

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 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

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.

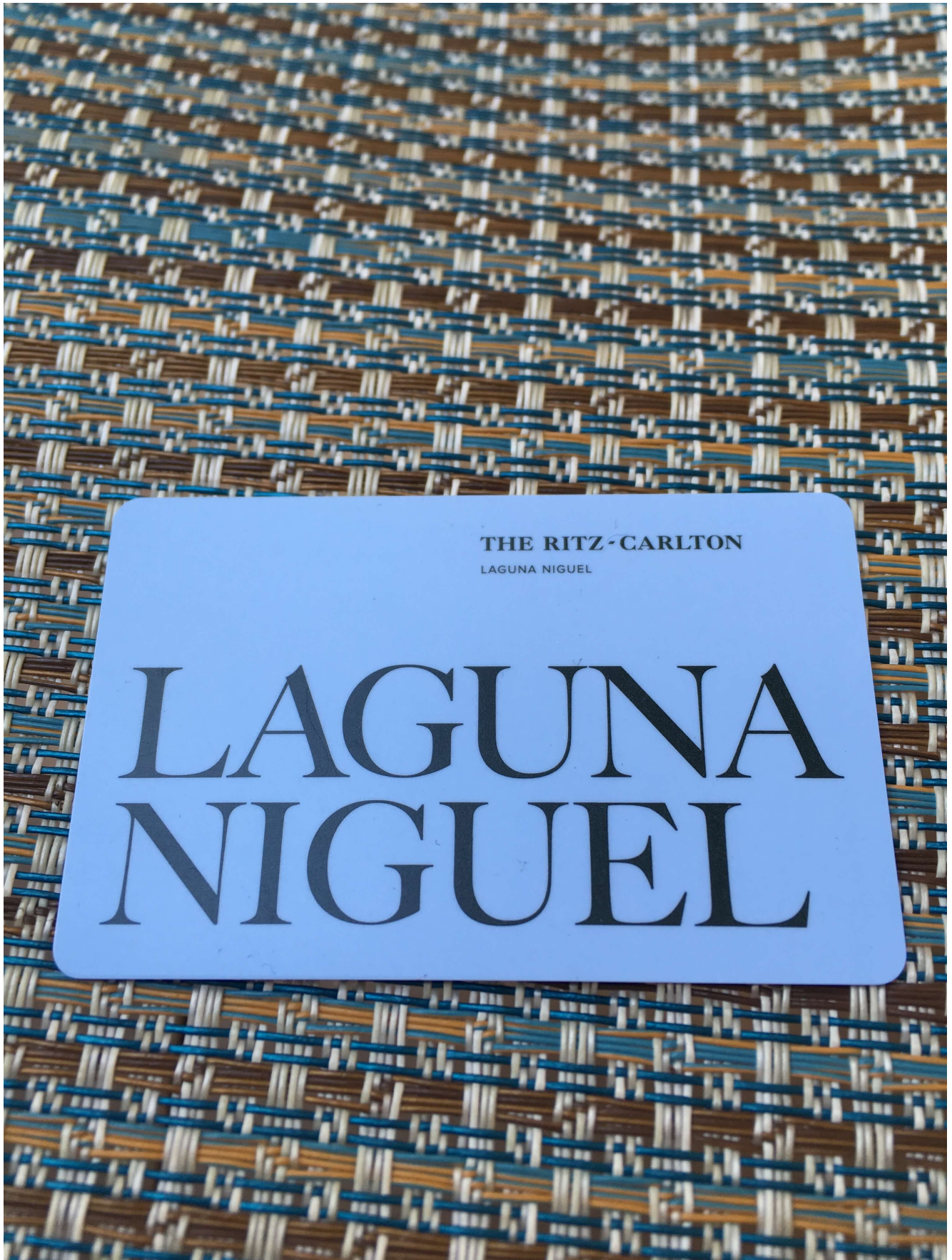
There's usually lots planned and it's a smart move to book your stay around special events to take advantage of them

- 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 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.
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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).