REVIEW: The Thompson in Seattle

Seattle has seen an arrival of quite a few new hotels in the past few years.

The conflux of fresh restaurants, retail shops, and convention spaces has led to the need for greater capacity. The Thompson is one of those new hotels, and those of you who have been to Los Angeles or New York will probably recognize the boutique chain, known for the famous Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood. The style is modern and hip, with a bit of art deco thrown in.

The hotel itself is centrally located next to the historic waterfront quarter of Downtown Seattle. It’s part of an entire “Condotel” complex, which includes residential units alongside hotel units. The lobby itself is a cozy affair, with a sitting room right next to the check-in desk. There is also an expansive restaurant in the lobby which makes incredible cocktails and serves a great Sunday Brunch.

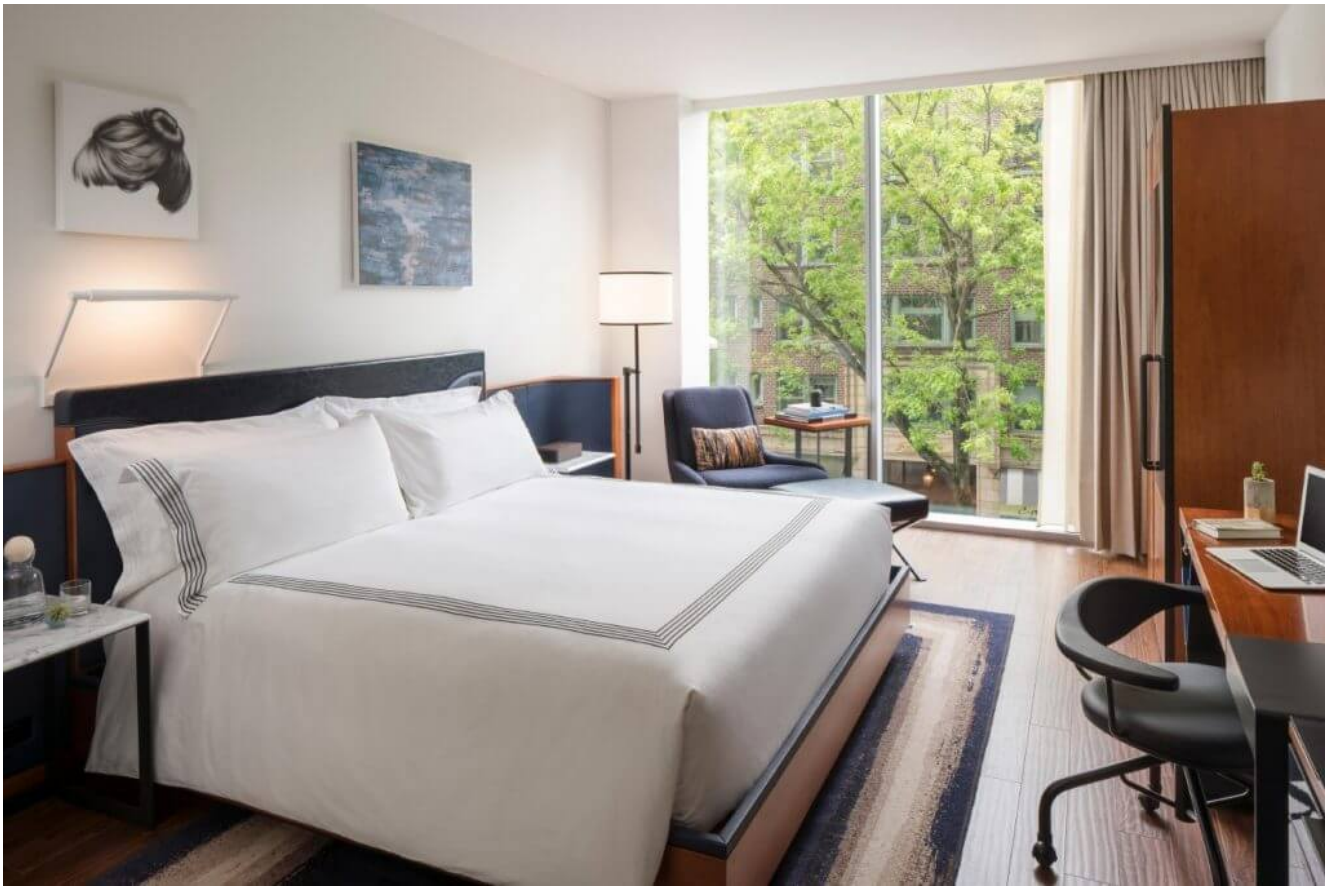


It’s a cozy lobby, which feels nice and homey in (sometimes) overcast Seattle

The rooms are well designed, albeit with cold bathroom surfaces, and the modern design has enough character to distinguish itself from the other bread and butter hotels such as the Hyatt or Westin.



It’s a nice bathroom, but a bit cold – especially in a city like Seattle



The rooms themselves are warm though…

Unfortunately, because of the location of the hotel, most of the rooms don't have views. There are obstructions on all sides unless you are on one of the higher floors, and this makes for a hard time when choosing a room at the property.

The service is also suffering, with staff that mean well, but appear to be new and not well versed (at the time of this writing in December 2016). I'm sure this will change as the hotel gets a bit more traffic.

The pinnacle of the property is NEST which boasts itself as the highest rooftop bar and lounge in Seattle. The views are outstanding up top, but the space is small, with half of it dedicated to an outdoor patio which is unusable most of the year.

Overall, I would recommend this property if you are looking for something hip and unique in Downtown Seattle. However, if you prefer a more seasoned hotel staff and consistent service,

I would recommend the Grand Hyatt, the W Seattle, or the Four Seasons.

PROS:

- New Rooms, you can still smell the fresh paint (December 2016 writing)
- Rooftop views from Nest are incredible and it’s a great place to hang
- Great food at the lobby restaurant – especially for Brunch

CONS:

- Staff are warm and hospitable, but seem to lack the experience and knowledge of more seasoned staff at other local hotels
- The bathrooms are very cold and sterile – albeit very cool to look

SECRETS:

- Nest is often booked for private events so be sure to check ahead of time before going upstairs or even booking a reservation at the hotel. This is one of the primary reasons to stay her and you want to make sure you get to experience it!

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Check out the BEST clam chowder in the US at Pikes Place Chowder which is just down the street
- There is an oyster reverse happy hour also nearby at Elliots Oyster House and it is exquisite if you love Oysters. Their selection and freshness can’t be beat almost anywhere else in the country.

REVIEW: The Modern Honolulu

This hotel is pretty unique in its own right, because if I were to drop you off here and you took a quick look around you'd probably think you were in Ibiza, or Miami, or somewhere else a bit hipper or party-oriented.

The Modern Honolulu is truly one of the only contemporary art-deco-esque hotels you can stay at in Hawaii, not just Honolulu, but at any of the islands (save maybe the Andaz Maui).

The hotel is a small one by Hawaii standards, with "only" 352 rooms. They're all beautifully decorated, however, with white contemporary furniture and artwork reminiscent of of 90's Miami. The common spaces, however, are what really make this hotel one of my favorites in Oahu.



Check out that awesome lobby. That bookcase opens and closes too!

The lobby hosts some really cool cocktail parties during the weekends, and the pool is a teak affair which makes you feel like you’re lounging on a very nice yacht.



Check out that pool deck. Got Teak?

Many people make the mistake of booking a hotel on Oahu on the beach, but that’s not why you visit Oahu. Sure, there are beautiful stretches on the North shore, near Hanauma bay, and even in Waikiki, but you visit Oahu because you want to take in the culture of Hawaiian living, the incredible cuisine, and because you want to mingle and socialize in paradise. Leave the beach time to places like Maui, the Big Island, and Kauai.



If you read the name of the hotel you'd know what you were to find in the rooms

Did I mention that the service is also impeccable at this property? The staff was willing to help in any way possible at all times, and they did an incredible job making sure my party and I were well taken care of.

PROS:

- The only option on the island for a modern hotel
- Amazing pool area with teak wood decks and a great view
- The service is top notch

CONS:

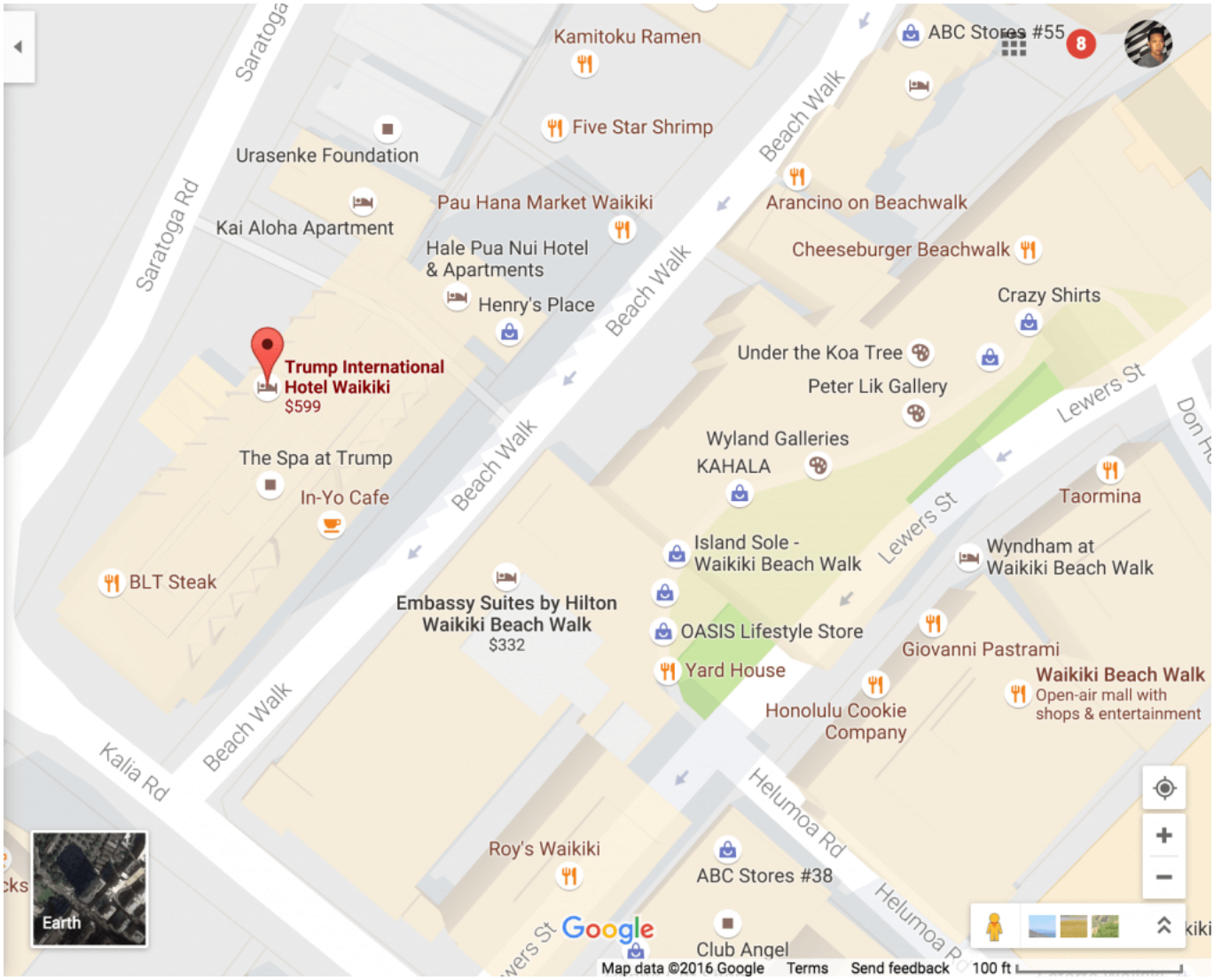
- There's no beachfront, but I don't consider this that necessary at a hotel on Oahu

SECRETS:

- The pool chairs get taken up pretty quickly, so I highly recommend calling ahead to reserve them, this is rare that a hotel lets you do that.

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Food trucks in Oahu are huge, especially the well known shrimp truck – Giovannis. However, you can avoid the long drive and the line if you go to this little known food truck area in Waikiki right behind the Trump hotel. See the map below where it says Five Star Shrimp (north middle side of the map)



REVIEW: The London Hotel in New York Is Just Plain Awesome

Lets just start by saying that there are a LOT of hotels in New York, just as there are a lot of people/restaurants/cars/pick your item here. I've managed to stay in approximately a dozen different ones but always seem to come back to the same handful. The London in New York is in that handful.



The London's signature entrance, you go to enough of these around the world and you know what you're gonna walk into

What makes this hotel unique amongst the sea of possibilities really is the simplicity of it. You know you'll get modern accommodations, great service, and no frills. Some might call it austere, but I call it New York. Most of the times you choose a hotel in NY based on where in town you want to be.

This one is great if you're spending time uptown or midtown. Its prime location near MOMA, Times Square, and Central Park make it a holiday time favorite of mine.



The lobby is classic black and white, timeless and elegant

What I love the most about the London, though, are the views. It's one of the tallest buildings in midtown, and with that comes some pretty epic straightline views all across the city. Make sure to ask for the highest room possible when staying here. The rooms themselves have these beautiful aged wood floors, and simple modern furnishings. I wouldn't call this the plushiest hotel, but the simplicity of it sits well in my book.



The views. That’s the best part of this hotel by far

PROS:

- The Epic views
- The location puts you in midtown without putting you next to Times Square
- Did I mention the views?

CONS:

- Not a lot of frills at this hotel, what you see is what you get

SECRETS:

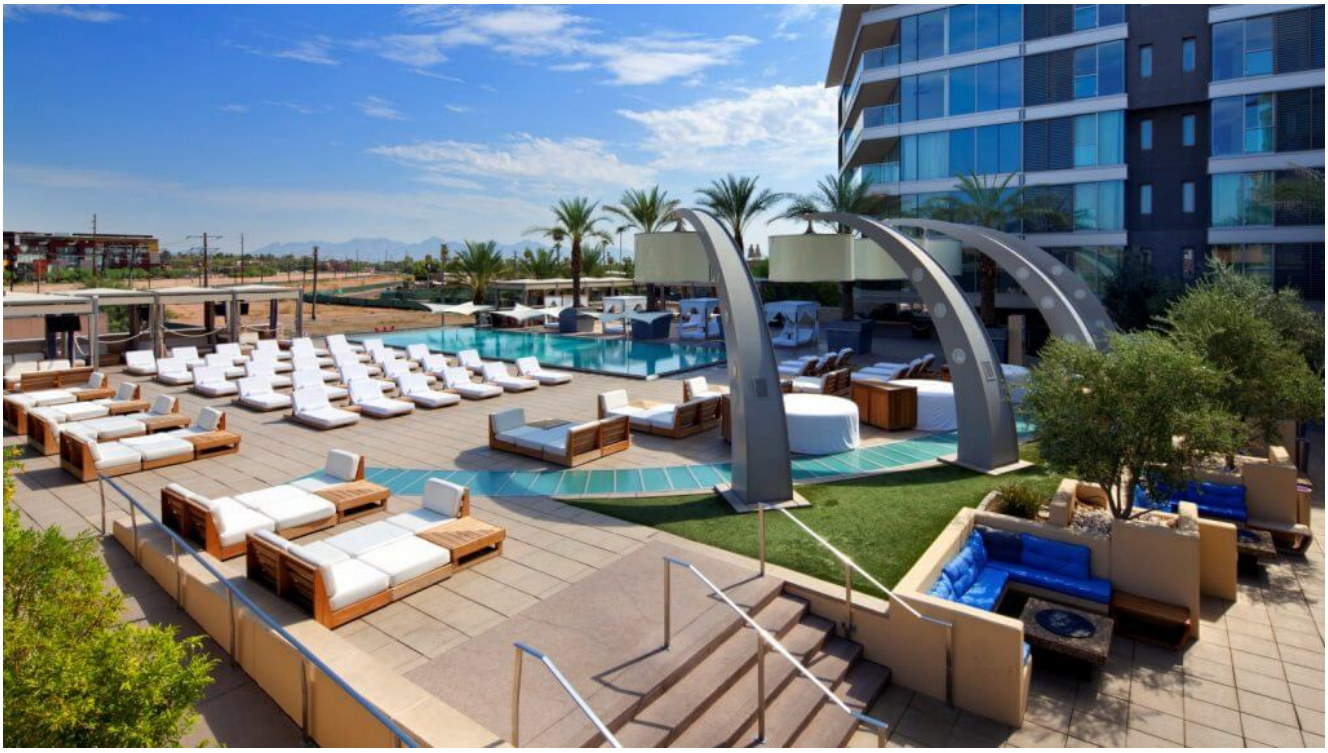
- The best views IMO are of Central Park so look for that north facing room if you can!

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- There’s too many things to mention in NYC, but one of my first stops is always one of the MomoFuku chain of restaurants.

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).

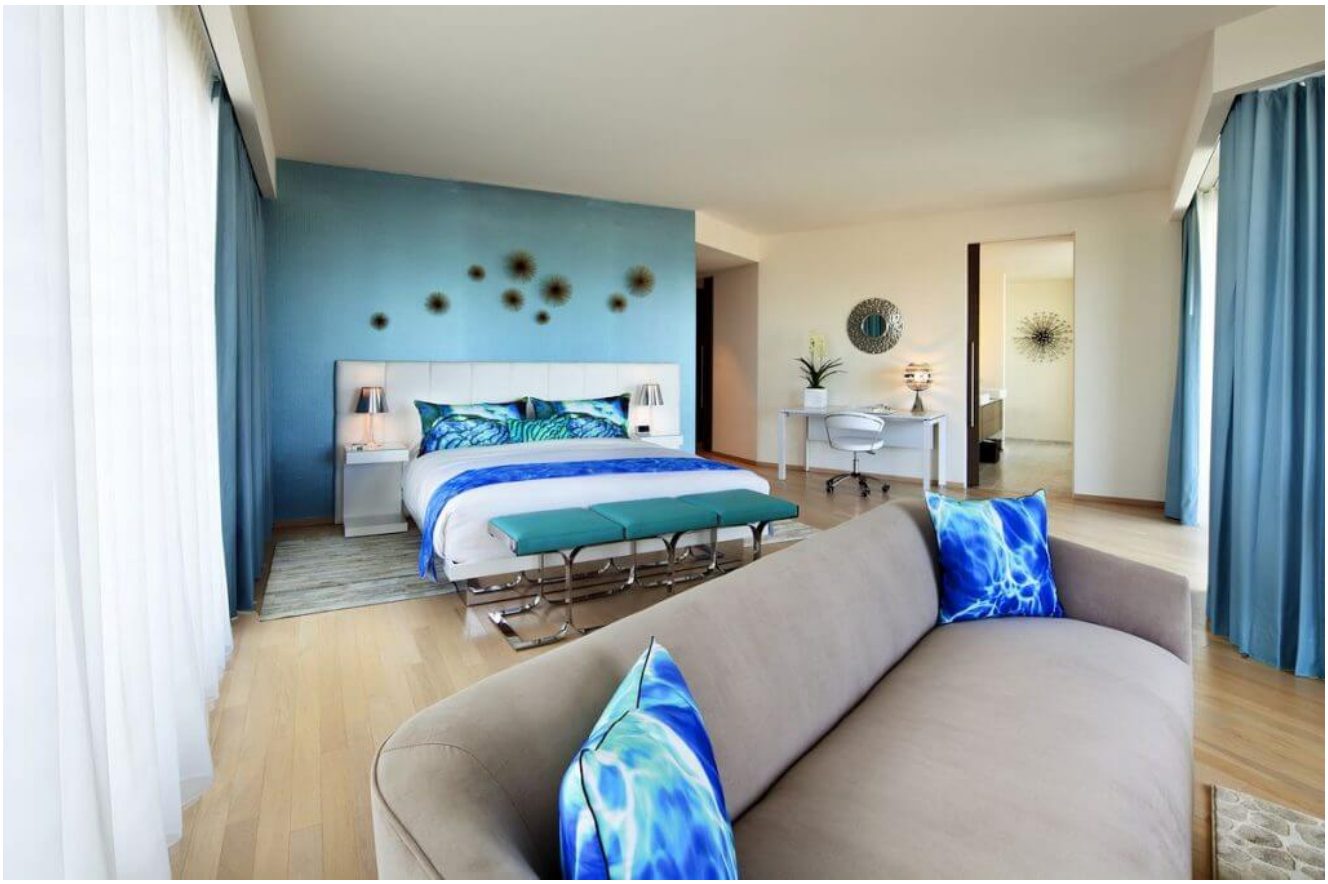


Probably the #1 reason why I like the W in Scottsdale – its pool – and let's not forget, it's always hot in Scottsdale so this is of prime importance.

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: The Hotel Del Coronado

The Hotel Del Coronado is a hotel that holds a special place in my heart. Having grown up in Southern California, my family spent many summers down in San Diego, and one of the go-to spots that we would always visit was the Hotel Del Coronado. It was always the family tradition to spend some

time on the beach in front of the Hotel Del and to grab one of their juicy burgers while watching the sun set over the Pacific.

However, it was NEVER a family tradition to *stay* at the Hotel Del Coronado. Why? Because the rooms were either in the old "Victorian" tower and old and stuffy, or they were in the "newer" tower which was just not quite as nice as the Loews Coronado Resort.

Everything else about the property was exquisite – the public spaces had an old school elegance, the elevator harkens back to the 1800's with manual controls, and the ballroom is a sight to behold by itself, but we never chose to actually stay in the rooms at the Hotel Del.

This changed recently, because as of 2014, a major renovation was completed at the Hotel Del Coronado. The rooms in both towers have received significant changes, and the public spaces have been refreshed, with special care taken to preserve the national treasure that the hotel actually is (it's a historic site – and yes, some swear it's haunted ;).



One of the renovated rooms at the Hotel Del Coronado – I can now highly recommend it!



The Thanksgiving dinner at the ballroom is exquisite and HIGHLY recommended

The best part of the Hotel Del Coronado is that it embodies the beachy California vacation vibe that so many try to replicate but very few actually achieve. It also has so much history to it that it's practically a given that should a president or governmental figure visit San Diego they stay at the Hotel Del Coronado.

Service is also incredible at the Hotel Del, but it's much better if you choose to stay in the Victorian historic side of the hotel, this is something I highly recommend doing – especially post-renovation.

If you do visit the Hotel Del, be sure to visit the underground gallery and marvel at the history of the place –

it’s all setup in a mini-museum type setting. All in all, I am happy to now be able to recommend the Hotel Del Coronado as a prime property that everyone should stay at if they visit Coronado island.



Get your burgers at the pool and just marvel at the great weather and the historic beauty of the Del

PROS:

- Location wise, the Hotel Del Coronado is the best place to be on Coronado Island, the nearest competition is the Loews and it’s located in a more rural area down the

peninsula
- The hotel has so much character, it’s not just another cookie cutter resort

CONS:

- The service could be slightly better, it’s not bad by any means but it doesn’t necessarily reach the levels of smaller Ritz properties or the Mandarin Oriental’s standards
- The pool is a bit small and has very little seating

SECRETS:

- Try brunch at the ballroom, its better food than the rest of the restaurants, and the environment is stunning

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Rent a surrey (four person bike) and just ride around Coronado island. It’s a great way to spend the day and enjoy the beauty of the island, the greenery of the golf course on Coronado, and to check out all the little shops around the peninsula

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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

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REVIEW: Rosewood London (It's pretty awesome)

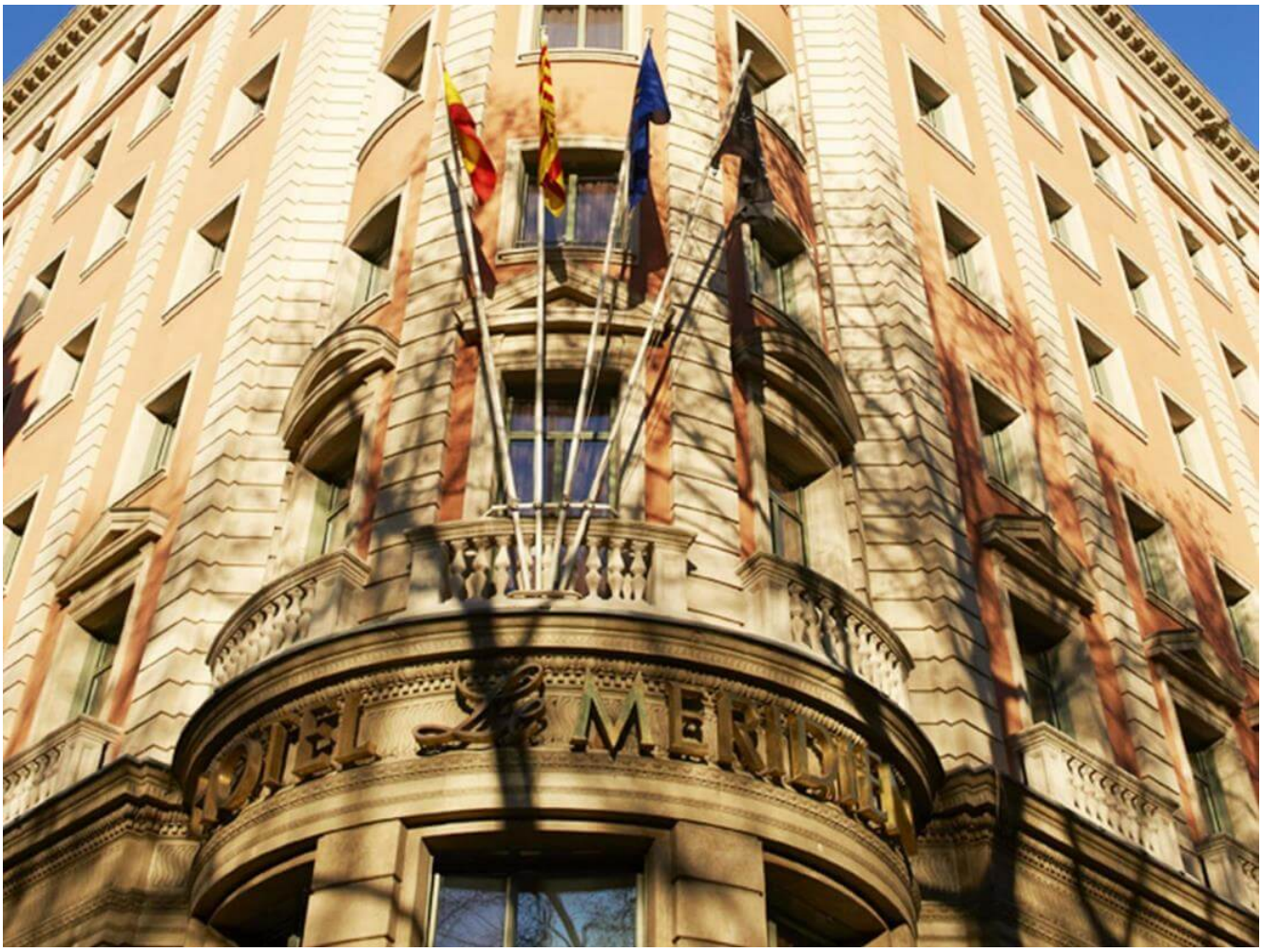
This hotel is one that makes an immediate impression on you the minute you walk through the double gates.

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 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: 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: The Four Seasons in Seattle



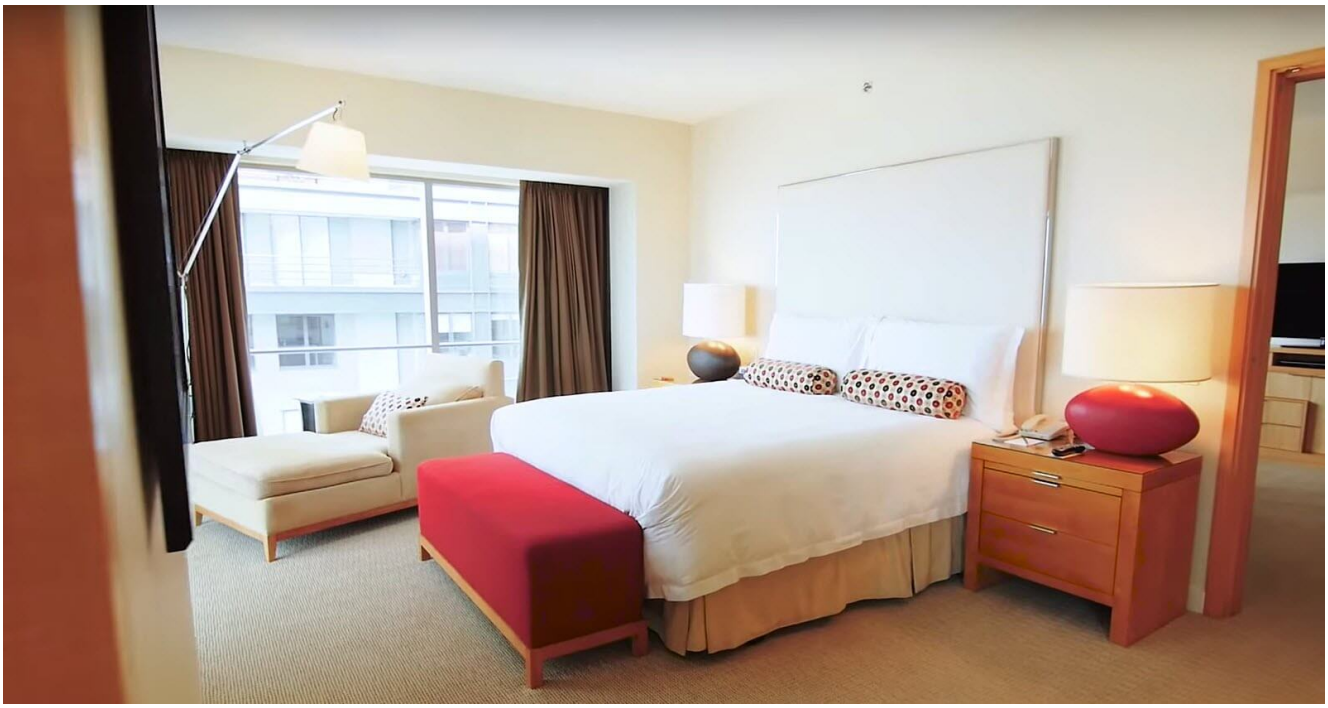
Seattle is one of those destinations that everyone should visit once in their lives. It’s a unique combination of city and forest, set amongst dozens of lakes and rivers and

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.

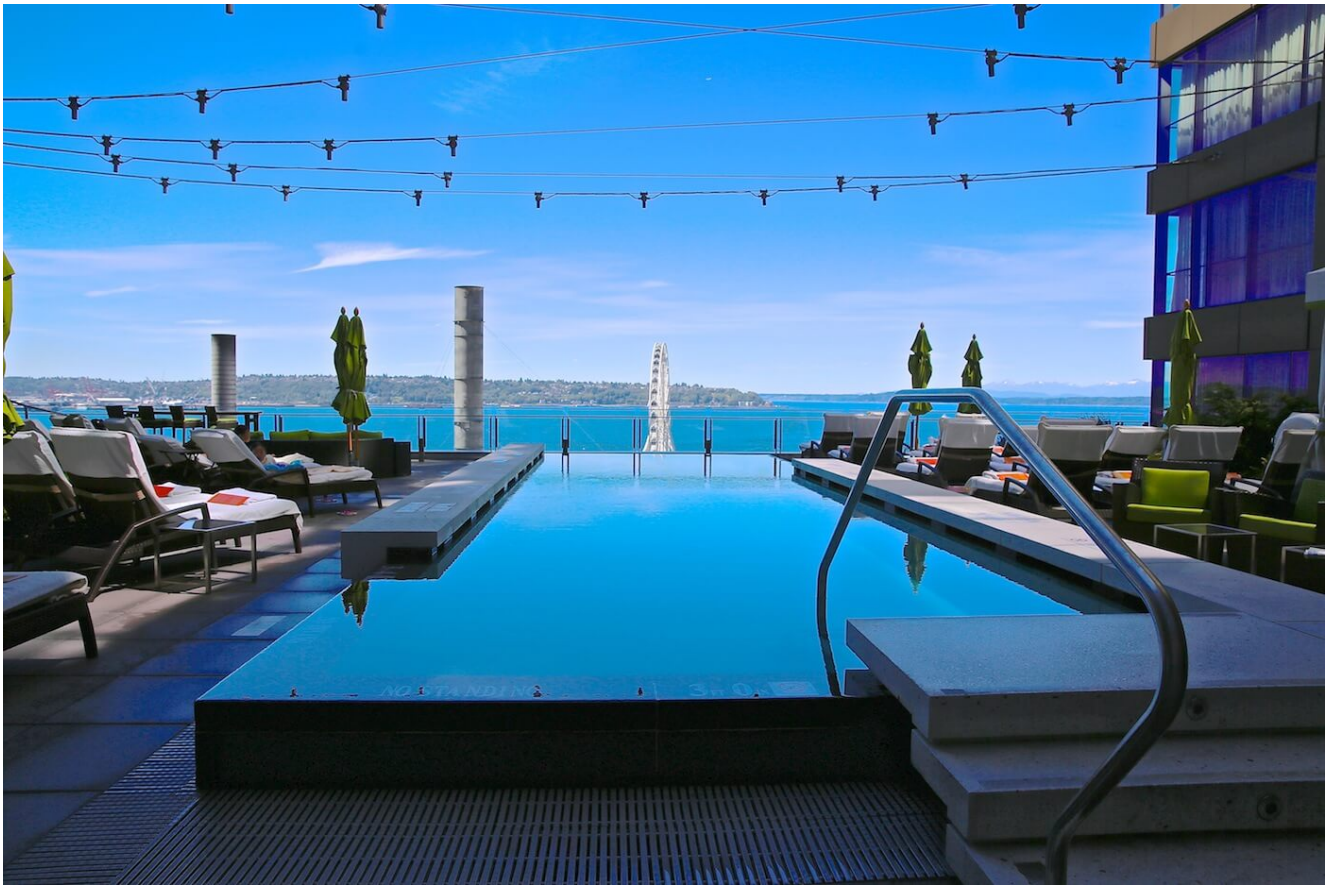
The rooms themselves are relatively plain and very Pacific Northwest with light woods and simplistic clean lines throughout.



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

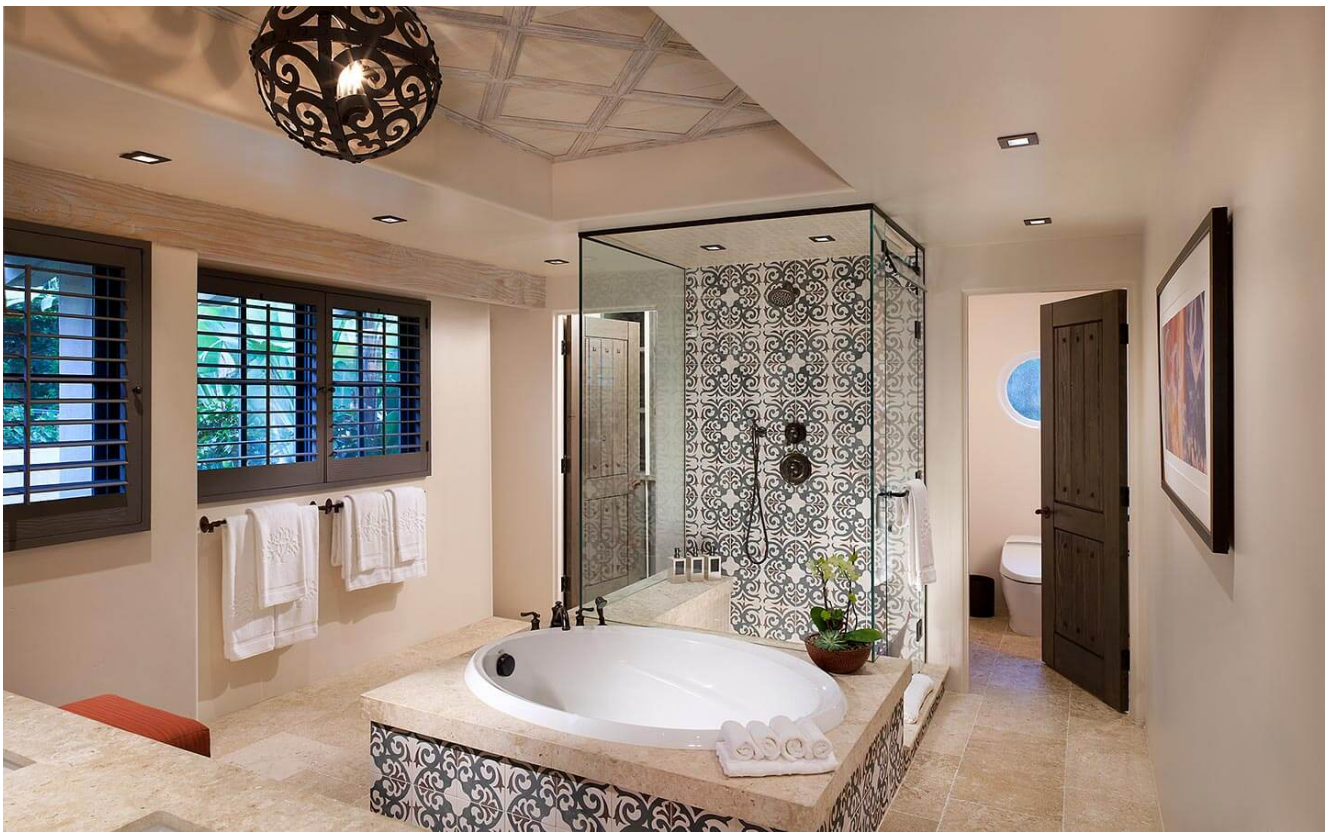
beautiful rooms – each one is considered a mini casa or “Casita” as they call them.



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.