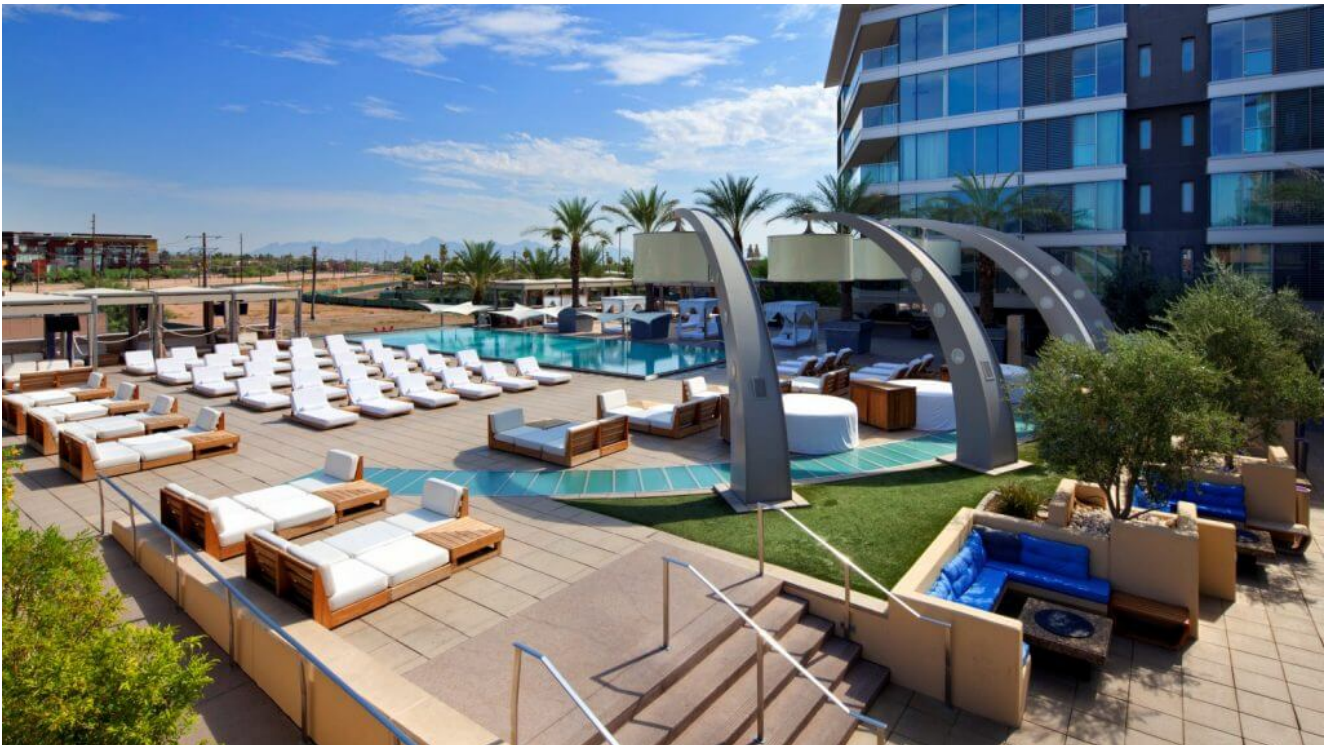


REVIEW: The W Scottsdale Hotel

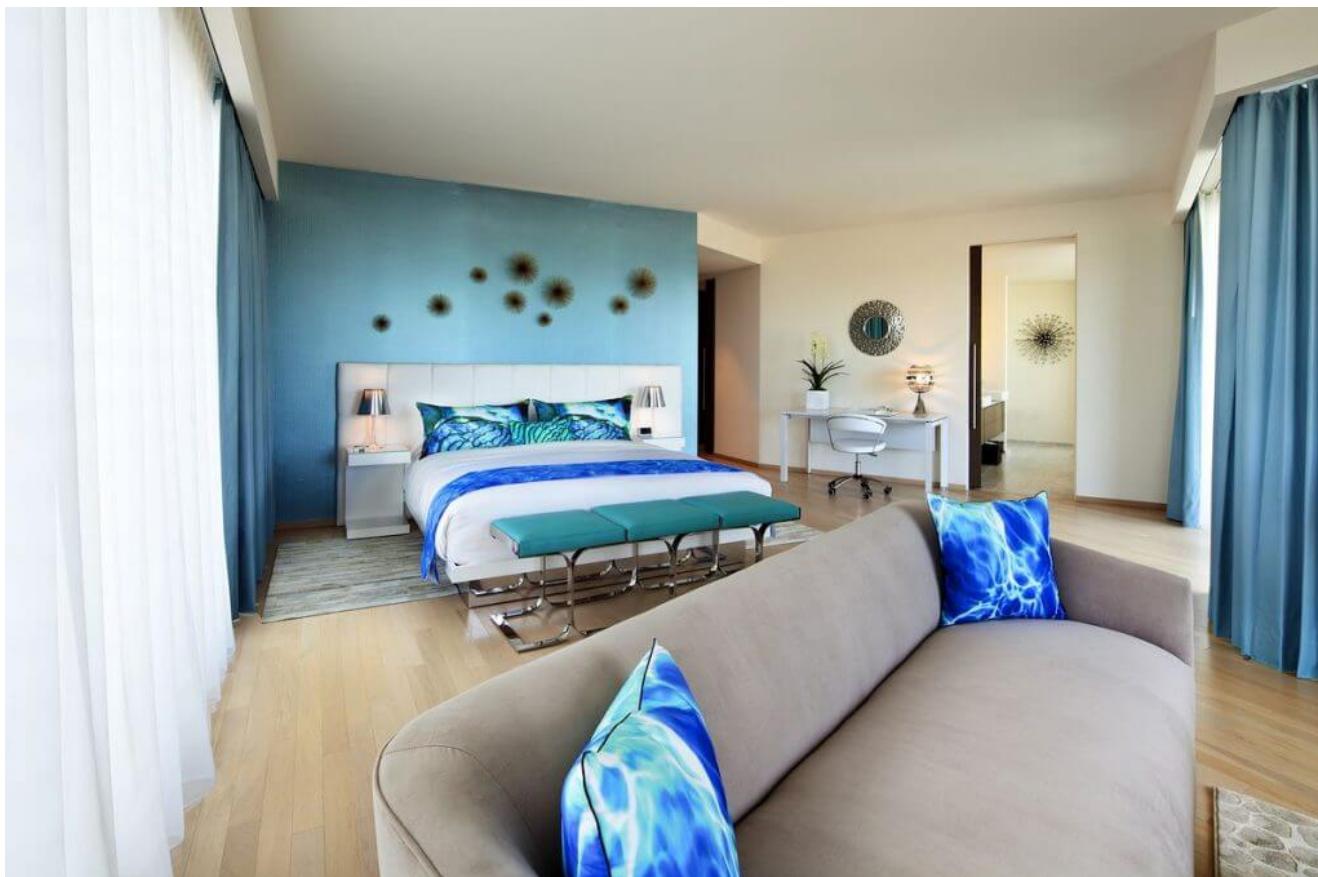
So I already wrote about one of my favorite hotel's in Scottsdale (you can read about it here), but the W is probably my second favorite and depending on my mood it sometimes comes in #1 as well (Variety and all that jazz).



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: Montage Laguna Beach



The Montage is one of those hotels I've grouped into "wedding hotels" of Laguna Beach – alongside the The Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel and the The Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point. They're all relatively close to each other, within a few miles, and they all have very similar features – grand entrances and public spaces, large pools with lots of chairs to lay out in, wedding-ready venues within the properties, and very similarly styled rooms that won't offend anyone.

These aren't the types of hotels I'd normally recommend when traveling – because I feel that there are so many different options out there to spend your money at and my personal preferences skew towards the unique. However, between the three I would recommend the Montage or the Ritz. Why you ask? The Montage and Ritz both have a bit more character than the Monarch Beach. They feel like they have a bit more soul and offer something slightly different than the standard large beachside resort. That being said, you really can't go wrong

with any one of these hotels.



My favorite part of the Montage is the restaurant there – The Studio

The best part of the Montage Laguna Beach is the separate standing restaurant the Studio. It's got incredible fare and the view during sunset is outstanding, if you stay at the Montage (or if you're around the Montage Laguna) I highly recommend visiting the Studio.

PROS:

- Grounds are incredibly beautiful, and the restaurant "The Studio" is a great place to check out
- Location is superb, within walking distance of Laguna Beach shops
- Service is impeccable, on par with the Ritz in Laguna and slightly better than the Monarch Beach

CONS:

- The decor, although classic, is slightly bland
- The pool area and cabanas can be pretty crowded on weekends when the hotel is full

SECRETS:

- Ask for a room further away from the lobby in order to gain more privacy. The hotel has some more secluded wings which are great for a romantic getaway

OTHER THINGS IN THE AREA:

- Who doesn't like ice cream? Or its Italian brethren – Gelato? One of my favorite spots down the street from the Montage is Gelato Paradiso. Take a walk, grab some ice cream, and enjoy the quaintness that is Laguna Beach

REVIEW: The Setai Miami



The Setai is quite a fancy place – this area outside of the main lobby is where they regularly hold bikini shows during swim week in Miami

This hotel was one of my first forays into luxury travel shortly after I made my first monies (I can't say money – I swear). Consequently, it holds a dear place in my heart, and I have been back many times since the hotel was first opened back in 2004. It's gone through quite a few owners and phases since, and I can't say that it's as great as it was back in 2004-2007 but it is still an amazing property and still ranks at the top of my list for quality of service and luxuriousness.

The first thing you notice when you enter the Setai is the very unique decor. This is because the builders were Indonesian and imported most of the materials from Southeast Asia, opting for teak from that region and exotic manta ray skins and handmade items imported specifically for the hotel from Indo, Philippines, and Malaysia.

The result is stunning, with a sexy Asian elegance that you won't find in many US based hotels other than a few select Mandarin Orientals (like the one in Vegas).

There are two distinct areas to the hotel, the standard hotel room side with its own lobby, and the suite towers which have their own entrance and smaller lobby.

The pool is also one of my favorite aspects of this hotel, with three pools each at a different temperature so that you can roam from one to the other based on your whim.



Three pools each with their own temperature

I highly recommend checking out the suite towers when you book, although they are not reasonably priced by a long shot, they're worthy of special occasions, and the corner units with their floor to ceiling glass walls and the height of the building (it's one of the tallest in South Beach) makes for spectacular views that you won't find anywhere else on Collins Ave.



The Asian theme is throughout, the rooms are relatively small by suite standards but the glass makes you forget about the size

Before the Fontainebleau was rebuilt, and the Soho Beach House was established this was always my first choice, but since those two have come into existence I only choose the Setai if there's a great deal to be had.

The service is bar-none though, and the concierge service is exquisite. However, since the changes in ownership some of the previous amenities have been deleted, including complimentary service in a fleet of Range Rover's and Rolls-Royces.

PROS:

- You can't beat the views here, it's one of the tallest buildings on South Beach
- The pools are spectacular, and if you want to relax in South Beach it really doesn't get better than this.

CONS:

- The price is pretty high even for a luxury hotel

- The service is not as good as it used to be, and they have deleted many amenities

SECRETS:

- Try out the Passion Fruit Martini, it's one of my favorite drinks ever, and i'm not into sweet drinks normally. It has a nice spicy kick to it!
- If you are trying to get a great rate, google "Setai Miami Rentals". The condo units owned here often have great rental rates, especially off-season



Order the Passion-Fruit Chili Martini (or two)

OTHER THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- I've mentioned some of these in my other post from South Beach here