REVIEW: Rosewood London (It’s pretty awesome)

This hotel is one that makes an immediate impression on you the minute you walk through the double gates.

The movie-esque entrance with gates manned by attendants in British Peacoats leads you to a courtyard complete with British house cars – Jaguars, Land Rovers, Aston Martin’s. This is one hotel that takes elegance and sophistication to a completely different level.

REVIEW: The Nines in Portland



The Nines in Portland is an interesting property. It was recently remodeled, and has a lot to offer in terms of location and contemporary style, but what detracted me from giving it a full recommendation are the smallish rooms and

mediocre bathrooms.

Located centrally in downtown Portland – the Nines is the hip luxury hotel in the SPG group. It's got a very cool farm to table restaurant, a very comfy lobby that I could spend hours in, and really great service from the staff.

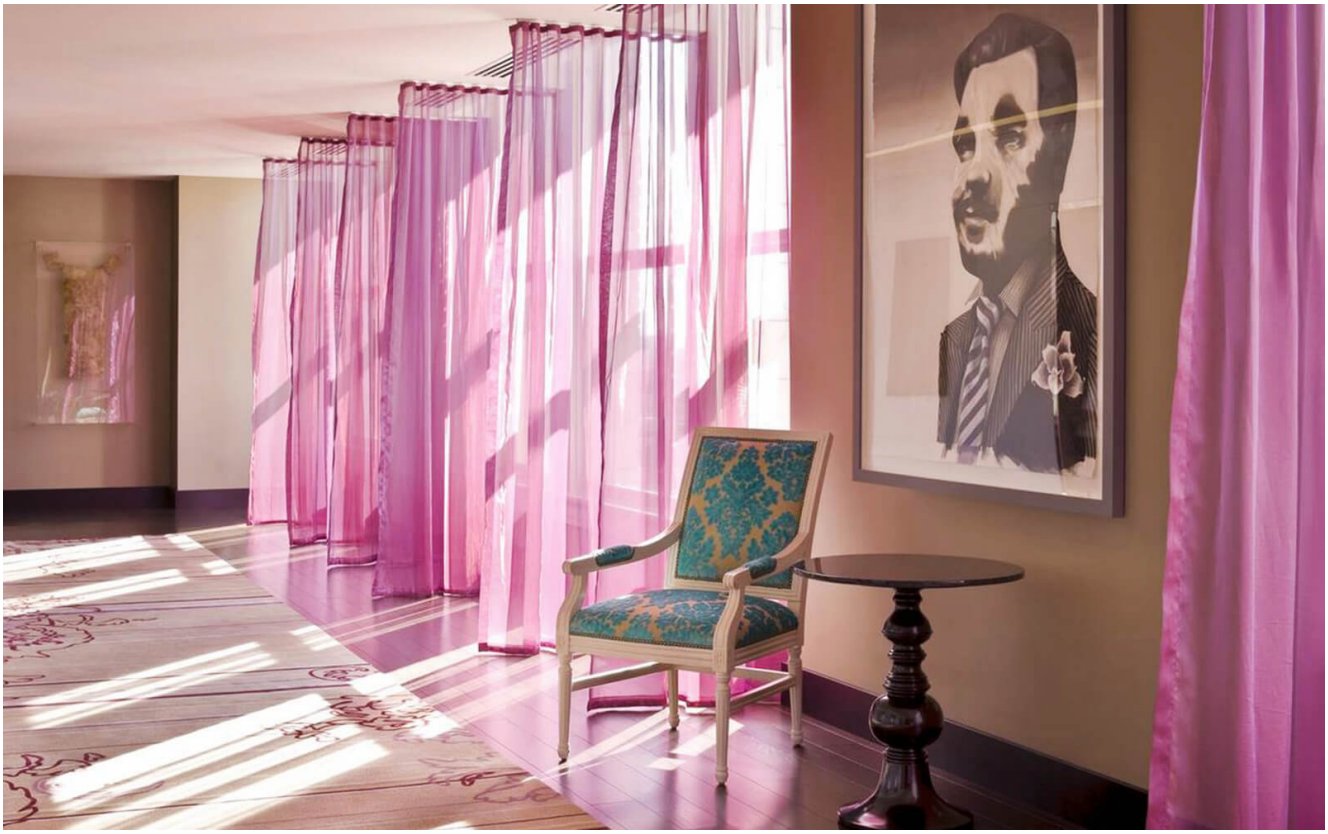


The rooms are small, but luxuriously appointed – however they do need a little more love and upkeep

I did get a chance to visit some other high end hotels in Portland, and I will say, if you're visiting the city – you should still stick with the Nines. It's got the combination of style and luxury – even if it's getting a bit long in the tooth, but location is very important in a city where you can walk to most places, and the service goes a long way.



The coolest part of this hotel is the greenhouse above the entire lobby – It gives what little natural light there is in Portland a chance at illuminating the interior of the building



Translucent pink curtains? It’s gotta be hip…

PROS:

- It’s trendy, contemporary, and I like the interior decor of this place
- The service is great – they’re attentive and quick at handling issues

CONS:

- Rooms are small and could use some upgrades

SECRETS:

- The bar in the lobby has an incredible selection of dark liquors

OTHER THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- If you love Nike, I HIGHLY recommend getting some coupons off of Craiglist and checking out the factory store, there’s lots of great savings to be had there!
- Walk around downtown and just wander – there’s lots of

cool little nooks and crannies around, this is a town where you can just casually meander around without a plan and have a great time doing it

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REVIEW: The Roosevelt – A Hollywood Staple

The Roosevelt – I have been to this hotel many times, because it's the center of Hollywood when it comes to hotels. Drop by this place any random weekend and there's an event happening, the pool is packed with fun-loving people, and the bars are flowing.

REVIEW: How to upgrade your room for close to free!

So how do you go from your normal room to that upgrade? Well there's quite a few ways to do it! Here are my secrets that i've used in the past.

1. **It is always better to check in REALLY LATE –** This is how it works, if you check in very late, many times the rooms will have already been allocated and the hotel will know its inventory for that day and for the next. Cancellations will also have been logged in.
2. **ALWAYS REGISTER FOR MEMBERSHIP REWARDS** – If you are not part of the program of a particular hotel chain, be sure

to register ahead of time. Then when you arrive at the front desk, let the manager know that you recently registered and are a new member of X (pick your hotel group), and that you are looking to learn more about the benefits of moving your business over to the new group. Ie: “I am a longtime member of Marriott’s Rewards but am looking to move my business over to SPG, can you please explain what kind of upgrades you would be willing to offer?”

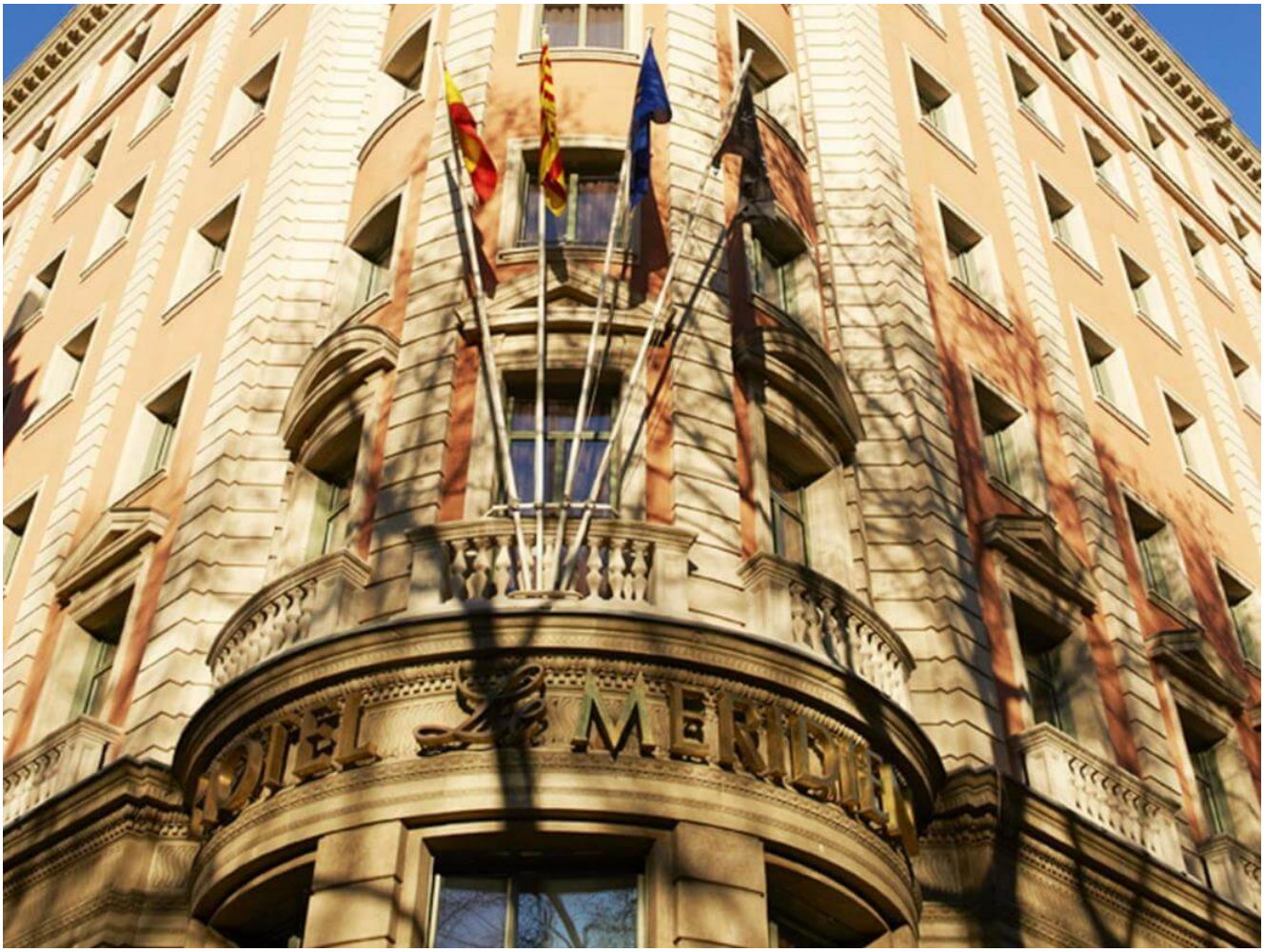
3. **SIMPLY ASK FOR UPGRADES** – Upselling at the front desk is the job of the hotelier working there. They get commissions for upselling so its in their best interest to get you an upgraded room. Also don’t take what price they quote as the end-all-be-all. Negotiate!
4. **PULL UP HOTEL TONIGHT RATES** – If you don’t have this app, get it immediately! You can then pull up the rates on Hotel Tonight for different room categories (which often are lower than the rack rates at the hotel), and kindly ask the hotel to match the rates.
5. **OFFER TO WRITE A GREAT REVIEW OF THE MANAGER OR EMPLOYEE ON THE SPOT** – Hotels rely heavily on Tripadvisor reviews. Every review counts too. Leverage your ability to review and get an upgrade out of it! At the very lease you’ll get great service.

Hope these all help you get better room upgrades and improve your hotel experiences for future stays!

Love,

Chris

REVIEW: The Le Meridien Barcelona



This hotel is a little gem in the middle of Las Ramblas. Le Meridien's are often overlooked by travelers in lieu of larger name chain hotels, but they usually provide the boutique service and luxury that you would expect to find at something comparably higher in price.

I chose this hotel for an extended stay in Barcelona, which resulted in me actually calling this place my home for a bit of time in late Fall a few years back. It is set in a very centralized part of Barcelona – right in the middle of Las Ramblas, which is essentially the main street in the city. This made for extremely easy access to shops, restaurants, bars, cafe's, and pretty much everything else you could ask

for when roaming and getting lost in Spain's best city metropolis (Madrid just isn't Barcelona if you ask me).

The lobby was a great place to have an afternoon cocktail, and the rooms were modernly appointed and clean with great attentive staff. Although the property has over 200 rooms it felt much more like a boutique hotel where they knew your name and service was remarkably quick everytime I needed something brought to my room.



Modern rooms here felt cozy, sophisticated, and noticeably well insulated, making for some very restful nights in the city

The hotel really embodies something which I find to be an epitome of European cities that have been around for centuries but have since grown up with the times, beautiful old world exteriors – but with modern luxurious interiors. This is the city of Gaudi after all, and interior decor and character and soul should be present at any hotel worth its price of admission. I felt as if Miro inspired some of the furnishings, colors, and overall decor of this place.



Modern bathrooms with granite, wood, and clean lines made this place feel like it had more character than your average luxury hotel

Of course, the best part of this hotel is and always will be its location. I don’t think Le Meridien will ever let go of this property. I highly recommend it if you’re visiting Barcelona.



Barcelona is all about lounging, and this lobby was built specifically for that purpose. Kudos to SPG & Le Meridien!

PROS:

- Great lobby to socialize in and hang out during nighttime hours
- Rooms were modern but with lots of character and warmth
- Staff was very attentive for what is a relatively large hotel
- The location couldn’t be any better for walking to lots of great destinations

CONS:

- There are certainly many newer choices and I haven’t reviewed some other top hotels in Barcelona but this one is a solid choice

SECRETS:

- Eat breakfast here at the restaurant downstairs, it’s magnificent

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- I’m biased, but I think everyone should visit the Miro museum while in Barcelona

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REVIEW: Melia Cohiba Havana in Cuba



Yes I went to Cuba, and yes it was a pretty awesome time. If you are thinking of going I highly recommend booking immediately. The country is in flux and massive amounts of investment is going in and when that happens things will just

not be the same.

Part of the charm of Cuba is how quaint it is. It's lifted straight out of the 1950's and 60's, complete with oil burning Studebakers and bright yellow and green Ladas, buildings with the architecture of a completely different era, and sensibilities of the people that you wouldn't find anywhere else in the world. Whatever romantic notions of Cuba you might have, you'll want to experience them in person before it all changes.

Hotels in Cuba are far and few in between, especially when it comes to luxury accommodations. The Melia chain is a well respected Spanish hotel chain with quite a few properties just in Cuba alone. This is one of their premier properties located right on the waterfront and in the center of Havana.

We found this property through pure serendipity, as I was planning a last minute bachelor party for one of my best friends and it just so happened to fall on "Cigar Festival week" in Cuba. This was almost a non-starter for our trip until we found the Melia Cohiba.

When we got to the hotel we realized something that all American travelers should be aware of. They don't accept credit cards from US banks! So travelers beware, bring lots of cash!



Our rooms were pretty large and decently appointed, but if you don’t like hard beds – well, tough luck

Rooms were decently sized, clean and hospitable, but in most other countries this 5-star establishment would be more comparable to a 3-star hotel, imagine a Garden Inn or basic Hilton property.



This is the best it’ll ever look at a 5-star resort in Cuba. Come in with modified expectations and you’ll be just fine!

Staff were extremely courteous, the concierge was beyond

helpful in a country where internet is sparse and you can't just Google or Yelp something on a whim, and the bar was open till very late at night – also a godsend when you're not a native Spanish speaker and television options are scarce at best.

My favorite part of the hotel? The concierge – whom was kind enough to setup activities for us on a strict budget (remember how I said how we did not anticipate having to pay the hotel in cash? Well that took a big chunk out of what we had on hand). A rum & cigar factory visit, a ride around town in a convertible, a picnic up in the hills, and even a visit to a Paladres that was highly recommended. If we had not stayed at this hotel, we would've been SOL what with the last minute planning and lack of information accessible to us.

PROS:

- The concierges at the hotel really made our trip, they knew what to do and how to do it on a budget which was important to our group during this trip, and accommodated some very last minute reservations during what was a very busy week in Havana
- Large rooms which were great for our group, it's actually very tough to find 2-3 bedroom options at hotels which aren't exorbitantly expensive

CONS:

- There was a certain air of staleness throughout the property, but this was probably just because Cuba is still in its early stages of modernization. Take it for what it is when you go!
- The pool food is absolutely terrible at the hotel, I highly recommend against it. Go for the buffet which is much better on the second floor

SECRETS:

- Buy cigars at the hotel, you're less likely to get fake ones from here than at shady vendors out in the city

OTHER THINGS TO DO IN HAVANA:

- Check out the dance halls and bars and clubs in the city. The Cuban people are extremely kind and they love to dance and you're not getting the full experience if you don't go out and mingle and dance with the locals. I promise you'll have a great time!

REVIEW: The Four Seasons in Seattle



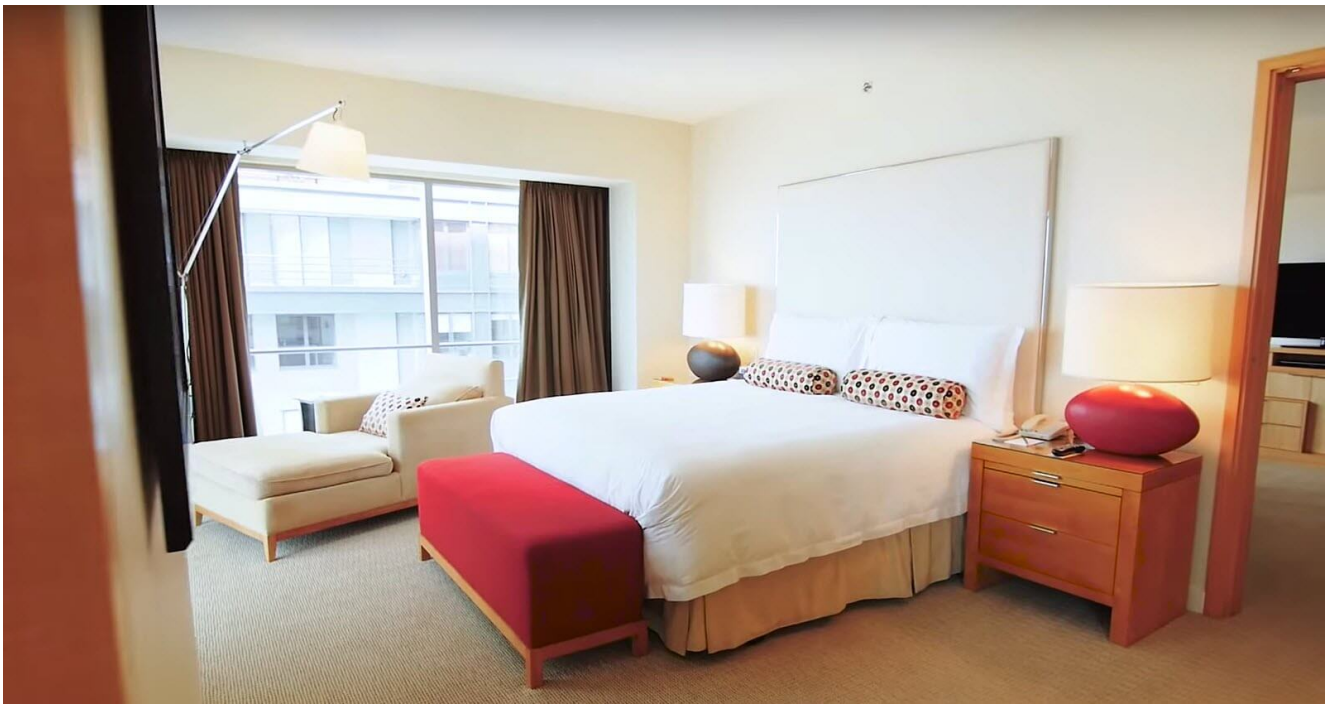
Seattle is one of those destinations that everyone should visit once in their lives. It’s a unique combination of city and forest, set amongst dozens of lakes and rivers and

bisected by the very large Lake Washington. In the summer when the weather is great there's almost no better place to be. The high latitudes allow for long summer days and warm summer nights.

For a very long time though, the city had a serious shortage of accommodations – and especially luxury accommodations. If you wanted to stay at a 5 star resort, you had to look to the Eastside – not Seattle downtown proper. This all changed when the Four Seasons came in with new construction right at the waterfront of downtown Seattle.

This is a smaller hotel but with luxury condominiums available for purchasers. It's got the feel of a boutique hotel but with all the luxuries that you would expect from a company such as the Four Seasons.

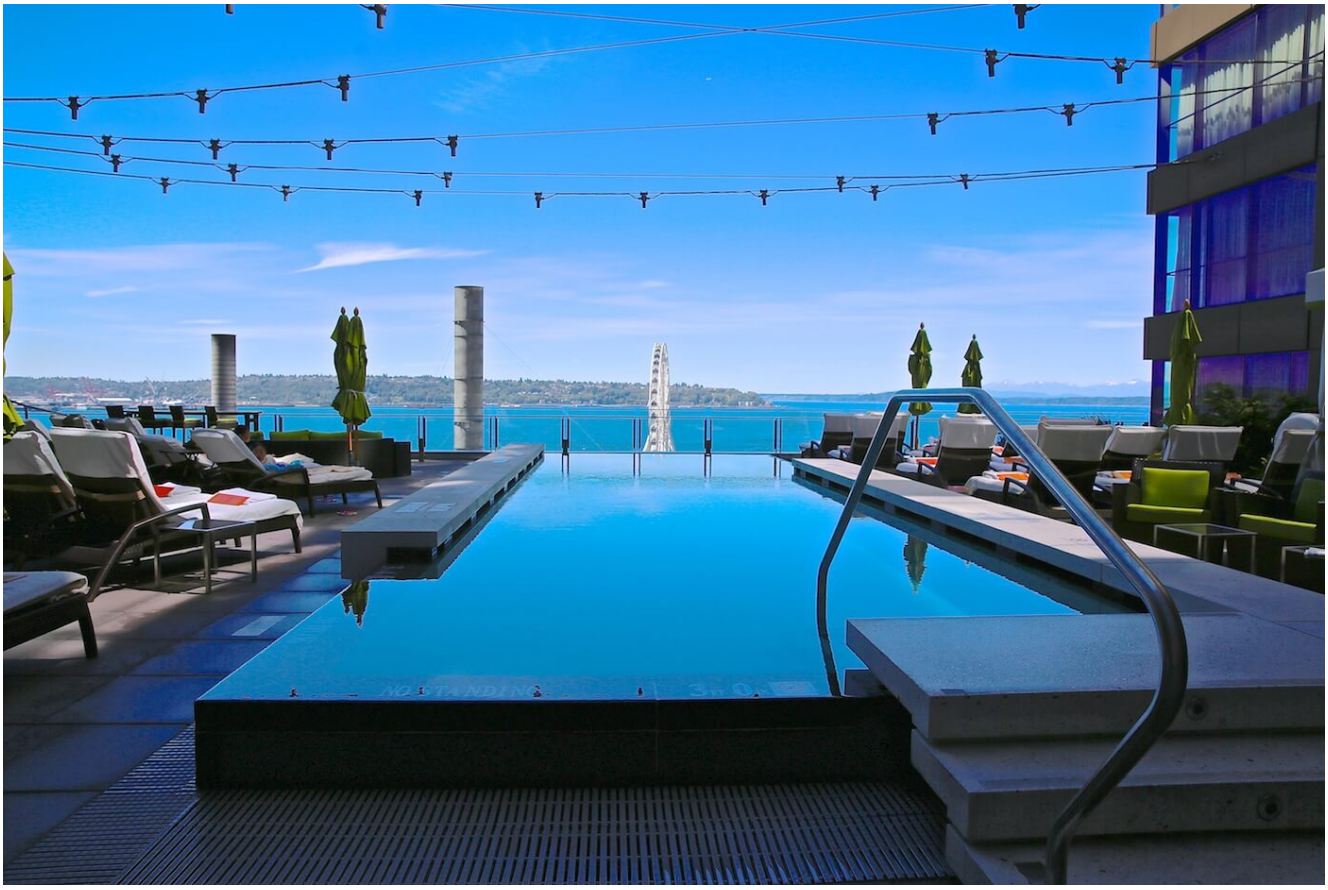
The rooms themselves are relatively plain and very Pacific Northwest with light woods and simplistic clean lines throughout.



Just a regular old room – nothin to see here

They are comfortable and materials are high quality but a bit lacking in depth and character.

What the rooms lack in effort though the hotel more than makes up for in its rooftop patio and pool. I love Seattle in the summer and the rooftop pool with its amazing vista over the waterfront is the perfect place to sit and relax for hours with a beer in hand.



The rooftop pool, I swear they’re needed in Seattle

So next time someone says Seattle is always raining remind them that they are referring to Portland or San Francisco, and that the rooftop at the Four Seasons is where you will be spending your summers.

PROS:

- The rooftop pool
- The rooftop pool
- Oh, it’s a Four Seasons – so the service is always impeccable

CONS:

- The rooms are luxuriously appointed but sort of boring
- There’s no grand lobby to hang out in

SECRETS:

- As previously mentioned, the rooftop pool – which many people overlook because it’s Seattle and they just assume its bad weather and no one would put an outdoor pool on the roof of a hotel

OTHER THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- There’s a variety of restaurants up in South Lake Union (they’re constantly in flux), but check out the area and have a nice dinner during sunset – it’s relaxing and fun to watch the seaplanes flying in and out of Lake Union

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REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton South Beach



When you think of South Beach you automatically conjure up thoughts of art-deco and 1980's glamour. All white decor and contemporary style.

The Ritz-Carlton in South Beach bucks this trend, severely. The first thing you notice about the Ritz here is how large the lobby is. Keeping in line with other Ritz properties this one is just as large, most of the other properties on Collins Avenue are relatively small in comparison, save for the Fontainebleau. The hotel's layout reminds me of a cruise ship with its multiple levels that jet out over each other, and the pool "deck" with rooms surrounding it on both sides with patios that mimic the look of outdoor balconies on upper level staterooms. If you're sitting at the pool it gives you the impression that you're on a cruise perpetually on its way towards the Atlantic Ocean – and i'm ok with it.



The pool overlooks the ocean and is surrounded on both sides by hotel rooms, mimicking the outlook of a cruise ship

Overall, the hotel is luxurious and modern yet retaining much of the feel of a Ritz-Carlton with dark woods and darker furniture.

I think it’s a great place if you’re looking to stay within the Ritz-Carlton or Marriott chain while in South Beach, but I can’t recommend it over a few other options that are unique to Miami Beach, including the SOHO Beach House, Delano South Beach, or the One Hotel.

If you DO want great service, and are used to a certain level of sophistication, then definitely check this out. However, I feel that there's other ways to experience the eclectic vibe of SoBe.

PROS:

- Cool pool area with a great view overlooking the ocean
- Excellent service, which is tough to normally get in South Beach

CONS:

- You won't be able to get the real South Beach feel, it doesn't have the uniqueness that some of the other art-deco properties in South Beach offer

SECRETS:

- You won't need a car, this hotel is RIGHT in the center of everything in South Beach

OTHER STUFF IN SOUTH BEACH:

- I've been to South Beach well over 20+ times so I have a long list, but always manage to walk down Ocean Blvd. You can't get the whole experience unless you do this



This is the quintessential part of South Beach – Ocean Blvd at night. In all it's Scarface glory

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REVIEW: Rancho Valencia Resort



This is by far one of my favorite resorts in California. It’s a large property, the type that requires you to get around by golf cart (don’t worry – they supply them). It’s got

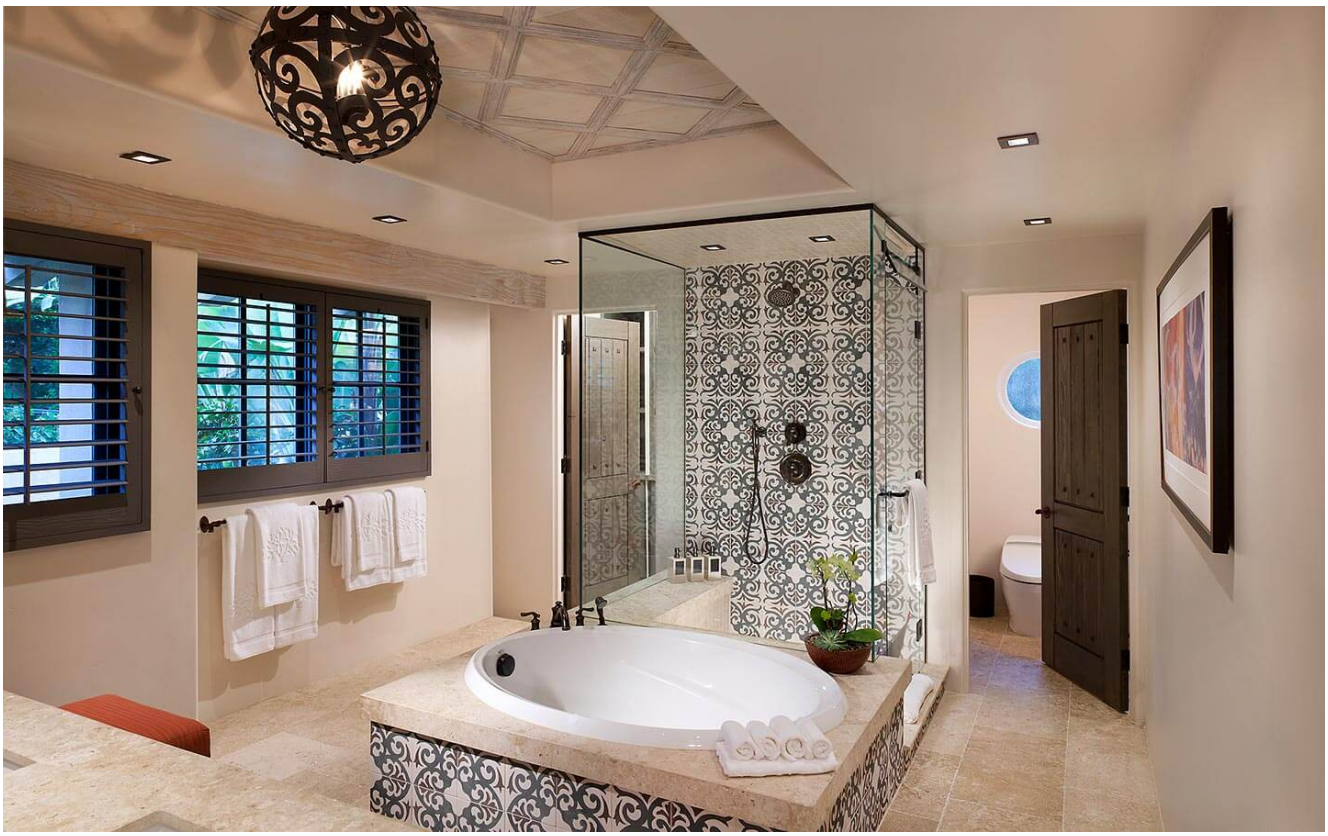
beautiful rooms – each one is considered a mini casa or “Casita” as they call them.



The not-so-mini Casita complete with sunken living room and a jacuzzi and fireplace inside AND out

The hotel has impeccable service, they know you by name and deliver some really cool fine touches, such as some really expensive bath products, a jacuzzi and fireplace in each individual outdoor patio, not just any espresso machine but world-class espresso machines, and my favorite part – the fresh orange juice service that is left at your room every morning (from the on-site orange grove). The property is exquisite and has some really great things going for it including an impeccably decorated restaurant and bar.

This is a resort you go to when you want to get away and relax for a few days – it’s not very close to much other than the Del Mar Racetrack, but the property itself has enough to keep one relatively busy – and by busy I mean relaxed.



Stunning spa-like bathrooms with views of the gardens will make you take extra long baths and showers. The toilet is even electronic and opens and closes its lid with a wave of your hand!



If you come here you'll be a spending a lot of time at this bar and restaurant in the lobby area

PROS:

- Rooms don't get much better than this. Fireplaces, private jacuzzis, beautifully appointed top of the line materials in the bathrooms. All with a modern-meets-rustic theme
- The food on this property is great, you won't want to leave
- The feeling of privacy makes this the perfect retreat

CONS:

- It books up quite far ahead of time, so make sure to put in your reservations early

SECRETS:

- You can actually go and pick oranges in the grove

OTHER STUFF IN THE AREA:

- Check out the Del Mar racetrack schedule to see if you can go to the races at the same time you're staying here. There's also a local fair that happens a few times a year next door.

REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain



The Dove Mountain Ritz-Carlton is a pretty awesome place to visit. The resort is a large property set in the side of Dove Mountain with lots of cool nooks and crannies to explore. The

feel is that of a modern hunting lodge, with high ceilings, large rooms with expansive views, and a rustic quality and vibe.

The Ritz here spent a lot of time and energy developing local activities such as sunset hikes, a traditional Native-American ceremony on certain days, and even outdoor games and a tangerine orchard.



A hunting lodge you ask? Ritz-Carlton has their interpretation of it here at Dove Mountain

My personal favorite area of the hotel, though, is the pool.

There's multiple decks, amazing views of the landscape around the hotel, and even a waterslide – if you feel so inclined.



Check out that waterslide!

Everything about this Ritz is a bit more special, and it reminds me a lot of a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. The service is a slight notch above the other properties, and the build quality of the hotel itself is higher. If you love the desert, I highly recommend visiting this property for a nice weekend getaway!

PROS:

- It's one of the nicer Ritz-Carltons in the chain – similar in feel to a Reserve
- It has lots to offer on the grounds and a wilderness center where you can book hikes and enjoy some really awesome desert activities

CONS:

- It's quite a far drive from anything in the Tucson area

SECRETS:

- Check the events calendar or call before you book.

There’s usually lots planned and it’s a smart move to book your stay around special events to take advantage of them
- The sushi is also really good here, trust me on this

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Biosphere 2 is a really cool biosphere habitat that is basically one of two in the world (as the name suggests). If you’re in the area you should definitely check it out!

REVIEW: The Ananda Boutique Hotel in Cartagena

If you’ve ever dreamt of that lazy getaway in a “cute” little hotel filled with luxurious amenities where you can wander into the streets and lose yourself in the middle of a UNESCO Heritage Site. Well, that’s the Ananda Boutique and that’s Cartagena.

REVIEW: Hotel Valley Ho in Scottsdale



This hotel feels like it should be set in the 60's. Everything from the architecture to the hip decor makes this hotel a choice that's not normal. When you walk in you notice

the flamboyant colors, the biomorphic shapes and shag carpet and wax vinyl surfaces.



Lets jus say that laminate floors are not the standard at the Ritz, but hey, this place is cooool

You choose the Valley Ho because you want something different, but at the end of the day you still want a bit of luxury and coddling.

The lobby is the focal point of this place, part of it is indoors and part of it is outdoors. The location is fantastic, just a few minutes by foot to the local art galleries and restaurants in the Scottsdale area. This is always my go to whenever I come to Scottsdale. The restaurant has great all american cuisine and I recommend it for the Sunday brunch.



You can’t look around at this place and not crack a smile – because it feels like you just woke up and Nixon is about to pop on TV

There are certainly other nicer hotels in the area, the W Scottsdale or further options if you’re there for the golfing, but there really is nothing else like the Hotel Valley Ho. And heck, at the least it’s fun to say.



Bet you haven’t been to a mid-century pool since…well, mid-century

PROS:

- Fun lobby and vibe – its super hip
- The showers are wide and open and the bathrooms and floorpans feel modern and different from anything else you’d see in the luxury category
- There’s really not much else quite like it in the area, especially walking distance to Scottsdale downtown shops and restaurants

CONS:

- It’s not a traditional luxury hotel
- The service is not quite that of a 4-5 star hotel, but somehow it just works with the laidback vibe
- The cuisine is all americana but if you want something different there’s not a lot of options

SECRETS:

- Check out the cool second story gym with its private yoga room which opens up to the pool
- The breakfast burrito on the menu is definitely what you want, I promise

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- If you love good pizza (and who doesnt?), definitely visit Sauce Pizza & Wine. It’s one of my favorite pizza restaurants in the nation (and that includes comparison to places like Lou Malnati’s in Chicago or top NY pizza joints). Yes it’s that good, and they have a great selection of beers and wines!