

Best Hotels

in the

World

By Jeremy Murphy with additional reporting by Mona Buchler

For six years now, *Simply the Best* has brought you the very finest in upscale travel—the coolest hotels, the hottest resorts, the most luxurious B&Bs. We spend a full calendar year scouring the country to bring you our picks for the top places to stay, whether it be for vacation, wedding, reunion or business travel. We've included more than 100 destinations on our list over the years, and are always on the hunt for more.

And this year, boy did we hit the jackpot! By opening our list to the world, we've found more than a dozen international destinations sure to tickle your fancy, from Europe to Asia to South America and beyond. Of course, we haven't given up rating U.S. hotels—we've just raised the bar to make our rankings that more competitive.

In the end, it's all about the experience, and that's what *Simply the Best's* in house Travel Snob, Jeremy Murphy was looking for as he spent the better part of 2006 and 2007 circling the globe in his quest to survey the world's top destinations. Here are his top selections.



The George V, PARIS A Four Seasons Hotel

It's been whispered (if you count *Conde Nast Traveler* whispering) that the George V is the world's finest hotel. After a few nights you'll see why. Featuring a prime location (steps away from the Champs Elysées, the Arc De Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower), lush décor (17th-century Flanders and Aubusson tapestries, marble floors, inlaid wood furniture, crystal chandeliers and 19th-century sculptures and paintings), private terraces and a world-famous art-muraled indoor pool, The George V Paris is as pristine as any hotel in Paris. Where it excels is its service—you simply won't find any better, anytime, anywhere. The pampering knows no bounds. Witness the front desk staff walking you to your room ... the chamber maids whispering "*bon soir*" as you head in for the night, only to find your slippers laid out for you on the floor and the remote control tucked into the bed (next to the chocolates). While mom and dad indulge in his and her spa treatments (go for the Vodka massage), or upscale shopping, the kids can hang with George the Four Season Frog, whose repartee includes French lessons, Paris trivia and etiquette classes. The George V is pure heaven.

Hotel deCrillon PARIS

In Paris, it's said there are five palace hotels, and sitting atop the list is the famed Hotel de Crillon. The historic property, commissioned in 1758 by Louis XV as a private home (it later became the residence of the Count de Crillon), was magically transformed in 1909 into a five star hotel, and it's remained one of Paris' true gems ever since. The 103-room property, which boasts the Place de Concorde as its setting, just oozes opulence from the minute you enter, but is never ostentatious. Whether it's gorgeous Baccarat chandeliers, silk draperies, Aubusson rugs, polished marble or Wedgwood medallions, you'll feel like royalty at this spectacular hotel, where service is top notch and the setting sublime. And its proximity (as in, behind the street) to the Rue du Faubourg St. Honore, where you can blow your kid's trust fund on custom made horse saddles from Hermes and \$1,000 Chanel sunglasses, will make your stay all the more with it! Hey, it's good enough for Madonna (and Bill Clinton, Liz Taylor, Lance Armstrong ...), heck, even the Dali Lama has nothing bad to say about this place, and we all know what a trash talker he is.

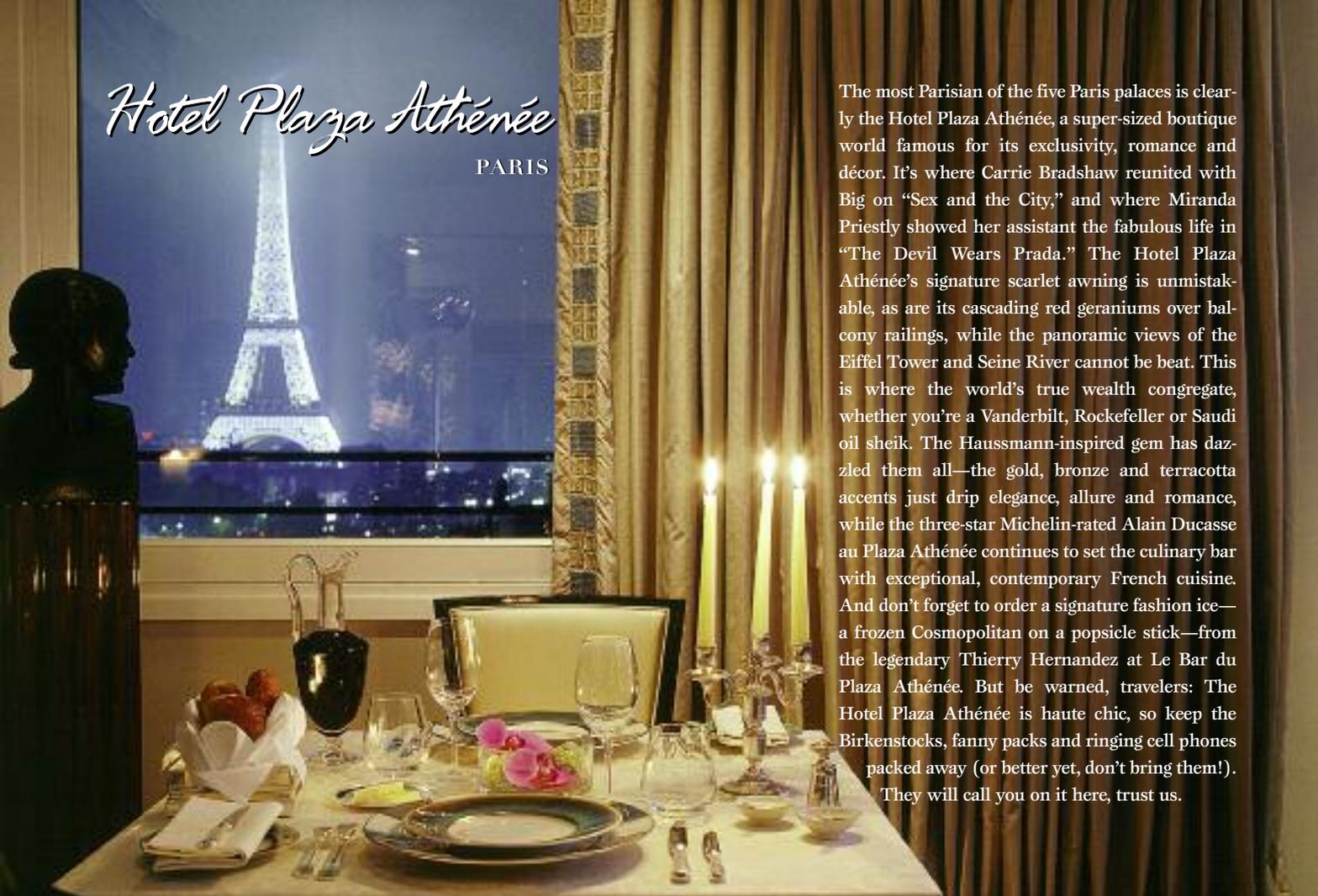


The Ritz Paris PARIS

The most iconic hotel in all Paris is also the world's most famous: The legendary Ritz Paris has hosted them all—from celebrities to royalty to heads of state. Located off Paris' most fashionable address, the historic Place Vendôme square, Cesar Ritz's masterpiece is the epitome of first class travel, boasting everything from Louis XIV and XV reproductions to museum-worthy antiques, marble fireplaces, big brass beds, and massive marble baths (rumor has it that fatty Edward VII once got stuck in the tub with his lover—ever since the tubs have been roomy). It's represented the pinnacle of luxury since it opened its doors in 1898, attracting everyone from Coco Chanel (who lived there during WWII) to Winston Churchill, and most recently setting for scenes in "The DaVinci Code." Aside from its luxurious trappings, The Ritz Paris is also home to the world's best watering hole—Bar Hemingway, whose namesake lived in the hotel during his Parisian adventures, and celebrated the liberation of France during WWII with a round of dry martinis. Today, bartender Colin Field keeps the taps running, and is always good for some Ritz Paris lore. P.S.: order the Vesper Lynd martini, shaken, not stirred.

Hotel Plaza Athénée

PARIS

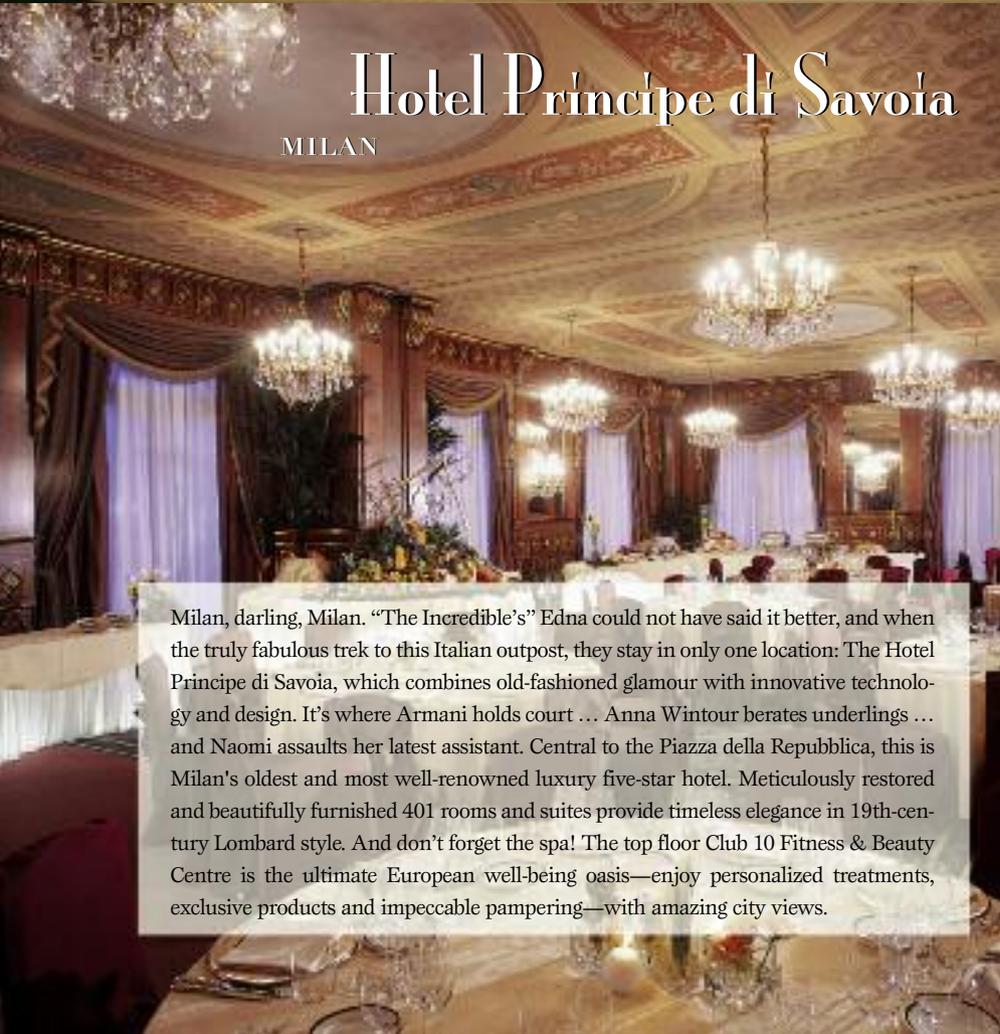


The most Parisian of the five Paris palaces is clearly the Hotel Plaza Athénée, a super-sized boutique world famous for its exclusivity, romance and décor. It's where Carrie Bradshaw reunited with Big on "Sex and the City," and where Miranda Priestly showed her assistant the fabulous life in "The Devil Wears Prada." The Hotel Plaza Athénée's signature scarlet awning is unmistakable, as are its cascading red geraniums over balcony railings, while the panoramic views of the Eiffel Tower and Seine River cannot be beat. This is where the world's true wealth congregate, whether you're a Vanderbilt, Rockefeller or Saudi oil sheik. The Haussmann-inspired gem has dazzled them all—the gold, bronze and terracotta accents just drip elegance, allure and romance, while the three-star Michelin-rated Alain Ducasse au Plaza Athénée continues to set the culinary bar with exceptional, contemporary French cuisine. And don't forget to order a signature fashion ice—a frozen Cosmopolitan on a popsicle stick—from the legendary Thierry Hernandez at Le Bar du Plaza Athénée. But be warned, travelers: The Hotel Plaza Athénée is haute chic, so keep the Birkenstocks, fanny packs and ringing cell phones packed away (or better yet, don't bring them!).

They will call you on it here, trust us.

Hotel Principe di Savoia

MILAN



Milan, darling, Milan. "The Incredible's" Edna could not have said it better, and when the truly fabulous trek to this Italian outpost, they stay in only one location: The Hotel Principe di Savoia, which combines old-fashioned glamour with innovative technology and design. It's where Armani holds court ... Anna Wintour berates underlings ... and Naomi assaults her latest assistant. Central to the Piazza della Repubblica, this is Milan's oldest and most well-renowned luxury five-star hotel. Meticulously restored and beautifully furnished 401 rooms and suites provide timeless elegance in 19th-century Lombard style. And don't forget the spa! The top floor Club 10 Fitness & Beauty Centre is the ultimate European well-being oasis—enjoy personalized treatments, exclusive products and impeccable pampering—with amazing city views.

The Beau-Rivage Palace

LAUSANNE,
SWITZERLAND

St. Moritz? Nahhh . Zurich? Way over-rated. Luzern? Zzz. For true luxury, only Switzerland's legendary Beau Rivage Palace will do. The 150-year old hotel, located in Lausanne off Lake Geneva, is as grand as it is historic, and exceeds just about every expectation of five star travel. The 169 room hotel has hosted everyone from Coco Chanel (her dog is actually buried on property) to Mary Pickford, Gary Cooper, and continues to set the bar. With its 18th century frescos, grand salon and rotunda, stained glass windows and neo-baroque design, the Beau-Rivage Palace is a place that time has forgotten ... and for the better. Guest rooms feature everything from marble, crystal, mahogany, as well as giant whirlpool Jacuzzi's, flat screen TVs and fireplaces. Its lush gardens and many sitting places make the Belle Époque property "feel like a resort," gushed Conde Nast Traveler. And don't forget dinner at The Rotonde restaurant, featuring French cuisine to die for (the foie gras, especially) and a wine cellar with 75,000 bottles.

The Four Seasons London

LONDON, ENGLAND

The British certainly love their tea, and what better place to indulge in some English Breakfast with crème and honey than The Four Seasons London, which was awarded Britain's "Top Tea Place of the Year" by the British Tea Council. That's just one of the many charms of The Four Seasons London, which combines the standards of its namesake with the distinctive warmth and style of a quaint English manor. The hotel has been a nesting spot for London's elite since it first opened its doors. What it lacks in grandiosity and glitz, it more than makes up with refined service, setting and locale, within walking distance of Buckingham Palace, and easy reach of Regents Park, the Zoo, Lord's Cricket Ground, Bond Street, Knightsbridge, West End theatres, museums and galleries. The hotel, which blends Old World décor with first class yet modern amenities, features 219 beautifully furnished, unique and spacious guest rooms and 26 deluxe suites all offering beautiful city and park views. You won't find Lindsay or Paris stumbling into the lobby at 3 a.m. 'cuz Nigel the concierge is on duty, and don't think he won't slap those b*#@*&@ back to the Hills, 'aight?

The Dorchester

LONDON, ENGLAND

Calling The Dorchester a hotel is like calling a Bentley a car, or Air Force One a plane. London's most envied address eschews bland luxury in favor of an unabashed celebration of opulence in décor, a level of service that is nearly telepathic, and food and wine that is gloriously over the top. For more than 70 years, it has played host to the noble and noteworthy: Prince Philip hosted his bachelor's party on the eve of his wedding to Queen Elizabeth II in the hotel's Park Suite; General Dwight D. Eisenhower planned the Normandy Invasion from his suite (because when you're planning a war, only five star accommodations will do). An endless flow of leaders and celebrities have been guests, from stars of the past to today's headliners. Its 195 guest rooms, 50 suites and four garden suites are among the very best in Europe, decorated in traditional country house style, and equipped with a maid, waiter and valet call system in every room, not to mention Irish linen sheets on exquisite four-poster beds, cherrywood furnishings, and deluxe bathrooms with mottled Carrara marble and Lalique-style sconces. Superbly located in the heart of London's Mayfair on Park Lane, between Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner, The Dorchester is close to exclusive London shopping in Bond Street and Knightsbridge and is within easy access of many London attractions including Buckingham Palace, West End theatres, the Royal Albert Hall and the National Gallery.

Ashford Castle

COUNTY MAYO, IRELAND

There are hotels, and then there is Ashford Castle, renowned as much for its tradition and service as much as its structure, built in 1228. This is the ultimate fairy tale experience, complete with turrets, towers and drawbridges. You might not be able to excommunicate your enemies and behead your foes (a boy can dream), but at least you've got the perfect setting to imagine it all! Once the estate of the Guinness Family, Ashford Castle opened its doors as an exclusive hotel in 1939, and today offers utmost comfort, elegance and relaxation in a lovely countryside setting. The service is impeccable, and why wouldn't it be? With a ratio of two staff to every room, you'll surely feel like royalty (just not the Tudors or any lineage from Great Britain -- the Irish still aren't crazy about that bunch). The activities are regal as well: spa treatments, hawk-flying in the School of Falconry, clay shooting and archery. Picnic in the Walled Garden, cruise the lake or catch wild trout or salmon in one of the most famous fisheries in Ireland. The idyllic, romantic setting has wedding written all over it: Pierce Brosnan held his nuptials here in 2001. Other famous guests include Fred Astaire, Brad Pitt, Jack Nicolson, U2 and Barbara Streisand.

Four Seasons Maldives

LANDAA GIRAAVARU/KUDA HURAA



Step away from the BlackBerry ... and yes, we know about the back-up one, too. For those who truly want to get away—then think Maldives. The Four Seasons has two resorts in this island oasis, each offering the vacation of a lifetime. A scenic sea-plane ride from Malé Airport takes you to a paradise hideaway where luxurious seclusion meets wild natural beauty: Landaa Giraavaru, a verdant, beach-fringed coral island where the Four Seasons offers guests sophisticated pleasures on land and water, from genuine ayurvedic therapies in the spa to splashing, sailing or diving in the jewel-like Indian Ocean and the Maldives' most pristine lagoon. You'll savor your room—one of the resort's 102 deluxe thatched beach and water villas, which come with private plunge pools and spacious areas, not to mention the typical amenities you've come to love from the Four Seasons. For extra tropical escape, the signature cruise on the Four Seasons Explorer, a private three-deck, 11-cabin catamaran will take you island-hopping, stargazing and diving. Divers, water enthusiasts, nature lovers and 21st-century explorers will love the remote shores and rarely visited dive/snorkeling sites—all with a comfortable private cruise accented with impeccable Four Seasons style. Then, hidden among a double string of 1,190 coral islands just southwest of Sri Lanka is the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa, another exotic, deluxe getaway accessible only by private speedboat from Malé. There, you'll discover the charm of a Maldivian village on a private coral island in the turquoise sea. The beautiful resort features lavish, one-of-a-kind accommodations with thatched beach pavilions and bungalows lining pure white sand as well as The Royal Beach Villa exquisite private water bungalows built on stilts over the lagoon.

The Portman Ritz-Carlton SHANGHAI, CHINA

Had Tom Cruise discovered The Portman Ritz-Carlton when making "Mission Impossible 3," we suspect the movie would have been 20 minutes long (which wouldn't have been such a bad thing, considering), with a climax involving reflexology treatments at the spa. Such is the lore of this Asian oasis. Easily considered Shanghai's best hotel, The Portman Ritz-Carlton is like a city itself. The 50 story skyscraper houses 598 rooms, six restaurants, health club, swimming pool, squash and racquetball courts, spa and a full retail complex featuring everything from Salvatore Ferragamo to California Pizza Kitchen (and after a week eating Dim Sum, you'll be thankful for that, trust us). Elegance abounds at every turn in this spectacular modern fortress, from the fiber-optic lighting, laminated stacked-glass sculptures, Indonesian ebony columns, and marble and limestone walls in the two-storied lobby, to the generous, plush rooms fully equipped with writing desks, sofas, thick duvets, and all the advanced technology you could want. The settings are definitely plush, and so is the service. No request is refused—including a ride through downtown on the hotel's custom-made 1938 Chang Jiang 750cc motorbike. Of course from its central locale you can also stroll down the famous Nanjing Xi Lu, past the magnificent Bund buildings and restored architectural icons to a place where the traditions of the past intersect with the ultra-modern.

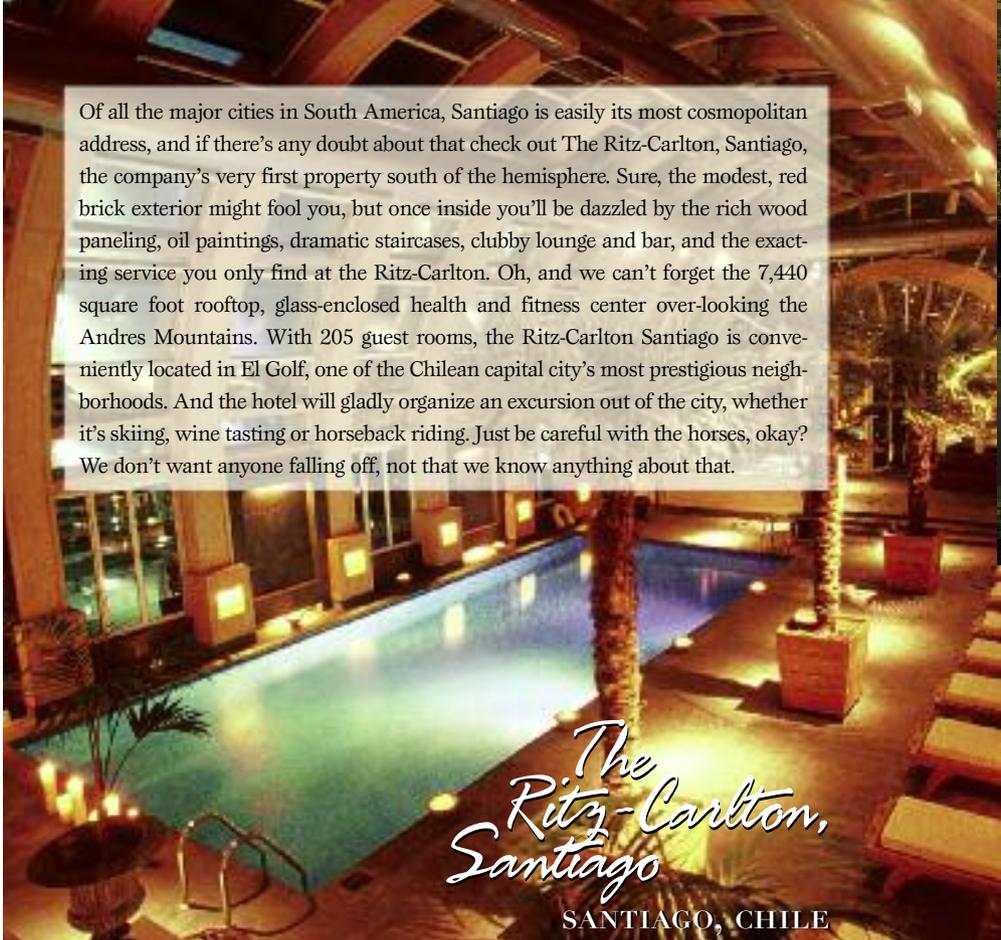
Imagine: It's been a long day of meetings, and you're ready for rest. You take off your custom made Berluti or Manolo Blahniks, put them in the shoe drawer, and relax. A few minutes later you find your shoes have been magically shined and ready for wear. Huh? Such is the mystery of The Peninsula Hong Kong, long hailed as one of the finest hotels in the world. Built nearly 80 years ago, the legendary "Grande Dame of the Far East" continues to set hotel standards worldwide, offering a blend of the best of Eastern and Western hospitality in an atmosphere of unmatched classical grandeur and timeless elegance. A fleet of Rolls-Royce Extended Wheelbase Phantoms are on call to whisk you throughout the city, while the hotel's helicopter service will land you right on its rooftop helipad. Each one of the hotel's opulent guest rooms is comfortable and stylish and equipped with advanced technology. Extensive recreational facilities include a full harbor-view Roman-style swimming pool, sun terrace and highly-acclaimed Peninsula Spa, renowned for its outstanding Oriental, Ayurvedic and traditionally-inspired treatments. Oh, and about those shoes: there's a sensor in the drawer that indicates shoe placement, and which triggers a system in which the shoes are lowered to a station for polishing, then lifted back into the drawer without anyone ever entering your room.

The Peninsula HONG KONG

The Lowell

NEW YORK, NY

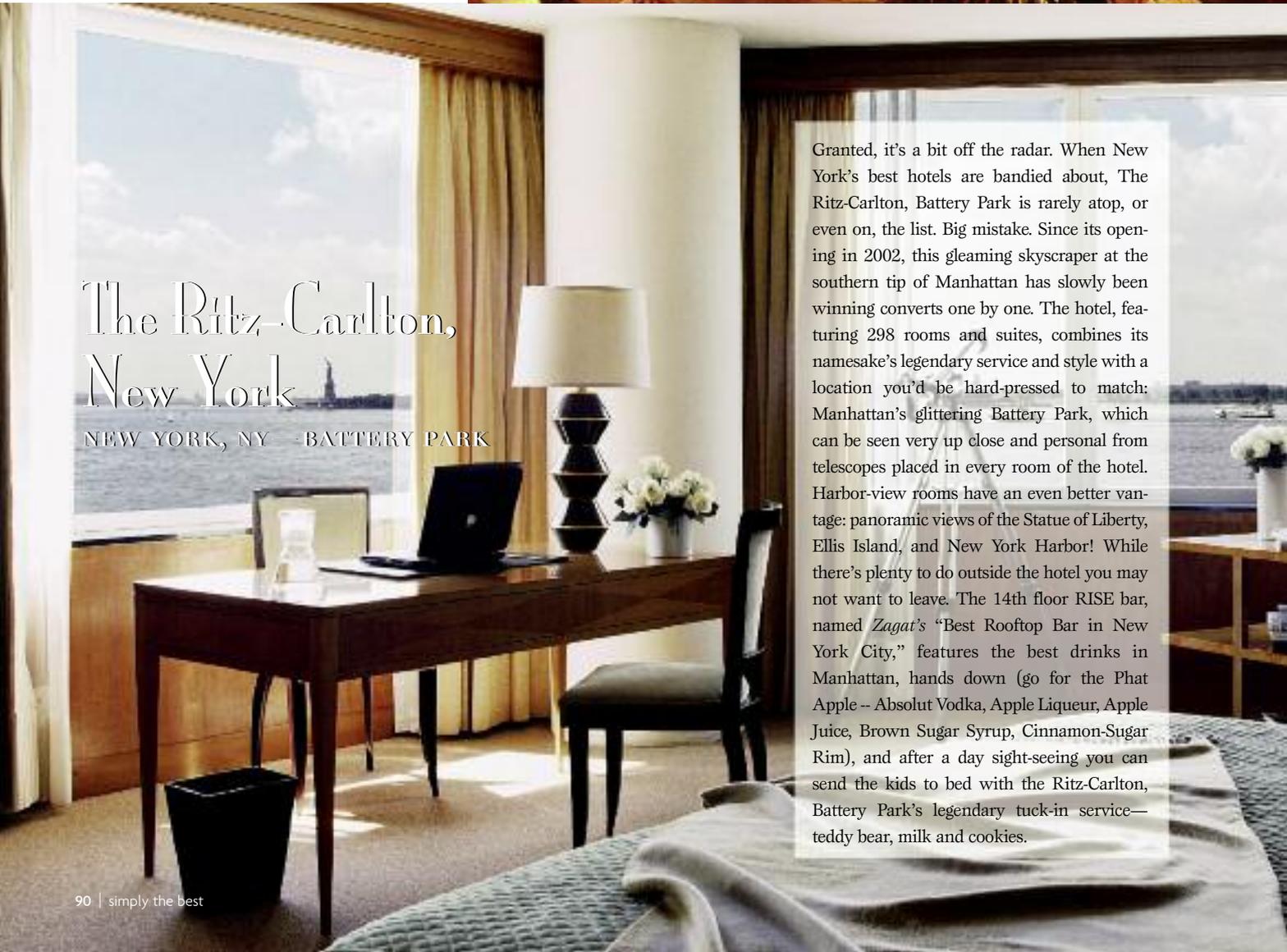
Forgo the noise, traffic and obligatory tourist wearing Statue of Liberty crowns at New York's best kept secret—The Lowell, an upscale boutique hotel located on a quiet, tree-lined street off Madison Avenue. When Hermes, Giorgio Armani and Barneys are within a few blocks, you know you're in the right neighborhood, and that the clientele is going to be elite. "The Lowell would scream class, if class did that sort of thing!" raved the *New York Times*. Featuring 47 suites and 21 deluxe rooms, The Lowell lavishes its guests with truly personalized service and sumptuous surroundings, including exquisite antique furniture upholstered in fine fabrics, eighteenth and nineteenth Century prints, Chinese porcelains, wood burning fireplaces, libraries, full service kitchens and marble baths with brass fixtures. As guests check in, a liveried doorman ushers them to an Empire Style reception desk with no registration lines. The Lowell runs itself like a "Pied-a-terre", a home away from home, except this is one you won't want to leave.



Of all the major cities in South America, Santiago is easily its most cosmopolitan address, and if there's any doubt about that check out The Ritz-Carlton, Santiago, the company's very first property south of the hemisphere. Sure, the modest, red brick exterior might fool you, but once inside you'll be dazzled by the rich wood paneling, oil paintings, dramatic staircases, clubby lounge and bar, and the exacting service you only find at the Ritz-Carlton. Oh, and we can't forget the 7,440 square foot rooftop, glass-enclosed health and fitness center over-looking the Andres Mountains. With 205 guest rooms, the Ritz-Carlton Santiago is conveniently located in El Golf, one of the Chilean capital city's most prestigious neighborhoods. And the hotel will gladly organize an excursion out of the city, whether it's skiing, wine tasting or horseback riding. Just be careful with the horses, okay? We don't want anyone falling off, not that we know anything about that.

The
Ritz-Carlton,
Santiago

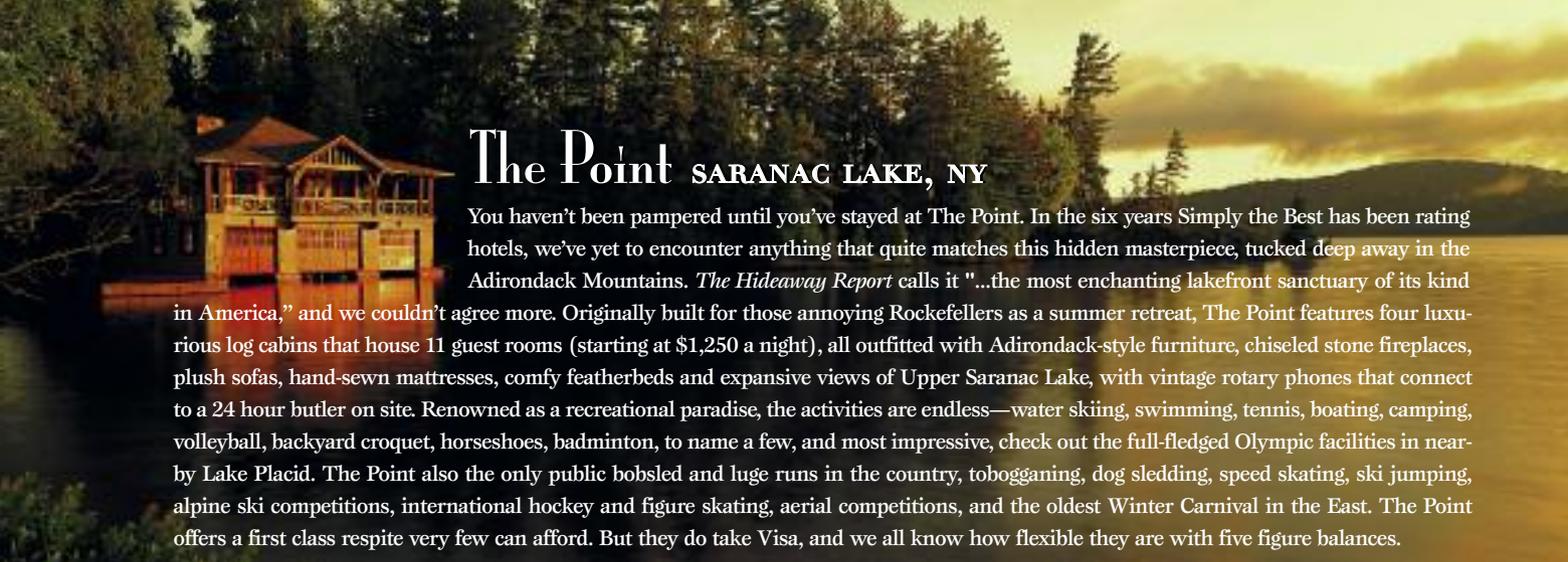
SANTIAGO, CHILE



The Ritz-Carlton, New York

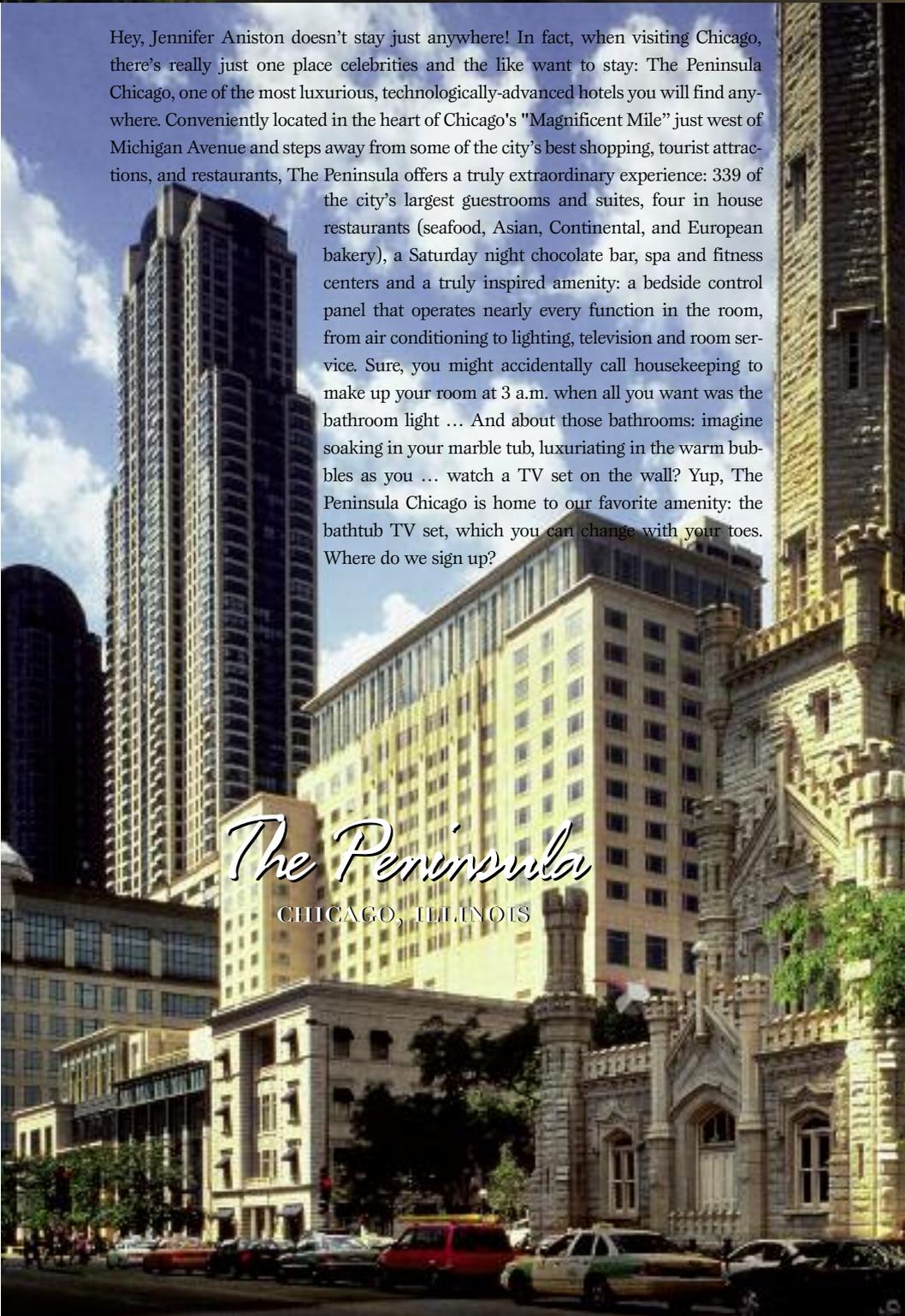
NEW YORK, NY - BATTERY PARK

Granted, it's a bit off the radar. When New York's best hotels are bandied about, The Ritz-Carlton, Battery Park is rarely atop, or even on, the list. Big mistake. Since its opening in 2002, this gleaming skyscraper at the southern tip of Manhattan has slowly been winning converts one by one. The hotel, featuring 298 rooms and suites, combines its namesake's legendary service and style with a location you'd be hard-pressed to match: Manhattan's glittering Battery Park, which can be seen very up close and personal from telescopes placed in every room of the hotel. Harbor-view rooms have an even better vantage: panoramic views of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and New York Harbor! While there's plenty to do outside the hotel you may not want to leave. The 14th floor RISE bar, named *Zagat's* "Best Rooftop Bar in New York City," features the best drinks in Manhattan, hands down (go for the Phat Apple -- Absolut Vodka, Apple Liqueur, Apple Juice, Brown Sugar Syrup, Cinnamon-Sugar Rim), and after a day sight-seeing you can send the kids to bed with the Ritz-Carlton, Battery Park's legendary tuck-in service—teddy bear, milk and cookies.



The Point SARANAC LAKE, NY

You haven't been pampered until you've stayed at The Point. In the six years Simply the Best has been rating hotels, we've yet to encounter anything that quite matches this hidden masterpiece, tucked deep away in the Adirondack Mountains. *The Hideaway Report* calls it "...the most enchanting lakefront sanctuary of its kind in America," and we couldn't agree more. Originally built for those annoying Rockefellers as a summer retreat, The Point features four luxurious log cabins that house 11 guest rooms (starting at \$1,250 a night), all outfitted with Adirondack-style furniture, chiseled stone fireplaces, plush sofas, hand-sewn mattresses, comfy featherbeds and expansive views of Upper Saranac Lake, with vintage rotary phones that connect to a 24 hour butler on site. Renowned as a recreational paradise, the activities are endless—water skiing, swimming, tennis, boating, camping, volleyball, backyard croquet, horseshoes, badminton, to name a few, and most impressive, check out the full-fledged Olympic facilities in nearby Lake Placid. The Point also the only public bobsled and luge runs in the country, tobogganing, dog sledding, speed skating, ski jumping, alpine ski competitions, international hockey and figure skating, aerial competitions, and the oldest Winter Carnival in the East. The Point offers a first class respite very few can afford. But they do take Visa, and we all know how flexible they are with five figure balances.



Hey, Jennifer Aniston doesn't stay just anywhere! In fact, when visiting Chicago, there's really just one place celebrities and the like want to stay: The Peninsula Chicago, one of the most luxurious, technologically-advanced hotels you will find anywhere. Conveniently located in the heart of Chicago's "Magnificent Mile" just west of Michigan Avenue and steps away from some of the city's best shopping, tourist attractions, and restaurants, The Peninsula offers a truly extraordinary experience: 339 of the city's largest guestrooms and suites, four in house restaurants (seafood, Asian, Continental, and European bakery), a Saturday night chocolate bar, spa and fitness centers and a truly inspired amenity: a bedside control panel that operates nearly every function in the room, from air conditioning to lighting, television and room service. Sure, you might accidentally call housekeeping to make up your room at 3 a.m. when all you want was the bathroom light ... And about those bathrooms: imagine soaking in your marble tub, luxuriating in the warm bubbles as you ... watch a TV set on the wall? Yup, The Peninsula Chicago is home to our favorite amenity: the bathtub TV set, which you can change with your toes. Where do we sign up?

The Peninsula

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Beverly Hills Hotel

BEVERLY HILLS,
CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles' most famous hotel has been hosting the elite for almost 100 years, and always with style and panache. Even amongst its trendy competitors, like the Mondrian or the Chateau Marmont, The Beverly Hills Hotel excels on two basic principles: service and surroundings. Located on Sunset Boulevard in the center of Beverly Hills, the hotel, referred to locally as "The Pink Palace," is surrounded by 12 acres of lush, tropical gardens, exotic flowers and private walkways. It's the place to see and be seen, catch glimpses of famous faces or simply be pampered. While the hotel's rooms are amongst the very best in all Los Angeles, its legendary bungalows are romantic and spacious, with one-of-a-kind furnishings and storied histories—Liz Taylor honeymooned with six of her eight husbands in the bungalows (this particular line speaks for itself), and Marilyn Monroe and Marlene Dietrich, among others, were frequent guests. Reminiscent of Hollywood glamour, this lavish hotel's special features include the palm-lined pool and cabanas, lighted tennis courts, The Beverly Hills Hotel Spa by La Prairie, 204 beautifully decorated guest rooms and 38 suites and with marble bathrooms, and specialized dog services include plush beds, bowls, and freshly baked biscuits.

The Four Seasons Dallas at Las Colinas

DALLAS, TEXAS

Golfers, rejoice! You have found your haven! The Four Seasons Dallas at Las Colinas is a true paradise for the swing set, a 397-room homage to the game, and one of its true champions, Byron Nelson. The resort's 18-hole, par-70 course measures 7,009 yards from the championship tees, good enough to attract some of the biggest games on the circuit. There are even two guest quarters dedicated to the masters—the 2,500 sq. ft. Byron Nelson suites features a baby grand piano and wood burning fireplace, while the 2,100 square foot Payne Stewart suite, located off the 18th hole of the Players Championship course, includes stone fireplace, flat screen TVs and a 14-seat boardroom (where you can do post mortem on your game or fire your senior management). Surrounded by 400 rolling acres of North Texas hills, minutes from downtown Dallas, the Four Seasons Dallas at Las Colinas is a fitness enthusiast's dream—it also includes four pools, 12 tennis courts the leading health club in Dallas area. For those that think golf is a silly game played by silly men wearing silly shorts, there's plenty more to do, like savor in a golf ball massage at the spa.

The Rittenhouse

PHILADELPHIA

They cooked special doggie biscuits for Oprah's pooch, Salomon. They built a special steam shower for Bruce Willis. And while filming "Philadelphia," Tom Hanks got a customized menu from the in-house chef. Ranked among the world's finest places to stay, The Rittenhouse Hotel is Philadelphia's most prestigious address ... by a landslide! Featuring all of the unique historic charm and residential ambience of Rittenhouse Square, the five star hotel offers the city's biggest and best accommodations—98 standard rooms and 11 suites, all beautifully decorated with rich mahogany, stylish furniture, and lush fabrics. In fact, Three Tenor Luciano Pavarotti has his very own suite at The Rittenhouse, which comes with a fully-stocked kitchen so he can cook for his friends. Every detail is personally looked after by the hotel's legendary General Manager, David Benton, whose expertise could rival the finest European chateau. And it's no accident the city's best restaurant, Lacroix, is also housed inside the Rittenhouse. There, you'll savor the succulent French-influenced cuisine, before heading off to bed in your luxurious suite. Life doesn't get much better, folks.

The Ritz-Carlton, Key Biscayne

MIAMI

The nation's best Ritz-Carlton by a landslide. Bask on the calm golden sands of Key Biscayne, a bridge and a world away from the hustle and bustle of South Beach, Coconut Grove and Miami. This acclaimed island oasis boasts many cultural, retail, and recreational activities, including a 20,000 square-foot ocean view spa and salon with over 60 treatments; the country's only "Tequiler" at Cantina Beach, the resort's oceanfront coastal Mexican restaurant and lounge; water recreation activities including windsurfing, sailing and kayaking; largest tennis center of any Ritz-Carlton with 11-courts designed by tennis legend Cliff Drysdale; two outdoor, heated, oceanfront swimming pools; beach cabanas and much more. Bordered by a 1,200 foot golden sand beach, this deluxe paradise boasts 402 guestrooms including 37 suites, 64 Ritz-Carlton Club Level rooms and suites and one Ritz-Carlton Presidential Suite. All guests enjoy private balconies with ocean, bay or garden views and sumptuous marble baths. ^(sth)