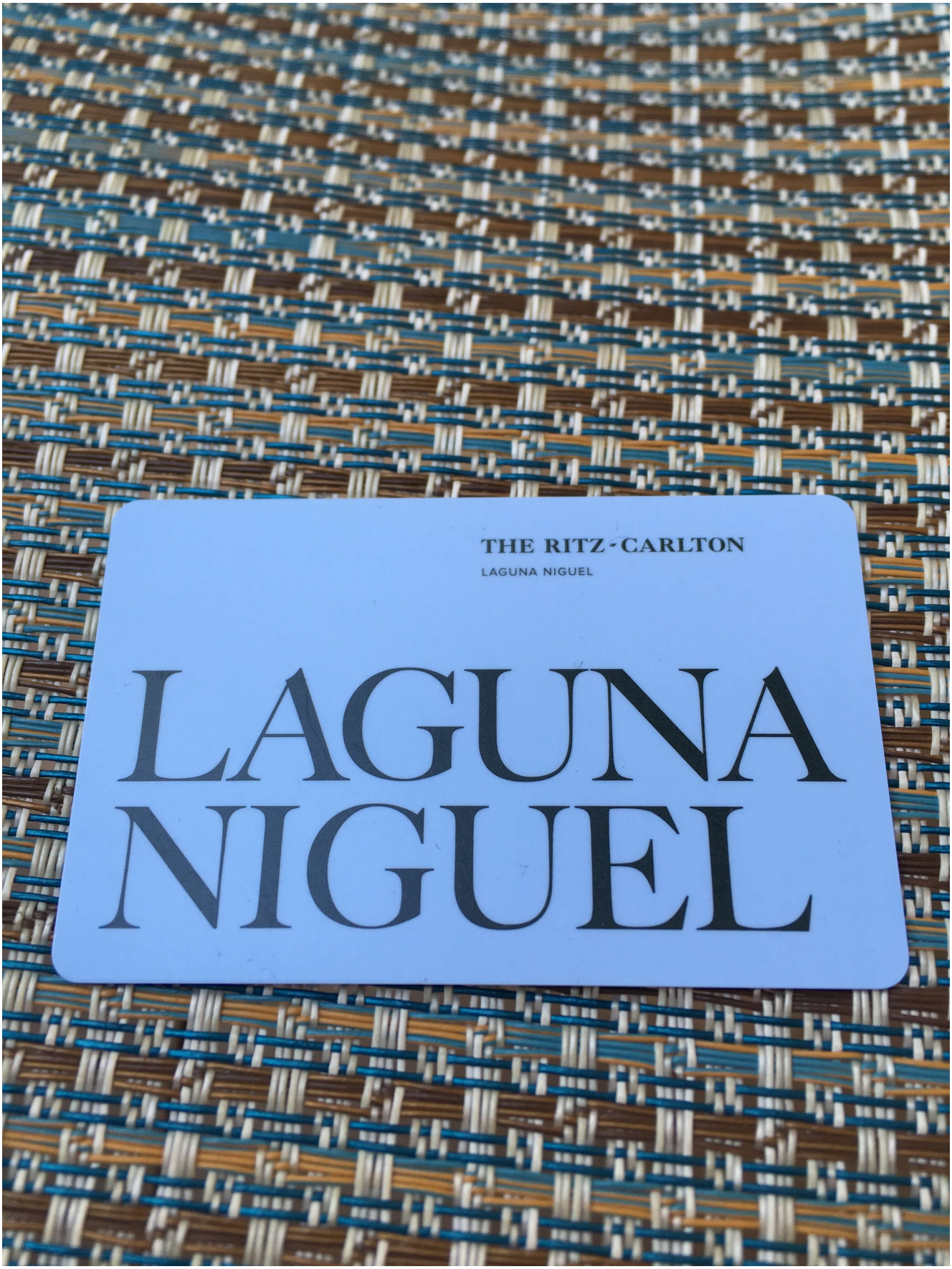
REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel



This one’s a keeper – as they say. The Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel is a mixture of old-world elegance and contemporary flair. The hotel is large but the intimate spaces hidden

within it make it feel homey and comforting rather than barren and excessive.



The Spanish villa look of the Ritz in Laguna gives it some old-world charm

The minute you walk in you're wowed by the depth of the hallway. It has a very similar feel to the Monarch Beach Resort in this respect, but with slightly lower ceilings which makes this hotel the perfect accessory for a romantic getaway.

The service here is impeccable, at the top of its class for Ritz-Carlton's, and the lobby bar here is a cool place to hang out. I had a chance to check out two of the restaurants here, EnoSteak and Raya and highly recommend both of them. Raya's floor to ceiling glass portals overlook the Pacific Coast and it's a dazzling place to have breakfast at a leisurely pace. Enosteak is the quintessential martini and ribeye spot which serves its purpose in this type of resort.

The rooms themselves are on the smaller side, and are not as new as the The Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point but they are definitely still clean and luxurious. This is yet another hotel built with weddings in mind and as such there are

breathtaking vistas throughout.

I recommend checking out The Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point and doing a spot compare between the two when booking to see which one is priced better during your stay as they both are comparable hotels, with the Ritz possibly edging on service, but slightly older in room quality.

PROS:

- Feels intimate yet maintains that large resort feel
- The pool area is well thought out to include private secludes so that not everyone is staring at each other when you're laying out
- The service is impeccable and the dining establishments at this hotel are above average

CONS:

- It could use some room refreshes

SECRETS:

- Check out the view at 180 Blu while enjoying a drink. It's easy to miss this part of the hotel

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Officially the second smallest church in the world, St Francis By the Sea is a pretty cool place to visit. Plus it's on the Guinness Book of World Records!
- This one's been written about but if you want to get around and you don't want to hire an uber. Check out the Laguna Beach Trolley. It's fun to use it as a method of hopping around town and checking out the sights.

REVIEW: The Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point

The Monarch Beach Resort was formerly a SPG St Regis property, one of the top ones in the portfolio, but as of mid 2016 was purchased by KSL group after a lengthy renovation. I went to stay at the hotel shortly after the renovation so this review reflects what the hotel currently is like (as of Q3 2016).

REVIEW: The SkyLofts at the MGM Grand

So there’s nice hotel rooms in Las Vegas, because there’s a lot of room to play with, and because there’s a lot of money at stake, but one of the biggest issues if you’re seeking high quality service is that the staff often has to deal with 10,000 other people at the same time.

REVIEW: Trump International in Panama



I had very high expectations for this hotel. It was essentially the highest rated luxury hotel in Panama City, and Trump hotels generally have great service and well thought out

and luxurious accommodations. However, I should've known something was off when I arrived and the front desk wasn't even staffed.

You see, this hotel was originally developed as a condotel (Hotel + Condo units). Many didn't sell, and as a result this happened: Condos not doing so well at Trump Panama. The result is a grand plan for a stunning hotel, crippled by high vacancy rates and low staffing. The rooms at the hotel weren't terrible, except that they hadn't seemed to have been well thought out. For one, Panama is a very hot environment, and there's a significant amount of humidity. Whenever the patio door was opened, condensation would form on the massive marble floors making them downright scary to walk on.

The rooms also lacked any real separation between the bathroom and the beds which was odd, and due to the shape of the building there were odd acute angles which made the rooms seem smaller than they actually were. My neighbor also approached me in the hallway one day to tell me his A/C hadn't been working the entire duration of his stay and the front desk wouldn't give him a different room when it was obvious that the hotel was at high vacancy.

The gym was large, but the equipment was old and needed changing. The pool had an amazing view, but the chairs had rust developing on them, and there never seemed to be sun because most of the pool area was blocked by the building during the middle of the day.



The rooms weren’t terribly decorated but had odd space planning



The pool may look stunning in the pictures but the view is of swampland and the building blocks most of the sun

PROS:

- The low price of the hotel makes up for its lackluster performance
- The hotel is easy to find because of its size

CONS:

- The decor is spartan and of low quality
- The dining options at the hotel are subpar
- The pool is one of the highlights due to its view, but look closely and you'll notice that its located right above swampland and the sun is blocked most of the time by the building itself
- The service is mediocre at best

SECRETS:

- Use UBER for quick travel to and from destinations
- Check out the rooftop bar which is accessible from the side entrance where the Casino is
- Before booking here, I would recommend looking at the Hard Rock International as an alternative option

OTHER STUFF IN PANAMA:

- Getting lost in Casco Viejo is a great way to spend a day or two (or three in my case). There's a lot of restaurants and other interesting sights in the old section of Panama but one place that I really enjoyed was Tantalo. It's a hotel but with a restaurant downstairs and a bar upstairs. It's got great views of the city from the rooftop, and when downstairs you've got a variety of delicious tapas and drinks. Definitely check this place out!

REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton Dorado Beach Reserve (it's a special one)

This was my first time at a Ritz-Carlton reserve and it will not be my last. I usually have a rule that I won't go to the same place twice (this was a rule I instated after realizing I had spent much of my money over many years getting incremental returns on visiting the same hotels/locations repeatedly). However, the Ritz-Carlton Reserve is something special.



A view of a portion of the property

Upon arrival at the front gates of the property you are given a fresh towel, a fruit popsicle of your choice (made from fresh fruit grown on the property), and introduced to your own private concierge which they call your "Ambassador". One of the overwhelming themes of this hotel is the ultra-personalized service. Your ambassador can reach you via your cell phone, and make pretty much anything come true (including running to the local store and picking up an iPhone cord or

other sundry you're missing).

The rooms are all incredibly spacious, with the smallest ones starting at 1000 square feet and some of the large units being as big as 10,000 square feet and over $100,000 a night. The difference between the Ritz-Carlton Reserves is that they are integrated into the environment they're set in. This one was melded directly into the rainforest around it, every bike and golf cart path was surrounded by lush greenery and the associated sounds of the forest – tropical birds singing and geckos running around. This isn't a hotel for those who don't like nature, because it really is part of the environment.



Even the spa is immersed within the rainforest, set in a treehouse

The food was incredible at each one of the establishments on the property. This included Mi Casa by Jose Andres – the leading Spanish tapas chef, Encanto – a beachside bar with great local style cuisine, La Cocina – where you can eat directly at the chef's table, and my personal favorite – Positivo, which served some of the best Mahi Mahi tacos i've ever had. I would say that by far the food at this property

was some of the best i’ve had at any hotel i’ve been to (yes, all 500 of them).



Want to have breakfast where the chef serves you directly? Do it at La Cocina

I’ve never felt more relaxed at a property, and spent all of my time without leaving Dorado beach, even though I knew Puerto Rico had much to offer – and this was because the experience at the Ritz-Carlton Reserve left me with nothing to ask for. I truly cannot remember an experience as fully immersive, well thought out, and luxurious as my stay at this hotel. It is by far my favorite relaxing experience that i’ve ever had at a resort.



The massive infinity pool overlooks the ocean with plenty of chairs and lounge areas around it

Every room has an incredible view



…and an indoor and outdoor shower

PROS:

- Impeccable service through your own private concierge
- Stunning environment and rooms with some of the nicest bathrooms – the outdoor shower in a tropical setting just makes sense
- The food at every place on the property had incredible dishes
- Well thought out and relaxing, to the point that I didn’t want to ever leave the property
- The private beach with its own cove was stunning

CONS:

- One of the only hotels where I couldn’t come up with a con

SECRETS:

- Have the front desk give you a free bike to use during your trip, and ride around the trails on the Dorado Beach property – explore the gym at the country club, it’s stunning
- On weekends the water park on the Dorado Beach property is open, and it has a bar!
- Cooking classes are taught at La Cocina, they book up early so ask your Ambassador to help you with a reservation before you even get to the hotel

OTHER STUFF IN PUERTO RICO:

- Cueva Ventana which translates to window cave is a cool rock formation that looks over a lush green valley. I didn’t really leave the resort much but after a ton of research I thought this was one of the cooler things to do. Check out the pic below!

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REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton in Santiago



The rooftop indoor pool

So let me start by saying, I had really high expectations for this one. I had just come in from the Four Seasons in Buenos Aires which was a newly renovated hotel with great rooms and service, and was expecting the Santiago Ritz to be on the same level. Unfortunately, it left me wanting for a few reasons.

At first glance and walk-in the hotel has a grand appearance and the feel of a cultured residence. Aged dark wood paneling and marble floors give the hotel a stately appearance and the travelers were mostly of the business variety.



The impressive lobby

Upon closer glance, however, you find that the hotel needs some updating. The carpets are well worn, and the rooms themselves left quite a bit to be desired. The room that I was given had mold in certain areas of the bathroom, and there was an effervescent musk in the room as if it had been around for too long without a renewal or upgrades.

The colors were also drab and didn’t match the initial look of the lobby. The decor was aged and the beds were highly uncomfortable.



The stock room photo looks enticing, but don’t be fooled. Lots of contrast image processing here



Mold in the bathroom – Needed a repainting

What the rooms lacked, however, the hotel made up for in service. I happened to be at this hotel during my birthday

and they were kind enough to send me a bottle of champagne and even a birthday cake. The overall experience was great even though the rooms just needed a little more updating than what I was used to seeing at a Ritz-Carlton.



The Ritz Carlton Service – Birthday cake and champagne for my birthday and a nice handwritten note

PROS:

- The service was impeccable, white glove treatment everywhere
- The concierge was highly knowledgable and even arranged a city tour through a local contact of his
- The lobby is warm and inviting and a great place to hang out and have meetings or just a drink

CONS:

- The rooms need updating, the bathrooms were particularly old, and the furniture and bed were old – cushions needed changing and mattresses needed to be changed
- The food in the main lobby bar left quite a bit to be desired. In a city with many food choices it was disappointing that the Ritz didn't have a particularly great menu

SECRET(S):

- Walk just outside the hotel to the local restaurants on Isidora Goyenechea

OTHER STUFF IN SANTIAGO:

- Go and visit San Cristobal hill. The view from the top is stunning. It's totally worth the climb. Check locally, but on most weekends they even close off the road so it's a great hike
- Want to see something unique and different? The locals (especially in government) have coffee about 10 times a day, but at coffee shops resembling bikini parlors. Read about it here: Coffee with legs

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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.

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!

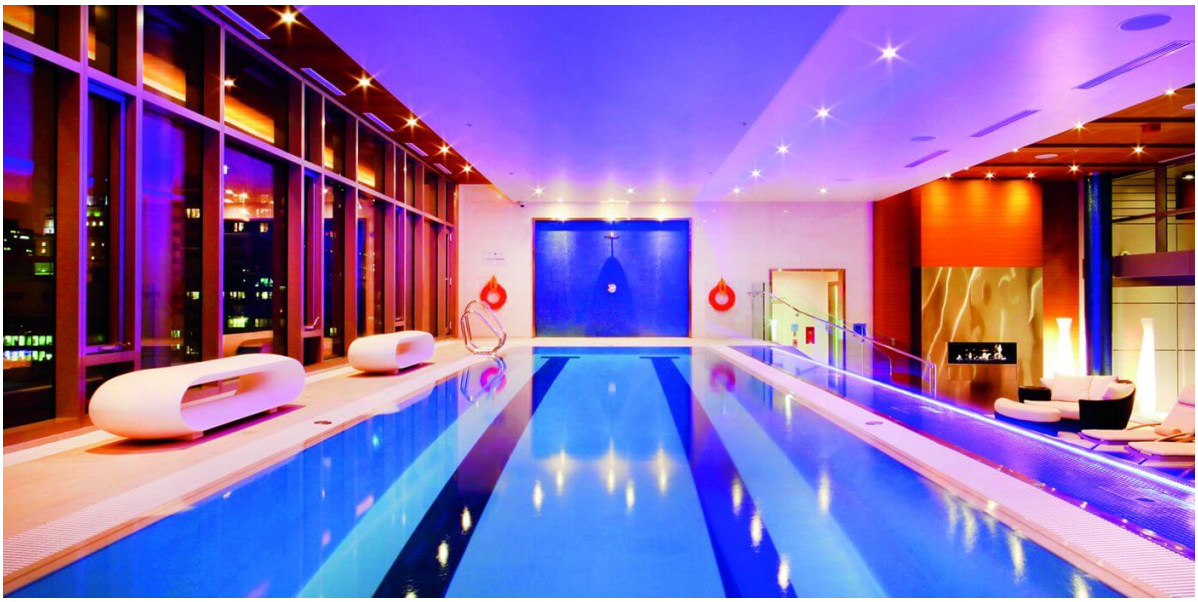
CONS:

- 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.

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!

