the SOHO House: South Beach

---

REVIEW: The Modern Honolulu

This hotel is pretty unique in its own right, because if I were to drop you off here and you took a quick look around you'd probably think you were in Ibiza, or Miami, or somewhere else a bit hipper or party-oriented.

The Modern Honolulu is truly one of the only contemporary art-deco-esque hotels you can stay at in Hawaii, not just Honolulu, but at any of the islands (save maybe the Andaz Maui).

The hotel is a small one by Hawaii standards, with "only" 352 rooms. They're all beautifully decorated, however, with white contemporary furniture and artwork reminiscent of of 90's Miami. The common spaces, however, are what really make this hotel one of my favorites in Oahu.



Check out that awesome lobby. That bookcase opens and closes too!

The lobby hosts some really cool cocktail parties during the weekends, and the pool is a teak affair which makes you feel like you’re lounging on a very nice yacht.



Check out that pool deck. Got Teak?

Many people make the mistake of booking a hotel on Oahu on the beach, but that’s not why you visit Oahu. Sure, there are beautiful stretches on the North shore, near Hanauma bay, and even in Waikiki, but you visit Oahu because you want to take in the culture of Hawaiian living, the incredible cuisine, and because you want to mingle and socialize in paradise. Leave the beach time to places like Maui, the Big Island, and Kauai.



If you read the name of the hotel you'd know what you were to find in the rooms

Did I mention that the service is also impeccable at this property? The staff was willing to help in any way possible at all times, and they did an incredible job making sure my party and I were well taken care of.

PROS:

- The only option on the island for a modern hotel
- Amazing pool area with teak wood decks and a great view
- The service is top notch

CONS:

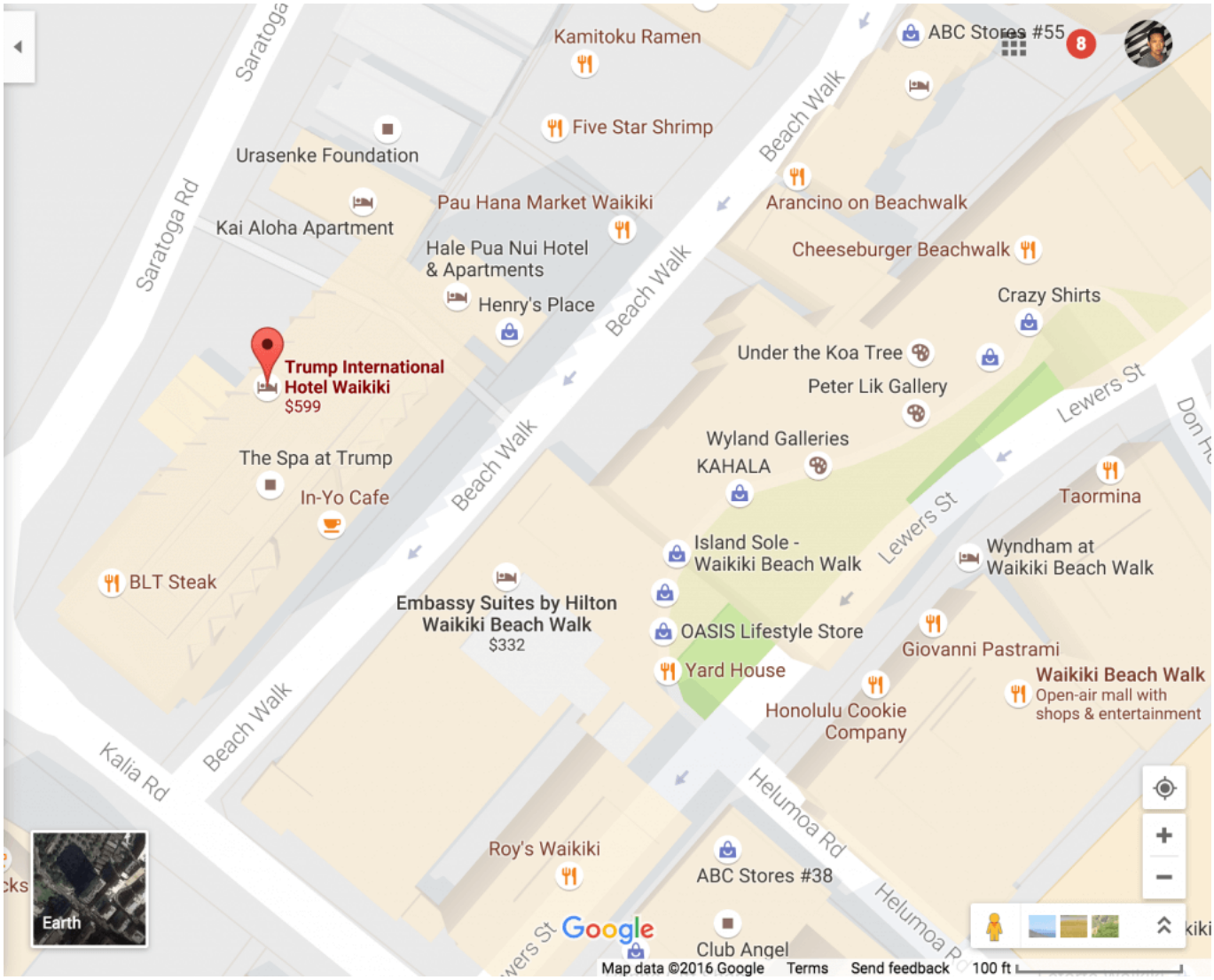
- There's no beachfront, but I don't consider this that necessary at a hotel on Oahu

SECRETS:

- The pool chairs get taken up pretty quickly, so I highly recommend calling ahead to reserve them, this is rare that a hotel lets you do that.

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Food trucks in Oahu are huge, especially the well known shrimp truck – Giovannis. However, you can avoid the long drive and the line if you go to this little known food truck area in Waikiki right behind the Trump hotel. See the map below where it says Five Star Shrimp (north middle side of the map)



REVIEW: The New York EDITION is almost a Ritz-Carlton

If you've been following Marriott Group recently you'll see that there's a new chain of hotels that they have been adding to their roster, named the EDITION hotels. These have been marketed alongside the Ritz-Carlton group, and can be booked via Ritz-Carlton's app and website. They are, from what I can tell, the younger more fashionable outgoing sibling of the family.

One of my first stays at the EDITION happened in New York recently. Located at 24th and Madison, on the East side of Madison Square Park, the New York EDITION Is smack dab in lower midtown just above East Village. The location is pretty nice if you are looking to spend some time in downtown, and some time in uptown but want to avoid the mess that is known as Times Square. The hotel itself is a beautiful affair. When you walk in you're greeted by a sunken lobby built in marble hurricane candles (at night), and uplighting built into the ground. The feeling is sultry, sexy, and modern. Modern couches are draped in faux fur, and the far end of the lobby is adorned by a fireplace, giving the whole lobby a warmth and homey feel.



The beckoning lobby, fireplace, fur, and all

The elevators are also pretty unique, in that they’re electronic. You enter your floor number and an elevator bank

is assigned to you, some might say it feels a bit corporate, but I think it makes waiting for an elevator something of the past in this place. The rooms are on the smaller side, and extremely modern. I appreciated the decor but felt that the rooms were a little cold. You would think with the wood floors, the luxurious textures, and the small space they would feel cozier, but I think the use of all the off-palette white and tan resulted in a colder feel.



The rooms have a tan uniform color palette to them. This opens up the small spaces a lot

The second floor lobby is really a different affair in itself. It oddly looks nothing like the rest of the hotel, but hosts some incredible mixologists and a cool restaurant which I never got a chance to dine in. The bar itself is called the “Gold Bar”, which made no sense other than through the indication of portraits with gold frames. The common room

space next to it with the pool table was also an odd choice for this hotel, but only because in my mind the hotel was supposed to be an offshoot of a Ritz-Carlton.



Yes, it’s called the Gold Bar

Overall, my experience was almost exactly what I expected it to be. It was as if I was staying at a Ritz that wasn’t quite a Ritz, but could’ve been one with a little more grandeur and magnificence. All said, I’d love to check out more of these in the future!

PROS:

- Marriott Group rewards and benefits!
- Price wise, it’s a little more affordable than a comparable Ritz-Carlton in the area
- Very chic and modern, it felt like a luxe nouveau-riche hotel in a city that is constantly reinventing itself

CONS:

- The rooms felt a bit cold and austere to me

SECRETS:

- It is very easy to miss the bar which is on the third floor, and I highly recommend visiting it for a drink and a snack

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- This one is kind of a no-brainer. You have to visit the extremely close Shake Shack, which is in Madison Square Park right next to hotel less than a stone's throw away. This is a New York burger staple and one of my favorites!

REVIEW: Le Meridien New Orleans – The Newest Luxury Hotel in the City

So i've been to New Orleans a few times, and have had the pleasure of staying at quite a few hotels there. This one, is so far, one of my favorite. Let me tell you why. It's NEW! This used to be the W New Orleans (not to be confused with the W New Orleans in the French Quarter). The last time I visited this property it was back in 2014 and it was definitely showing its age. The renovation on the property and rebranding of it as a Le Meridien happened within the last year in 2016, and when I say renovation, I don't mean a fresh coat of paint and some lipstick. SPG pulled out all the stops on this one, gutting the building and changing the entire

layout of the common spaces.

The result, as you can see below… Is stunning!



This is the front desk. It’s nice.

You are greeted by stunning textures, surfaces, the combination of marble, antique wood, and mirrored surfaces is something that is a nice juxtaposition from the city of New Orleans, which itself has lots of character, but is older and antique in character.

The lobby is a great place to have a coffee, a drink (which you can walk around with in NOLA – just like in Vegas), and relax.

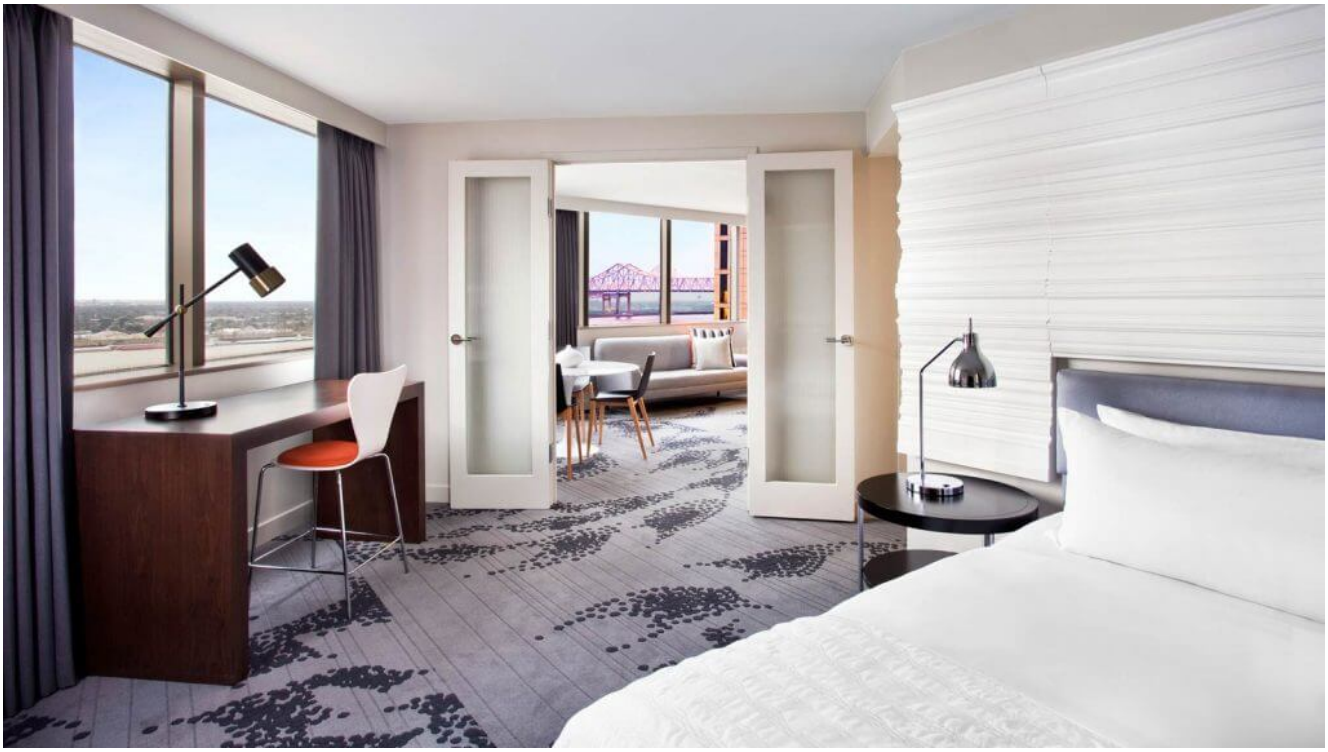


Yup. That’s an awesome lobby area too. Cozy, visually interesting, and thoroughly relaxing

The rooms themselves have gone through some pretty significant renovations. They have beautiful bathrooms in particular, with minimalist countertops and low edge sinks – my personal favorite. The building itself is pretty tall and centralized, next to the Harrah’s casino and only about 5 blocks away from Bourbon street.



The very sexy renovated bathrooms – if you can’t tell i’m a big fan



This is one of the smaller suites, notice the views, the textured walls, and the bright lighting

To top it off, the service is top notch, it is definitely a hotel where you get a great value, and the gym up top really takes the cake, with 360 degree views (if you actually decide to workout while you're in NOLA).

PROS:

- Newly renovated, it's a great place to be! (2016)
- It's got a great lobby to hangout in, with indoor and outdoor spaces
- Prices are highly competitive

CONS:

- Some would say location, since it's not directly on Bourbon Street, but this can be a personal preference

SECRETS:

- The hotel has high capacity, so more likely than not you

can ask for a late check-in and then ask for a higher floor with a great view

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Everyone knows that New Orleans is the city of food and soul, and I highly recommend having breakfast over at the Ruby Slipper Cafe
- Of course there's the requisite Cafe Du Monde
- And lastly, Commander's Palace – with old school group waiters/waitresses and good ol' southern fare
- But, the one thing you NEVER want to miss, is a ride on an airboat to go into the swamps and see some Alligators. They're harder to spot in the winter time as the water gets cold, but if you choose a tour company that tends to take their airboats out on the side of the Gulf you're likely to see more of them. Airboat Adventures is one of those tour companies I highly recommend! (I've had bad luck with others)

REVIEW: The London Hotel in New York Is Just Plain Awesome

Lets just start by saying that there are a LOT of hotels in New York, just as there are a lot of people/restaurants/cars/pick your item here. I've managed to stay in approximately a dozen different ones but always seem to come back to the same handful. The London in New York is in that handful.



The London’s signature entrance, you go to enough of these around the world and you know what you’re gonna walk into

What makes this hotel unique amongst the sea of possibilities really is the simplicity of it. You know you’ll get modern accommodations, great service, and no frills. Some might call it austere, but I call it New York. Most of the times you choose a hotel in NY based on where in town you want to be. This one is great if you’re spending time uptown or midtown. Its prime location near MOMA, Times Square, and Central Park make it a holiday time favorite of mine.



The lobby is classic black and white, timeless and elegant

What I love the most about the London, though, are the views. It’s one of the tallest buildings in midtown, and with that comes some pretty epic straightline views all across the city. Make sure to ask for the highest room possible when staying here. The rooms themselves have these beautiful aged wood floors, and simple modern furnishings. I wouldn’t call this the plushiest hotel, but the simplicity of it sits well in my book.



The views. That’s the best part of this hotel by far

PROS:

- The Epic views
- The location puts you in midtown without putting you next to Times Square
- Did I mention the views?

CONS:

- Not a lot of frills at this hotel, what you see is what you get

SECRETS:

- The best views IMO are of Central Park so look for that north facing room if you can!

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- There’s too many things to mention in NYC, but one of my first stops is always one of the MomoFuku chain of restaurants.

REVIEW: The Island Hotel in Newport Beach – The Best spot for 4th of July Fireworks in Orange County

So for those who haven't been to the Orange County coast of California, you may not be familiar with the swathe of land that covers approximately 60 miles from Northern tip to Southern tip. This swathe of land also happens to have an incredible variety of hotels from resorts such as the Rancho Valencia in the south, to the Island Hotel in Newport Beach all the way on the North. My preference has always been for the resorts on the Southern end of Orange County (Including the Ritz-Carlton in Laguna, the Monarch Beach in Laguna, or the Montage also in Laguna).

However, sometimes you need to be in a particular place and don't feel like driving an hour just to get to somewhere you need to be. If it so happens that you need to be spending time in Huntington Beach or Newport Beach – then your best option, in my opinion, is the Island Hotel.

This property isn't particularly new, nor is it particularly flashy, but what it does have it does very well. The tone of the property is muted and beach-reminiscent. Pastel tones carry the property and make it feel light and airy and even though it is still a few miles from the Ocean one would think they were right on the beach when entering the lobby.



Check out those pastel beachy tones

The rooms themselves have great expansive views, as the building is exceptionally tall and although they’re not as updated as I would personally prefer, they still have a well-built luxurious quality to them and the mattresses are comfortable, the entertainment systems are updated, and bathrooms are kept exquisitely clean.



The rooms aren’t the most modern, but they’re comfy and luxurious still

My favorite features at the hotel are the poolside fireplace – a great place to have a glass of wine and unwind for the night, and the rooftop lounge – replete with awesome views all the way to Los Angeles and of course towards the Ocean.



This is where you want to spend your time when you're here



Oh yea, spend some time up top as well. It's on the 12th floor

PROS:

- This hotel has excellent service, and even though its not the newest property it has been very well maintained
- The fireplace and rooftop lounge really are excellent features that you don't find in many hotels in the area
- They have an incredible room service menu and it's 24/7

CONS:

- The hotel could use a slight update, things are wearing well but it wouldn't hurt to refresh the colors or furniture to something more modern

SECRETS:

- I highly recommend checking last minute rates at this hotel, they are often pretty cheap. Also, you can often get a good room upgrade once you get to the hotel, the suites are pretty great bargains and are very nice – a step up from the standard accommodations and worth the extra $$.

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Check out Balboa Island – rent a Duffy and cruise the harbor, eat frozen dipped bananas at the original Banana Stand
- This is the best place to spend 4th of July, but book early, as the Island Hotel is the BEST place to watch fireworks down in Orange County (the height of the building really lends itself to this)

REVIEW: The Andaz West Hollywood – Your spot on the Sunset Strip

I've stayed at nearly every hotel on Sunset strip, and most of them are pretty unique in their own way. The Andaz West Hollywood stands out for being the most modern and updated of the properties on the strip, and whenever someone asks for a recommendation for something modern this is where I send them.



The view from Sunset Strip (Your ad on side of building may vary)

The lobby is clean and small, with an open check-in concept that Andaz is known for. This means that there is no large check-in front-desk with employees standing at the ready. Instead, there's a few laptops on some unassuming desks located next to refreshments and couches. The feel that this is supposed to connote is one of casualness and modernity. It does the job.



The minimalist lobby, notice the check-in "stands" in the distance

The hotel itself is a smaller property, but that's because the Andaz believes that this property is all about the location around it and they don't expect you to spend a lot of time

within the hotel. There is a restaurant on the side of the lobby, which is beautiful, but rather expensive. It's not a bad place to grab a bite, but I would recommend checking out everything else that Los Angeles has to offer – it IS the foodie capital of the US.

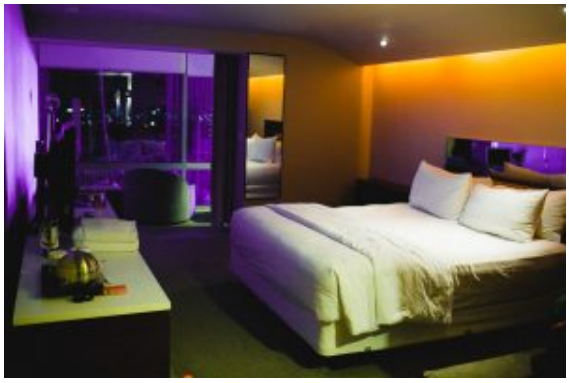


The lobby restaurant is gorgeous AND expensive

The reason you come to this hotel, though is because the service is good, the rooms have beautiful floor to ceiling windows with breathtaking views, and there's a very cool rooftop pool with expansive views of the surrounding Hollywood Hills, Downtown LA, and sometimes when there's not so much smog – views all the way to the Pacific.



The rooftop pool where you'll want to spend a lot of time



Floor to ceiling windows unveil the beautiful view from the high-up Andaz which is already on the high-up Sunset strip area

PROS:

- One of the only modern hotels on Sunset strip
- The views from the rooms and rooftop pool are pretty fantastic
- Walking distance to everything in the area (and there's a lot)

CONS:

- There's not a lot to the hotel itself, it's a small property

SECRETS:

- This is a place you want to stay at during the summer months or when it's hot in LA, because otherwise the rooftop pool and lounge is otherwise pretty useless

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- This is Sunset strip, which means you are within walking distance to some pretty legendary bars and restaurants. Check out the lounge at Chateau Marmont, it's cheeky and hip and always "in".
- Walk over to the Rock & Reilly's bar if you want a cool

place to have a drink and watch a game. This bar also has an incredible selection of whiskeys (Go figure – it’s an Irish pub)

REVIEW: A little slice of heaven – Andaz Papagayo

Staying at this hotel was one of the best experiences I have had in a while. I know, it may sound like hyperbole, but the Andaz really knows how to do things right when it comes to their resort in Costa Rica. I was lucky enough to stay here during low season which turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the resort was exceptionally placid and relaxing with only a few people around.



This is the view that you'll be seeing every morning as you have an amazing breakfast

One of the first things you'll notice when you enter the Papagayo Peninsula and then the Andaz is just how secluded it all is. Costa Rica, in general is already a getaway, but at the Andaz the buildings just meld into their environment making guests feel at one with the nature around them. When I was choosing whether to stay at this hotel, or the Four-Seasons down the street I decided upon the Andaz due to its newer build and more zen-like atmosphere. I did get a chance to visit the Four Seasons one night and my decision, in retrospect, was correct.

There's a lot of things to love about this property, its direct beach access and water-based activities, including jet-skiing, snorkeling, paddle-boarding, and snorkeling, to its

beautiful set of infinity edge pools that span across the entire width of the resort. What I love most about the hotel, however, was the fact that the management has spent a lot of time training the staff to make you feel as if you were an old friend, and valued guest. This is especially important when you're at a secluded resort and spend a significant amount of time on the property.



Modern, relaxing, and awesomely integrated into the mountainside – Big ups to the Andaz hotel chain for this one!

The staff went out of their way at each moment to know the names of the guests, to know my personal preferences in drinks and food, and to impart some personal tidbits about Costa Rica – once they knew it was my first time there. The concierge was extremely helpful in planning activities, and one of my favorite things about the resort was the mixology bar and the mixologists on staff. The complexity and innovation that went into some of the beverages that the staff made for me was

almost incomprehensible (yes, it's that good).



They take mixology to a whole 'nother level here. I really can't begin to describe how amazing the drinks are at the Andad Papagayo

The spirit of "Pura Vida" (Google it, because that's a whole 'nother article in itself), is especially prevalent here, and I cannot hesitate to recommend this as a must-see and must-stay at property if you're ever in Costa Rica.

PROS:

- Beautiful modern property with amazing rooms/bathrooms, it's a lot newer than the more expensive Four Seasons next door, and a lovely property
- The service is bar-none. I would put it at the same level as a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, which is saying a lot
- All the awesome activities were put together with lots

of planning and thought, the mixology classes, coffee classes, forest hikes – you won't feel at a loss when finding things to do here
- The food is incredible, lots of amazing cuisine for vegetarians to meat lovers alike

CONS:

- Some of the restaurants were closed on certain days due to it being low season, but that ended up not being an issue as there were shuttles to the Four Seasons next door when added variety was needed

SECRETS:

- Check out the adults-only pool next to the spa, it's got a nice secluded atmosphere to it
- The ceviche at Ostra is incredible and a must have

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- I highly recommend the ATV tours through the company that Andaz's concierge uses, it's a fun adventure through rivers and rainforest that shows some of the beauty of Costa Rica (hidden waterfalls, local towns, etc)

REVIEW: The W Scottsdale Hotel

So I already wrote about one of my favorite hotel's in Scottsdale (you can read about it here), but the W is probably my second favorite and depending on my mood it sometimes comes in #1 as well (Variety and all that jazz).



Probably the #1 reason why I like the W in Scottsdale – its pool – and let's not forget, it's always hot in Scottsdale so this is of prime importance.

So you're probably wondering, how does it compare to the Valley Ho? Well, they're two different spots. The Valley Ho is very much a boutique hotel with all the associated qualities, there's less of a corporate feel, some cheeky elements and details, and a property that feels much more tailored to an off-the-beaten-path experience. The W, however, does much of this in the traditional W manner – which is to say, corporate but still with some passion and uniqueness.

The rooms are probably the second best part of this hotel (after its very cool elevated rooftop pool area). They are clean, modern, large, and have great views of the surrounding area.



Clean, warm, modern, and luxurious. It matches the desert vibe quite well

Lastly, I can’t help but mention that the lobby and public spaces are spot on (albeit a bit small) for a W. The fireplace and little cubby areas throughout the lobby make for great spots to hideaway and have a drink and some great conversation – just what hotel lobbies were meant for.

PROS:

- Great pool, like really great – lots of space, lots of chairs, and lots of fun
- Even though it’s not the newest hotel it’s still got a modernity and class to it

CONS:

- Not necessarily a con, but across town there exists a pretty good hotel called the Valley Ho, you’ll just have to pick your poison

SECRETS:

- You have to check out the SPG points + cash options on this one, because it’s an expensive hotel in general and you can save a lot of money with the cash + points booking options

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Take a golf cart ride with one of the local carts that roams around downtown Scottsdale, and have them give you a tour. It’s a cool little town with some pretty unique dive bars, restaurants, and art galleries and the best way to get a lay of the land is to have a golf-cart tour!