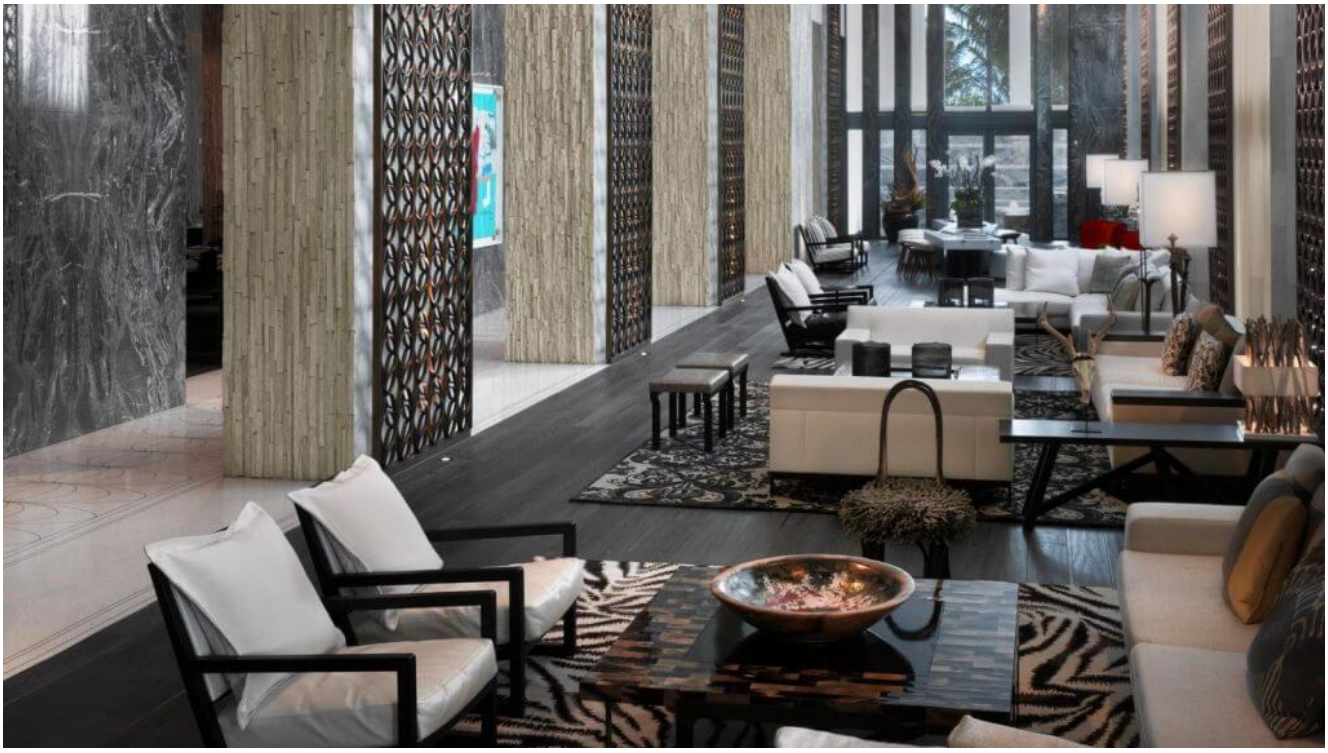
REVIEW: The W Hotel in South Beach

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

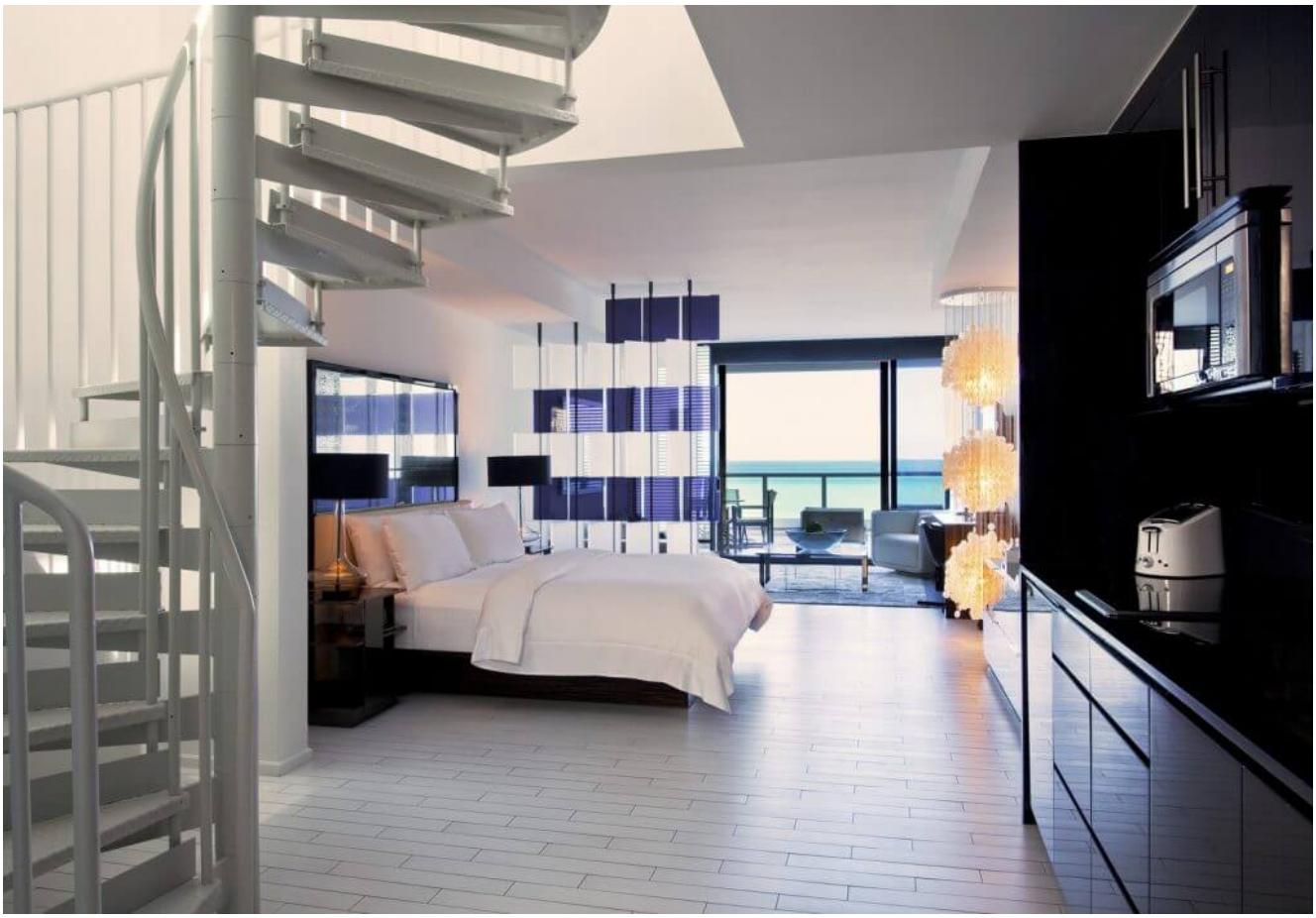
The W Hotel there is no exception, and it is probably one of my favorite W's that i've visited. There's two reasons for that – the room selections, and the incredible pool area.

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



That's the lobby, it's pretty

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



Check out that spiral staircase which leads to…

…a sweet rooftop jacuzzi

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

PROS:

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

CONS:

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

however

SECRETS:

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

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

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

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REVIEW: The W Scottsdale Hotel

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

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

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

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

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

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

PROS:

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

CONS:

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

SECRETS:

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

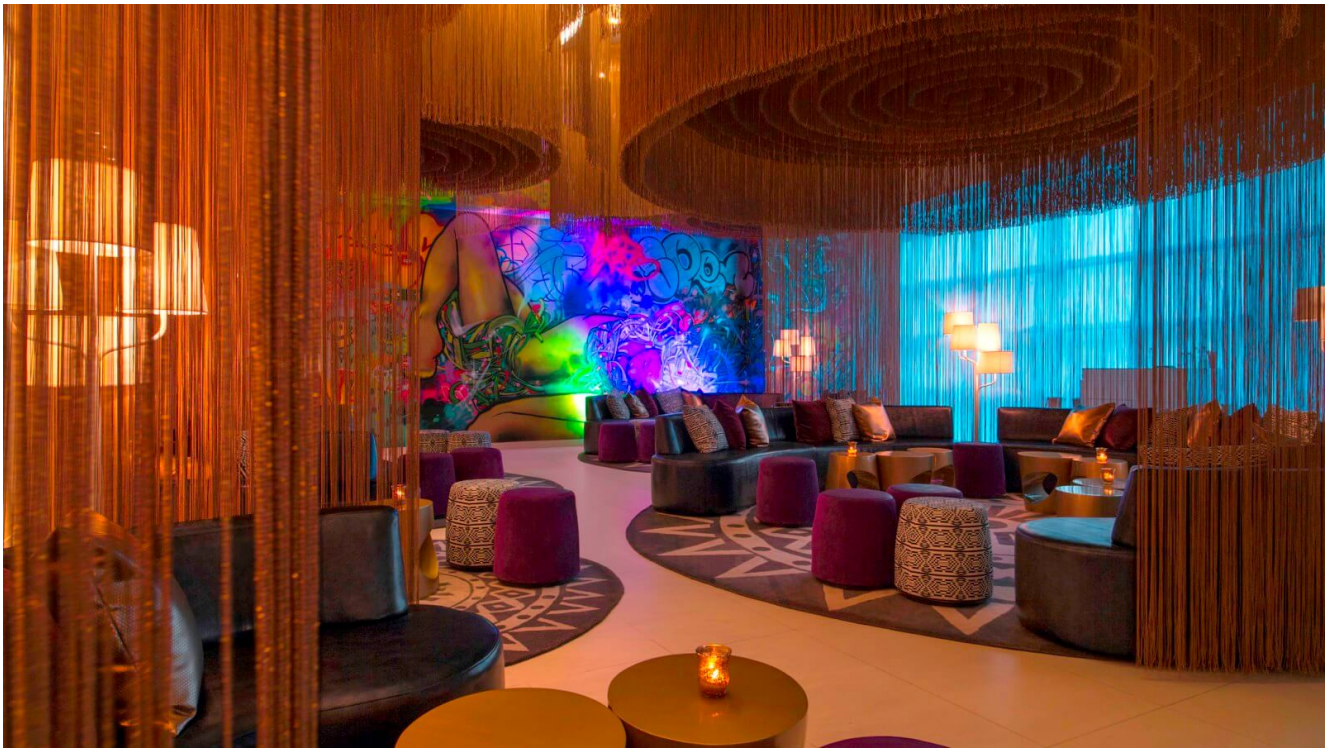
THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

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

REVIEW: W Bogota – It’s real Colombian here!

This has got to be one of the cooler W hotels in terms of design and style. Its a small one but its great location and great room rates make it a great home base if you find yourself in the city of Bogota.

What you immediately notice when you enter this property is the moodiness of the place. This is not unlike most W hotels which have slightly darker surroundings and evoke a sense of sensualness and mystery.

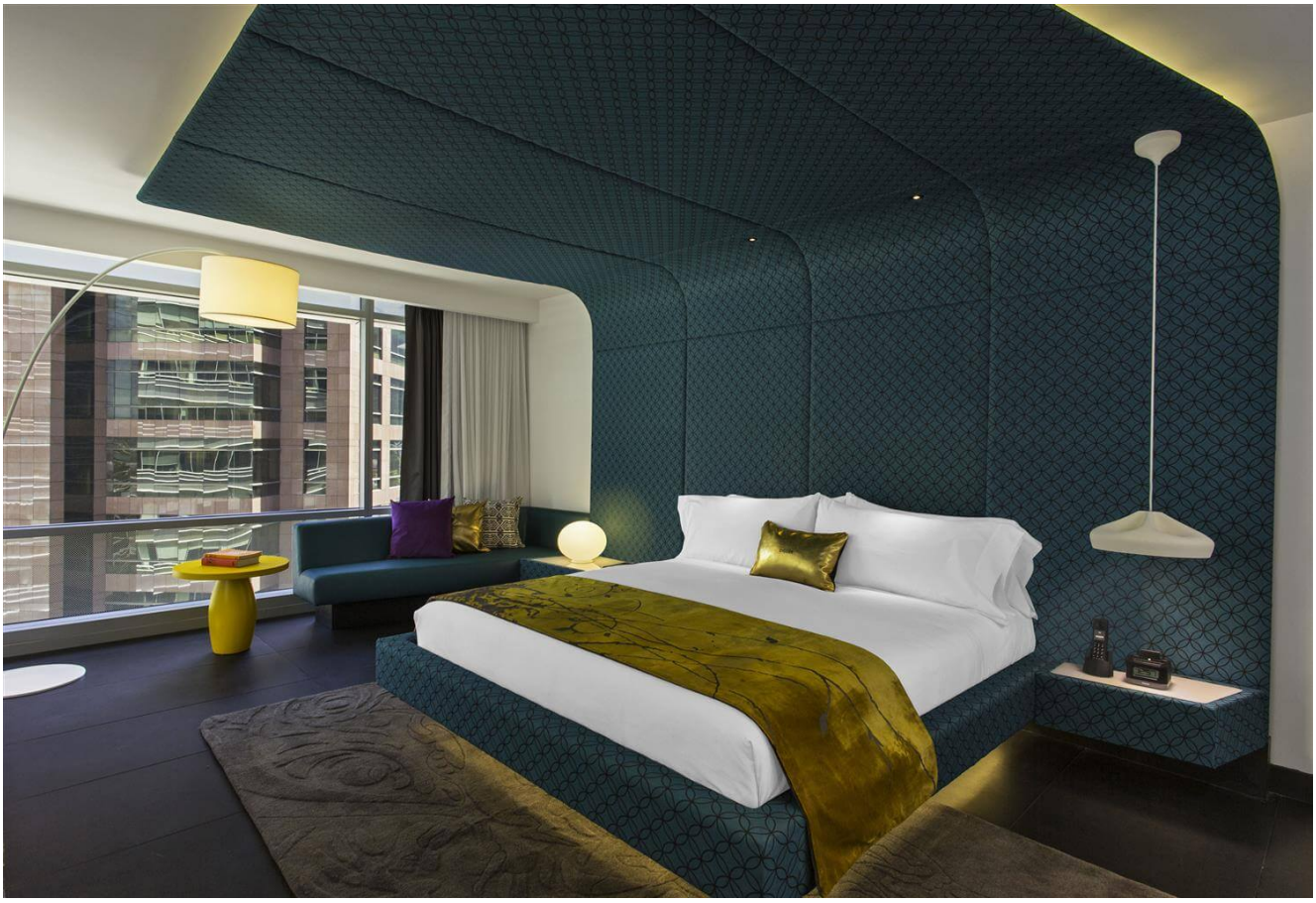


That’s one sexy lounge. It’s also a great place to hang out in before you head out for the night!

If you book early enough, check out the suites – they go for great prices, and they’re totally worth the price. For less than $200 I was able to get a suite with its own game room and pool table, and this was during peak holiday season!

The service was above average for a W hotel, they were extremely accommodating when we needed to check in early and even though the room wasn’t ready they gave us complimentary spa access in order for us to freshen ourselves from our journey.

The rooms themselves were in great condition as of this writing, and had a whimsical and charming quality to them. Especially awesome were the bathrooms, with LED lighting in the showers and gold fixtures that couldn’t help but remind me of something that would be in the infamous Pablo Escobar Mansion.



The gold touches really make this room pop visually. It’s got some of the most interesting contemporary furnishings i’ve ever seen in a room. Clean yet warm and inviting

Gold tiles, a gold shower, and gold fixtures. Remember, gold is best!

PROS:

- Its got a bathroom that stands out and makes you wanna smile
- The service is on par with some higher tier hotels
- The rates are phenomenal for the quality of hotel you are getting into

CONS:

- It’s a smaller property so it doesn’t have a grand feeling to it

SECRETS:

- They really appreciate SPG loyalty here so remember to use your SPG card if you have one. Also, they have a disproportionate amount of suites so it’s relatively easy to upgrade at the front desk, I highly recommend

trying that out if you didn’t book a suite ahead of time

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- You really should check out Tabula when you’re here. Anthony Bourdain recommends this restaurant and so do I.

The Best Credit Cards to get for travel

I know this subject has been covered by specific sites such as The Points Guy and Nerd Wallet but I wanted to throw my hat in the ring and give an opinion, as sometimes those sites are a bit biased due to their sponsorships and advertisements.
I have at one point or another owned almost every credit card related to rewards travel, but the picture above shows what’s currently in my wallet. I’ll let you know why I have each one in there and give you some secrets.

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

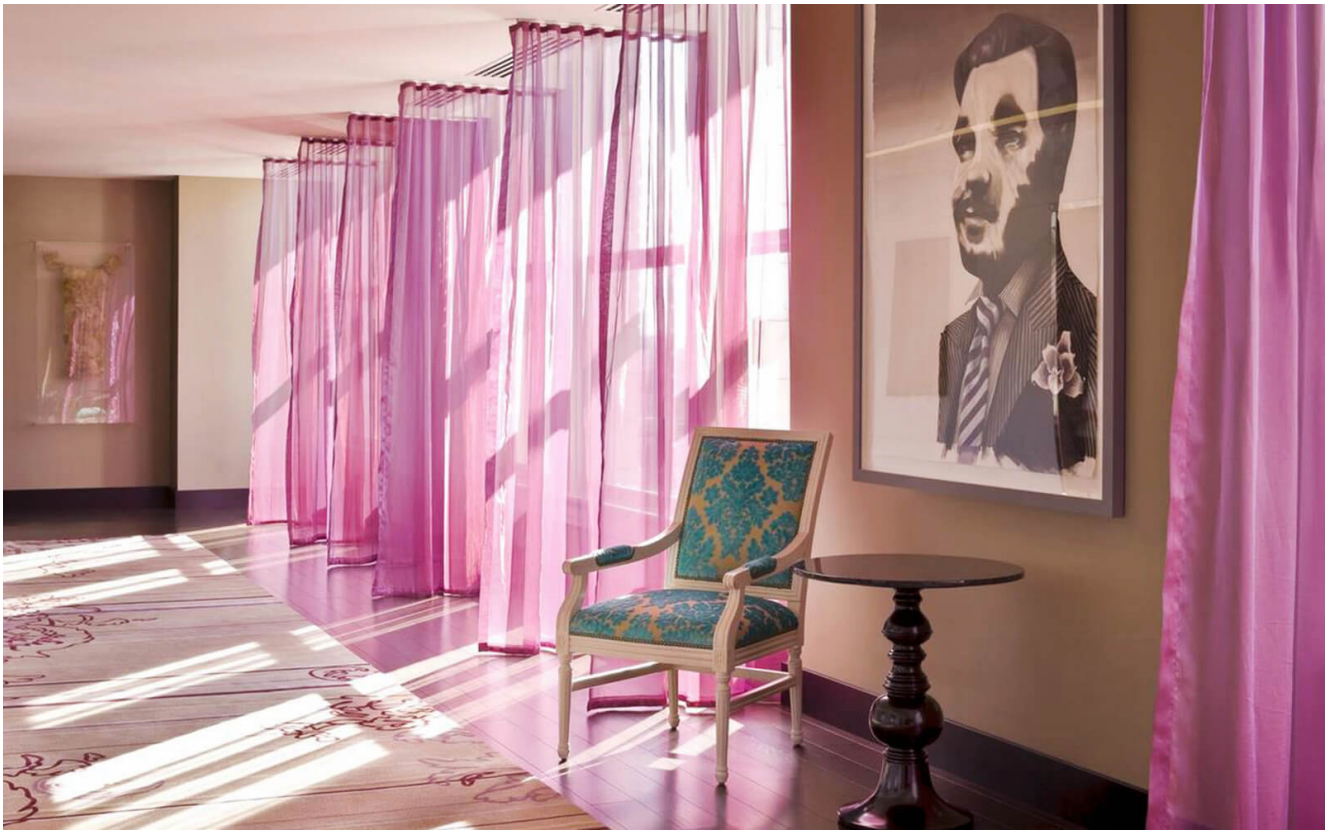
mediocre bathrooms.

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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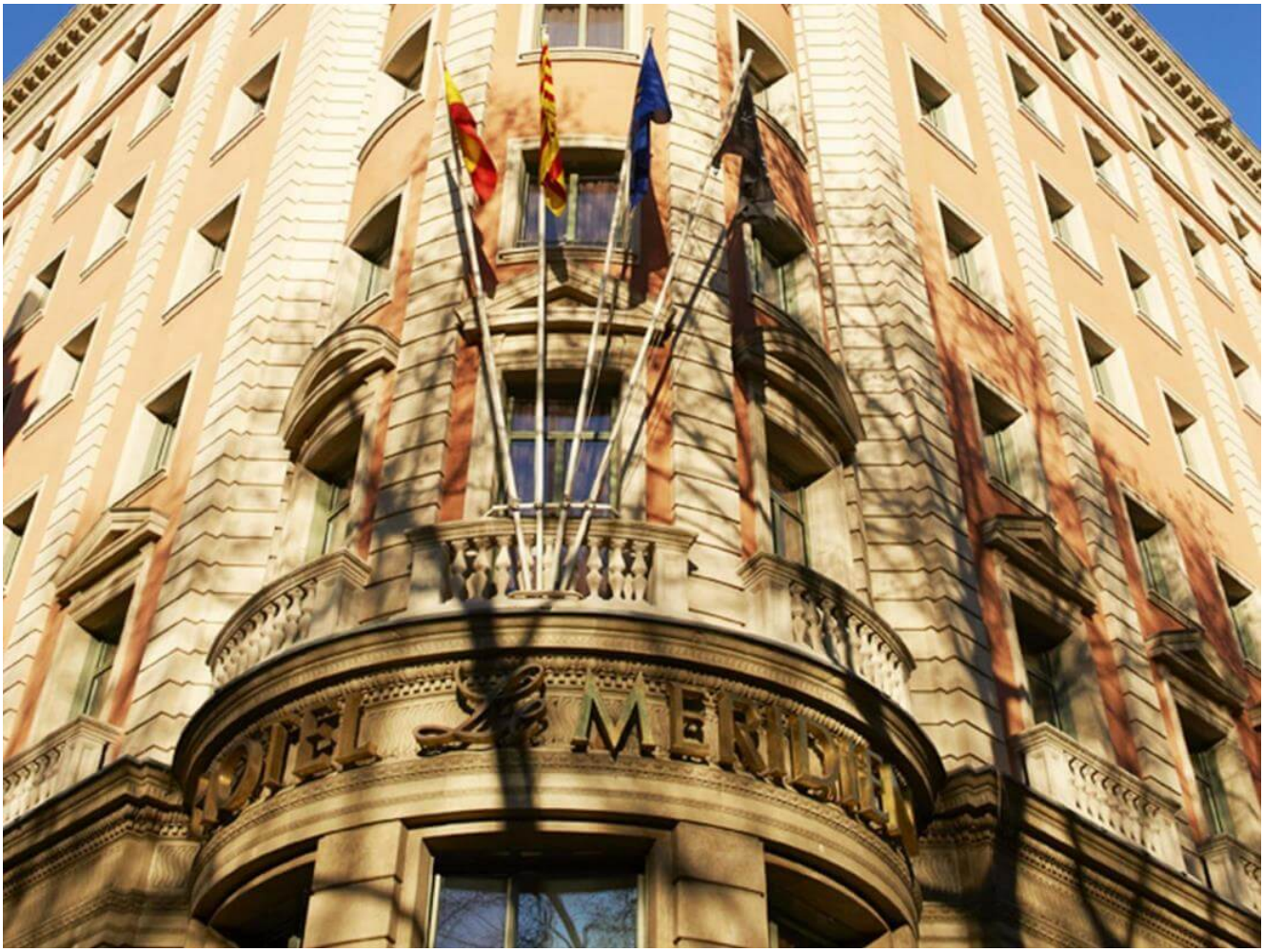
REVIEW: The Le Meridien Barcelona



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.

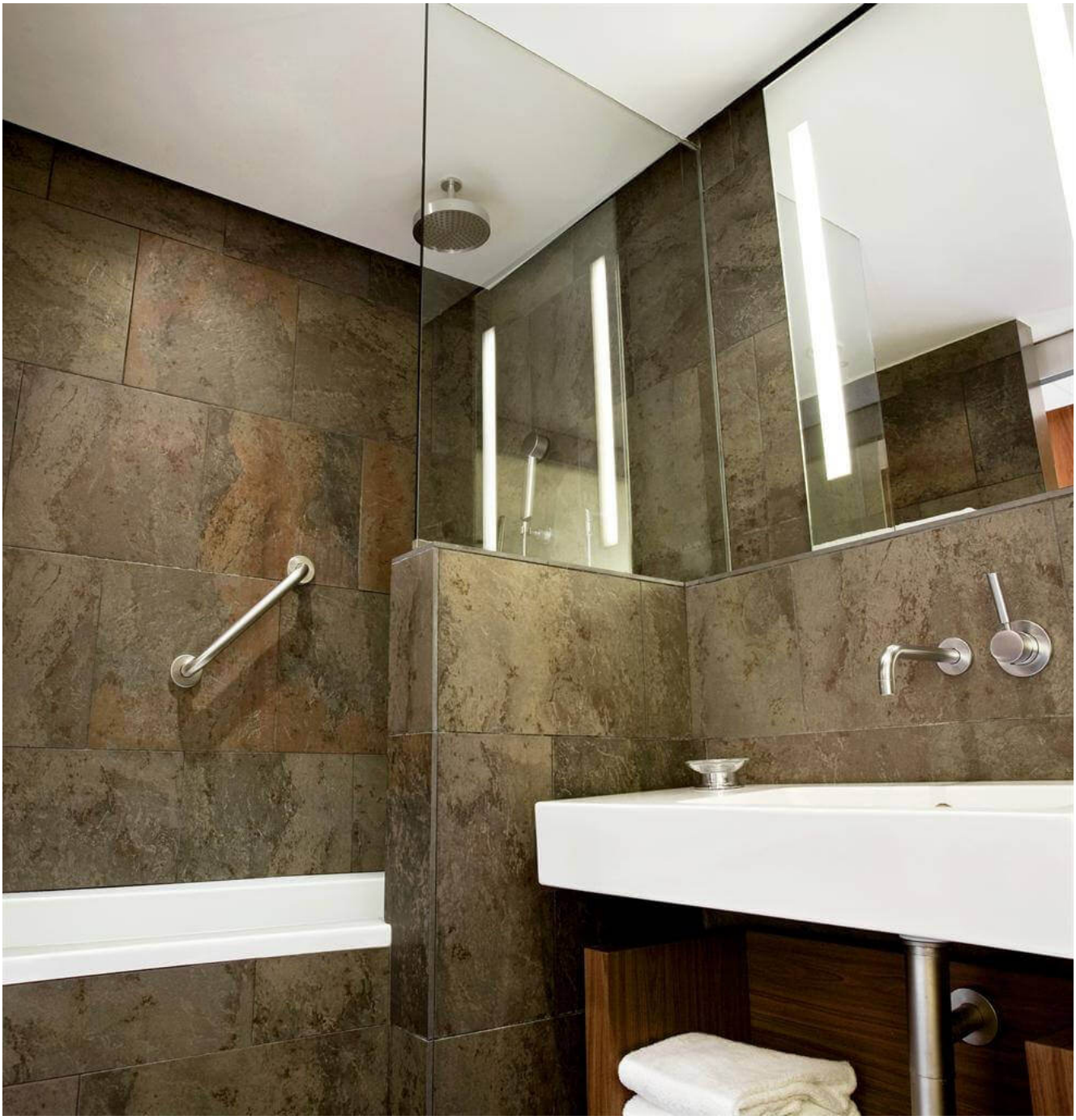
I chose this hotel for an extended stay in Barcelona, which resulted in me actually calling this place my home for a bit of time in late Fall a few years back. It is set in a very centralized part of Barcelona – right in the middle of Las Ramblas, which is essentially the main street in the city. This 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