# REVIEW: Four Seasons Buenos Aires



It’s not the Ritz.  But it might still be just as good.

On a recent trip to four South American countries – Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Colombia, I tried to stay at as many Ritz Carlton’s as I could find.  Turns out, I couldn’t find many.

Being as how this was my first time to Buenos Aires, I started off on Tripadvisor and looked up the best 4 and 5 star hotels.  It all came down to three choices if you were looking for the top-ranked luxury hotels in the city – The Alvear, the Park Hyatt, and the Four Seasons.  I ended up choosing the Four Seasons because of its centralized location, the quality of the restaurants that it contained, and because of the relatively competitive rate.  What I have never liked about

the Four Seasons, however, is their lack of a competitive loyalty program.  It's not a part of a large chain like the Ritz is (Marriott), or something like the St. Regis (SPG).  That meant that the $1800 or so I would spend over a few nights would only go onto my Chase Sapphire as double hotel points, but I would not receive any preferential treatment as I would have with my Marriott or SPG status'.

The hotel is awfully pretty at night, and as is the case with Buenos Aires there was always something going on until the wee hours of the night.  I returned from a discoteque one morning at 3AM just to see that the lobby bar was still relatively crowded and full of people dancing and drinking.



As for the rooms and service it was the small things that counted and made me smile.  The bathrooms contained L'Occitane products, the building, although retro in character, had upgrades throughout.  The gym had a barbell which is very rare in many places (I'm often relegated to weight machines which I hate), and the staff went above and

beyond during m stay.  For example, the spa was supposed to be open when I had come back from a day of sightseeing, but 25 minutes before the steam room/spa amenities were supposed to be closed the doors were already locked.  A quick visit to the front desk and security came to open up the entire spa – which ended up being a private spa experience.  In another instance, I needed extra travel power adapters.  I asked for a few and the front desk sent up a total of five!

With luxury hotels so close in 90% of the experience, it is always the extra few small touches that set aside one property from another.  It was nice to see that the Four Seasons took those extra steps to make their guests' experience stellar and above and beyond!




You can’t have proper tea/coffee time if you don’t have trays for those tea cups!




Incredible Alfajores that the hotel made in-house.  These are a national snack in Argentina, they’re a flaky pastry-like cookie with dulce de leche in the middle.

**PROS:**

- Check out the gym – not everyone works out when they're traveling but this one is especially nice and has a great view out the rooftop of the hotel
- The concierge's really know what they're talking about. Came to Buenos with a list of things I already wanted to do based off of other friend's suggestions and tripadvisor but the concierge's had some really good insight and other similar places to suggest based on my list coming in

**CONS:**

- There was a lapse in service when we tried to get reservations at either the lounge or the restaurant last minute. The concierge and front desk were not able to accommodate our small (2-person) party even though we were guests of the hotel – you don't see this often at a 4-5 star property

**SECRETS:**

- Argentina is known for its meat, and the steakhouse in the hotel lobby is impressive. Be sure to have a meal in Elena which is downstairs – but make reservations if it's a Thursday-Saturday because they do get booked.

**OTHER STUFF TO DO IN BUENOS AIRES:**

- Food is superb here but by far my favorite thing in Buenos Aires (After going to about 10 different restaurants) were the empanadas at 1810. Try the Humitas, a corn ground and wrapped in husks then stuffed. It's a contentious issue when you ask the locals who makes the best Empanadas but more times than not 1810 is at the top of most of the local's lists.
- Check out Uruguay! Take the BuqueBus Express which for about $150 R/T gets you to Uruguay and back for a day

trip in Colonia del Sacramento. It's a beautiful UNESCO heritage site, and eat at the quaintly beautiful Charco Hotel. It's right on the water and has an amazing selection of wines and beautifully executed flavorful dishes.

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# REVIEW: A peek into the SOHO Beach House in Miami

There's nothing quite as relaxing as tropical climates where a constant breeze keeps the sweat from building up and you can find some shade and a view. The SOHO Beach House in Miami is one of those spots.

From the minute you enter the building (located right next to the legendary Fontainebleau) there is a feeling of secrecy. After all, this is home of the SOHO club, known internationally as hidden lounges reserved for celebrities and well-heeled folk. You walk into the hidden check-in area where reception whisks you into an even more hidden (and velvet lined) elevator.

The best part of this hotel is the decor. It's eclectic and feels like something that someone might put together for their own house. It's a mishmash of items with a beachside bungalow feel. I wouldn't have thought that leather chairs with reclaimed wood and outdoor cushions would feel at home inside a hotel room but for the SOHO Beach House it all works well.



The best part of this hotel though is the property itself, namely the upstairs spaces, and all the little nooks and crannies of the SOHO Beach House members-only property.  As a matter of fact, if you're not a member of SOHO House this is the only way you're going to get into this place short of being invited by a friend.

There's a movie screening room, an upstairs hot-tub, a

smallish pool, and dedicated beach access with chaises for hotel guests.  The anchor restaurant in the hotel is of course Cecconis, similar to the SOHO House in Los Angeles and definitely worth a visit.  Everything about the decor of this property is charming, upscale, and incredibly detailed.  It's got a whimsical touch to it and I definitely think it's a great alternative to your standard faire in South Beach (as there's so many options there).



Check out the wood tub, the exposed brass piping, and the wicker baskets for towels and bath accessories

**PROS:**

- Impeccably decorated with a great beach vibe.  This place really stands out and has character and charm
- Incredible rooftop deck which is great for a romantic retreat or just relaxing with your favorite beverage.

- Each room is different from the others which gives it a bed and breakfast type of experience (if that’s your type of thing)

**CONS:**

- The service was not very good.  It took multiple calls to get some extra soap and towels, and unlike many small boutique luxury properties, the staff doesn’t go out of their way to know your name or particular preferences.
- The pool area is relatively small and covered by the trees and high walls of the building on either side, making it hard to catch some rays or to find an available lounge chaise.

**SECRETS:**

- Ask the front desk to send a bartender to your room for happy hour. There’s a full bar set including fresh fruits, bitters, and assorted mixers on the bar cart in the room and bartenders on staff will come to your room to make drinks for you as you get ready for your night out on the town!

**OTHER STUFF IN TOWN:**

- With the caveat that i’ve been to Miami well over 30+ times one thing that always stands out to me (And still my favorite hotel in Miami) is the Setai.  It’s the pinnacle of luxury in South beach and has been since it’s inception.  I really enjoy a speciality martini they make there called the “Chili Passion Martini”.  Enjoy it in the lobby of the Setai which is decorated with manta ray skin-lined walls and teak wood imported from Indonesia.  I always make a stop here when i’m in Miami.

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# REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton San Francisco




So this is what one sees when they pull up to the Ritz in San Fran.  It’s actually kind of hard to get this view, I’m pretty sure they had to get a crane for this shot, because the hotel

is set on the very top crest of a hill (as it seems almost everything in San Fran is).



The first impression you get is that you've pulled into a D.C. monument, or you're about to enter a really well built bank vault. The lobby is small, and the hotel itself lends itself to an older feel. It is certainly a building that's been around for a while but with significant renovation. One of the most impressive things about the lobby is the champagne room which is adjacent to the check-in desk. It's also known as the Jean-Charles Boisset tasting room. For a mere $50-$100 a head you can taste some really complex fermented grapes. I chose to keep my Benjamin (and half a benjamin), but did peek in just to admire the gravitas of the environment in the JCB Room.



This Ritz reminds me a lot of the Montreal Ritz in many ways, because of it's old bones and renovated skin. The ideal location at Nob Hill makes it central to pretty much everywhere in San Fran and the service was impeccable. Nothing out of the ordinary at this Ritz.

**PROS:**

- It's got tons of character, and a very centralized location
- For the price it's not too bad. San Fran is known for incredibly expensive real estate (at the time of this writing the highest in the country), and the rack rates for the Ritz here are actually – dare I say – affordable for what you get
- It's a smaller Ritz so the service is very intimate and personalized

**CONS:**

- The rooms are a bit small, but I guess you can't

complain because space is always at a premium in SF.
- Remember to ask for a room that is further away from the elevator, it’s old and quite squeaky
- Plan on paying an arm and a leg to park your car there

**SECRETS:**

- Get to the lounge early enough and you’ll score some happy hour drinks. The bartender’s tip is that they pour them extra stiff at the beginning of the hour to get the crowd going. Now THAT’S what a happy hour is all about!

**OTHER STUFF IN SAN FRANCISCO:**

- Lets get this straight. It’s called “Frisco”. I’ve had this argument numerous times, but have since conceded to the naysayers, even though the graphic evidence below supports my personal conviction.




- You HAVE to have yourself one of the original Irish Coffees at the Buena Vista located in the Marina District.  It even so happens that if you get one WITHOUT the "Irish" portion it still tastes quite damn delicious



- Do yourself a favor and get some exercise.  Rent a bike in the Marina, go across to Sausalito via the bridge, have some damn good seafood, and Uber or ferry back.  Check out this link for more detailed info.  Gratuitous shot I took on my way over the bridge below:



# REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton Montreal

So Canada is the US's northern brother/sister – and most recently, after a poll was released signifying Donald Trump's lead in the presidency, one of the top Google search terms that came up was "Move to Canada" (Check it out here). I, for one, have always enjoyed skiing and snowboarding on the Western side of our northern brethren around Vancouver and in the powder-blessed mountains of Whistler, but this was my first foray into Quebec, the semi-French part of Canada. Now I say semi-french because as I soon found out, people actually speak a little bit of both, or either, or sometimes neither (that's another story).

Of course upon finding out that there was a Ritz in Montreal I decided to make a reservation. Now let me say, i've been to about ten Ritz Carlton's thus far and this one was by and far my favorite. But you'll have to excuse my french when I tell you why – it was the only one that had built in electronic bidet's and heated floors in the bathrooms.



Now you're probably looking at this thing like "Why is there Hal 9000 in my personal commode space?"  Let me tell you, if you've never traveled to Japan or had the personal luxury of having your private spaces washed and dried by an electronic tool of personal hygiene then you're missing out on life!

All jokes aside, this Ritz Carlton wholly embodies the spirit of the Ritz.  I arrived at the hotel pretty late after deciding my AirBnB I had booked was a bit too creepy for my taste (lost the money on that one – but totally happy to stay at the Ritz instead), and the staff at the Montreal Ritz was happy to make space for me (they have rooms blocked off for Marriott members if you ask nicely enough, and if you tell them you don't plan on keeping the room past when they need it – because then you're causing issues for other guests that are checking in later).



The lobby is a work of art, with a beautifully painted ceiling mural with backlighting and a Dom Perignon Bar that elicits the question “Why shouldn’t I have some coffee, a glass of champagne, and caviar at 10AM?”




Furthermore, the rooms are decorated with that classic Ritz old-world style along with modern amenities (see above bidet reference). The rooms weren't particularly large, but they were cozy, and in the 30 degree (cold by my Southern California standards) Montreal winter I thought it was just the perfect spot to spend a few nights. Extra kudos to the electronically controlled shades and the infinitely adjustable dimmers in the room – I mean, who wants to wake up to blinding incandescent lighting when all you want is to go have a midnight tinkle.



**PROS:**

- Absolutely love the decor in the room.  The wood flooring, the high quality finishes, the elegantly classic touches but with modernity imbued throughout.
- The champagne room and foyer area was lovely
- The brunch on Sunday's is incredible, they have quite a spread and you can eat in the indoor/outdoor atrium area which is nice on a dark winter day
- The concierge service with umbrellas at the ready and personal greetings every time you walked to the elevator – this isn't the case in every single Ritz, but at the smaller ones it's much appreciated
- I have to say, this might be my favorite Ritz to date!

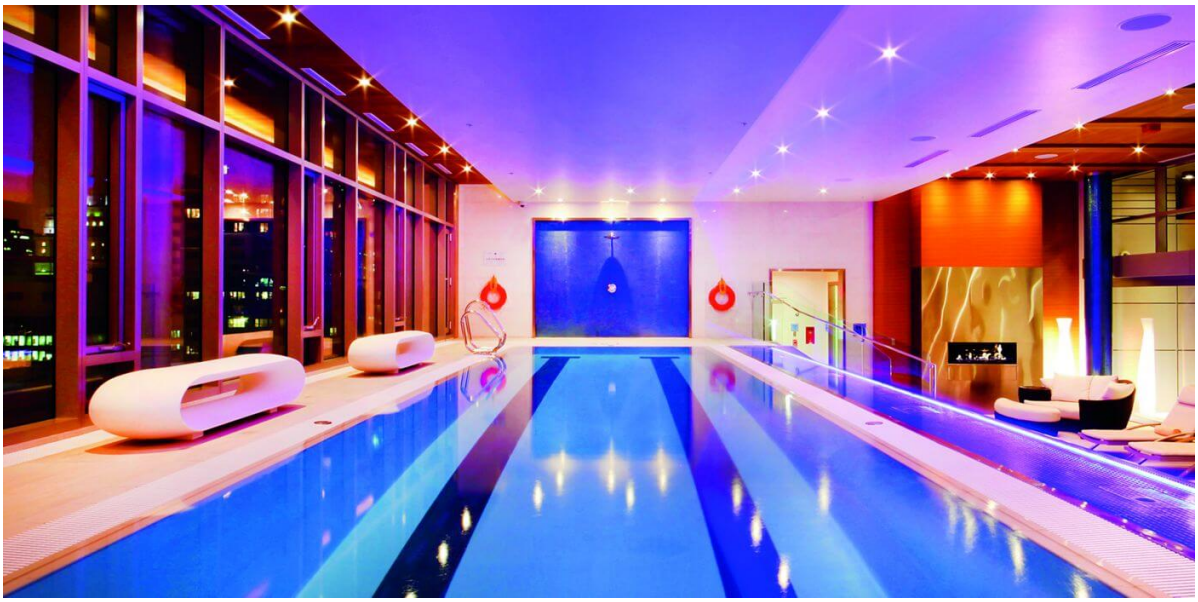
**CONS:**

- The price is pretty high for the Ritz, and the area is a bit further than I would've liked from the shopping district, but it is centrally located for the most part

- The rooms are small but they are appointed lavishly
- Dining options other than the brunch area are limited. The Champagne bar is fun but the dining there is subpar

**SECRETS:**

- Spend some time upstairs in the upper lobby, there's some sitting areas that are sort of hidden from view but overlook the downstairs foyer. Bring a drink upstairs and enjoy the view from there
- There's also a rooftop pool and they sometimes open up the floor to ceiling glass walls which allows for lounging on the rooftop – you can view all the rooftop gardens around Montreal from here



**OTHER STUFF IN MONTREAL:**

- Definitely visit the local St Viateur Bagel Shop, it's a 24/7 bagel shop where you can saunter in at 4AM slightly inebriated (like I was), and request bagels be tossed to you in a bag. Yes, I didn't make that up. Grab a tub of their special cream cheese and slather away!




- Just to get the vista, and to work off all those carbs, walk up Mount Royal – it’s an easy 20 minute hike up a few steps with a rewarding view



The rewarding view from the top of Mount Royal



The random forest you have to hike through to get to the top of Mount Royal

- Lastly, I highly recommend the Montreal Craft Beer Tour. Do the walking tour, enjoy the exquisite microbreweries popping up all across Canada (Yup, they love their American microbrews up there), and enjoy all that poutine + beer amalgmation – a match certainly made in heaven.

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# REVIEW: The Ritz Carlton

# Kapalau – Maui



A panorama of the grounds



The stock photo

The island of Maui is not necessarily my favorite because of a variety of reasons.  Most of those revolve around my theory that it's the neglected "child" of an island.  It doesn't share as much greenery as Kauai, certain portions of the Big Island, or even the windward side of Oahu.  It also doesn't have the culinary faire or the cultural sights of Oahu or the Big Island, but mostly, it's just large and barren.

My personal disjoint on the subject aside, there IS a Ritz, and a glorious one at that.  The Ritz Kapalua is a massive resort, and has cascading pools, a beautiful golf course, and its very own private beach access (pic below)



The resort is fairly priced and is the perfect place to relax and hang out with family or a loved one, the rooms are beautifully appointed (albeit in the standard modern Hawaiian style of wicker, koa wood, lots of tan and whites, and Tommy Bahama inspired theme colors.

There is also a nature reserve on the resort property where you can hang out with two very affable hogs



The staff went out of their way to accommodate me  when I had a late flight and offered a late 6PM checkout so that I could enjoy the pool and shower prior to my 6 hours back to LAX.

**PROS:**

- The resort has a lot to offer, with ancient Hawaiian burial grounds for those who like cultural artifact
- There’s lots of activities such as a very well maintained volleyball, tennis, and basketball court, and whale and dolphin watching from the private beach
- The pool has multiple areas and terraces, so you aren’t stuck like sardines staring at each other trying to hog some sunlight
- Looks pretty newly renovated.  Some Ritz properties could use some more TLC but this one looks like it’s had some recent lovin’

**CONS:**

- In Maui you need a rental car, and there's a ton of traffic around the Kapalua area.  That aside, once you drive northwards you get to see a ton of outdoor activities to partake in, including brewery tours, wine tours, snorkeling trips, etc.
- The hotel doesn't have many dining options, but there are a few secret ones you should definitely check out

**SECRETS:**

- Check out the Terrace restaurant, it is downstairs below the lobby and offers an incredible brunch complete with fresh local fruit and to-die-for salmon lox
- If you go to the Alaloa lounge bar in the lobby, they'll hook you up with a bottle of your favorite champagne or wine and a cooler with which you can bring to anywhere in the hotel grounds to enjoy.  Cheers to that!
- You MUST TRY THE MAHI MAHI.  They grill it to perfection here.  I must've turned into one at the end of the trip because I couldn't stop eating it (Yea they're kinda ugly but they grill well)



- They'll also put any drink you want into a pineapple (to be fair, many tropical resorts do this), but heck, nothing beats the original Hawaiian pineapple – mostly

because it’s grown in that nutrient rich volcanic soil



**OTHER STUFF IN MAUI:**

- I highly recommend renting a car and just going off the beaten path to explore.  Maui is known for little hiking spots and waterfalls (Take a look at Nemo Falls below) and Blowhole.
- Check out this website Maui Guidebook for more detailed info on the island.



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# REVIEW: The Turtle Bay Resort in Oahu

The very last trip I took before throwing my life on the internets was this one a few weeks ago at the end of April.  I will **preface this by saying, It's Not the Ritz, but it ain't bad.**

I attended my buddy's wedding and stayed at two different locations while on the trip.  The first few days were at the Turtle Bay North Shore Resort which happened to be my very first experience there.  The last few days were at the Trump Waikiki.



The views from the hotel were exquisite, and although I was a bit hesitant to pay the close to $3,000 tab for just a short three nights (In their defense I did book very last minute, and opted for an UPGRADED ROOM – be careful to do this as some of the other rooms are OLD), I must say that it was quite an experience and well worth it.  A majority of my expenses also coincided with in-resort activities such as the spa (well worth it), and the dining experiences throughout the hotel.

**Total Payments** **-2941.98**

**Balance Due** **0.00**

I have received the goods and / or services in the amount shown hereon. I agree that my liability for this bill is not waived and agree to be held personally liable in the event that the indicated person, company, or association fails to pay for any part or the full amount of these charges. If a credit card charge, I further agree to perform the obligations set forth in the cardholder's agreement with the issuer.

Guest Signature: _____

57-091 Kamehameha Hwy, Kahuku, Oahu, Hawaii 96731
Phone 808.293.6000 | Toll Free 1.800.203.3650 | Reservations 1.866.827.5321




So as I test and iterate my blog i'm going to start off with a format where I go with the pro's and con's of the hotel that I chose (usually a Ritz, but not in all cases), and then a synopsis of whether I think it was a good choice. I'll also throw in some interesting tidbits of the actual location and places I think are worth visiting while you're at the locale that i'm blogging about.

**PROS:**

- Lots of privacy – this place is on a peninsula, and it is beautiful, surrounded by water on almost 270 degrees and with its own private beach, cabanas, an incredible restaurant at the golf course, and its own nightclub where locals from the North shore come to hang out
- Impeccable attention to service and detail – the staff were well trained, greeted everyone and tried their best to remember names when they could. One day the elevator went out and we had to use the service elevator and staff did their best to maintain decorum even when they had to use the service elevator for purposes of running the hotel
- I'm a foodie, and the food here was actually pretty impressive for being a resort. Most resorts suffer greatly when it comes to dining options, but knowing

that their guests are basically 20-30 miles from the nearest major city (Remember, this is North Shore Oahu), they went ahead and spent the money to develop a stand up menu.




- The food options on the North Shore aren't actually terrible. There is a conglomerate of food trucks just a few miles southwest of Turtle Bay towards Hale Ewa town and you can find plenty of grub there

**CONS:**

- Well if you like nightlife, the only option is the club downstairs in the hotel, that's about it. Unless you want to ride in a (often hard to find) uber/lyft back to the south shore of the island and hang out in Honolulu
- The rooms, albeit nice, have very thin walls. You would think for resort oriented towards couples and umm, lovers, you'd have thicker walls, unless the concert of

love is what they were going for.
- The pool was very nice but needed some upgrades, it was showing some wear and tear

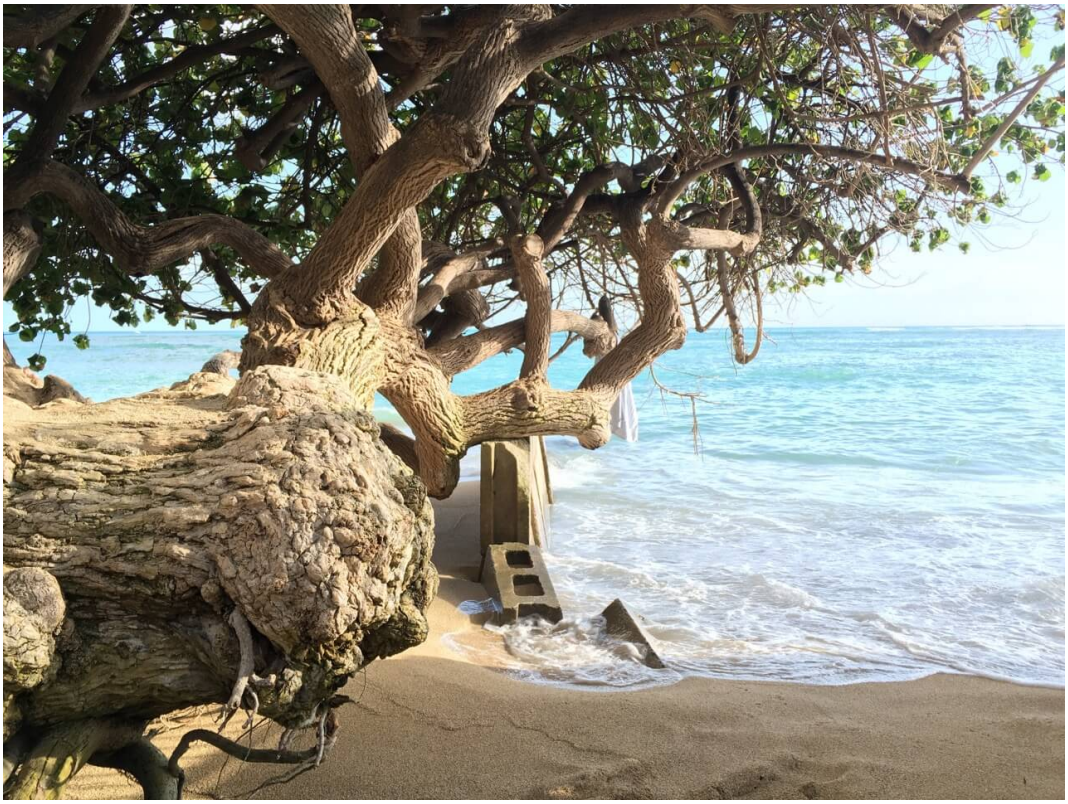
**SECRETS:**

- If you get a chance, try to book the oceanside villas, or one of the Turtle Bay multi-bedroom villas and split it with your friends. The Oceanside Villas come with some cool little toys including a **very badass Hawaiian wood guitar** for you to play with and some **high end binoculars** from which you can watch the whales all in the comfort of your own room. The multi-bedroom villas are relatively cheap for what you get and the price breakdown makes more sense than the regular rooms. They are spacious, newly appointed, and well equipped.
- If you need a drink early in the morning (don't judge), you can always go to the bar at the golf club, it's 5'o clock there 24/7.

**OTHER STUFF IN OAHU**

- Having been to the islands quite a bit growing up, due to family being there and all, i'm often asked what to do when you're in Oahu. Here are a few of my faves:
    - Visit the trucks on the North Shore, Giovanni's is the original shrimp truck and go for the garlic scampi, but if you can't make it there, there's another group of trucks next to the Trump Hotel in Honolulu which does the same job
    - Go to Hanauama Bay and snorkel the hell out of that place. Try to go early in the morning before there's too many people in the water and the sediment is kicked up – making it hard to see the fishies. Bring your own packed lunch because its hard to find food around there when you're exhausted and done trying to maintain flotation trying to snap that perfect fish selfie

- Eat Eat Eat – Yelp has a great variety of suggestions but I recommended Sweet E's Cafe for brunch or breakfast, it's incredible stuff-yourself-to-the-gills breakfast and brunch food. There's a reason why people get big on the islands, the food is amazing, and you couldn't surf enough to salvage that calories in vs. calories out thing if you started exploring all the spots in Honolulu
- Have a drink at the original Dukes Waikiki. This is where the King drank, and surfed, and drank some more. Beautiful views at sunset, add a 151 floater to your drink and be a beast about it, I swear all your worries will melt away. If this place is too busy, go next door to the beautifully restored plantation-esque environment that is the Moana Surfrider and enjoy those same views next to 100+ year old Banyan tree sitting right in the middle of the bar.
- If you want to go to one of the top 10 beaches in the world, it's at Kailua, on the Northeast side of Oahu. This white sand stretch is beautiful, and one of my favorite things to do is rent a car, throw on my board shorts and sandals, pick a direction, and just drive from beach to beach until the sun sets. Hawaii was made for this type of lackadaisical approach and I recommend you try it out!



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# Yup.. this is the first post




So this is the very first entry of my blog.  I've been lucky enough to travel and experience 35 countries over the last 10 years, and have stayed at some exquisite properties over that same period.  After 10 years, however, I have decided to start

traveling with a purpose in mind – *to travel to every Ritz Carlton in the world in as short of a period of time as my finances and work allow.* Along the way i'll inevitably have to stay at hotels that aren't the Ritz, but that won't stop me from writing about my experiences at these other properties.

This blog will be equal parts rants, boisterous excitement, and informationally relevant travel advice.

So why the Ritz? I have many fascinations, with one of them cornering on being a vice – I love to stay at NICE HOTELS. Now you're probably saying, doesn't everyone like a nice hotel? And I respond, NO, some people are perfectly fine with whatever is available at a decent price in a decent neighborhood. There are many that would argue that travel is not about what is at the hotel, but what is around it, and that spending money at an expensive property is a waste because you're in it for such a short period of time.

My personal opinion, though, is that the hotel sets the foundation for the trip. It truly is your home away from home, and for many it is nicer than their home back home, it offers a chance for one to escape to a luxury and a lifestyle while abroad, and affords pleasures that some would not otherwise be capable of sustaining on a continuous basis back home. A great property sets the mood for a "vacation" and the atmosphere and hospitality of a 5-star property can be the underlying bass-line of a great trip. Not to mention that the best hotel's always have the best concierge's who will always know the hottest spots and be well connected in a new city. There's nothing more satisfying to me than exploring somewhere new and knowing I get to come back to a nice bed, great service, often a fantastic view, and a refreshing (substitute your favorite drink).

My goal in this endeavor is to share my travel experiences with you, the reader(s) – (hopefully there's more than one reader). Sure there's Yelp, Tripadvisor, and a myriad of

other hotel review sites, but hopefully through this blog I can influence some travelers and help others make some well-informed decisions.

My posts will focus mostly on Ritz-Carlton's but sometimes I'll share another hotel experience – because not everywhere has a Ritz!  I'll be writing about the property itself, the hospitality staff that runs it, the secret little things you shouldn't miss while there, and of course some ancillary notes about the travel destinations themselves.  I'll try not to dwell too much upon the destinations except to extoll some virtues which I wasn't able to find elsewhere on the million or so other travel sites/blogs/reddits/etc.

As a legal disclaimer, the views and opinions expressed in this blog in its entirety are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect or represent those of Ritz-Carlton Hotels, Marriott Group, its partners, affiliates, et al.

Here we go!!