

Best Hotels in the World 2008

By Jeremy Murphy
with Mona Buehler

For the better part of the 2000s, *Simply the Best* has strived to give you the very best in hotel travel, from the grandest European resorts to the trendiest Miami boutiques. It's an ever-evolving process, with new properties opening each year, existing ones offering multi-million dollar renovations, and the quality pendulum perpetually swinging back and fourth.

To that end, Travel Snob Jeremy Murphy, along with a worldwide string of discerning correspondents, circle the globe each year in search of the ultimate hotel experience. What we look for are destinations that create memories, the kind you'll cherish throughout your life, whether it's a marriage engagement on top of the Eiffel Tower or a safari deep in the South African bush land.

Boiling down the top hotels is not a subjective process in the least, but it's an informed one based on years of bringing you the very best.

This photo: The Ritz-Carlton Berlin
Below L-R: The Ritz Paris, The Beau-
Rivage Palace, Hotel Plaza Athénée Paris



The Dorchester

Park Lane, London W1K 1QA, England; Tel: +44 20 7629 8888
www.thedorchester.com/index.html

London's hottest address, The Dorchester, is where new money meets old, providing they've made the requisite six months in advance reservation for afternoon tea in its lobby Promenade. The Hyde Park treasure brings a whole new meaning to decadence, with food, décor and amenities that play on all the senses, eschewing staid luxury for unabashed opulence. Its 250 luxury rooms and suites feature décors of both English country charm and art deco chic, while its dining options run the gamut from Alain Ducasse's refined French cuisine by Executive Chef Jocelyn Herland to the nouveau Cantonese menu at China at The Dorchester, which has become a hot spot with London celebs.

The Ritz-Carlton, Powerscourt

Powerscourt Estate Enniskerry Ireland; Tel: +44 353 1 274 8888
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Powerscourt

Set amidst one of the most scenic and historic estates in Ireland, The Ritz-Carlton, Powerscourt may be brand spanking new—it only opened last October, after all—but its tranquil, countryside setting can trace its origins back to the 12th century. Designed to graciously blend into its estate landscape, the hotel features a gorgeous, seven story building surrounded by gardens, terraces, fountains, statues and waterfalls. You may not find any leprechauns, fairies or changelings but you will find one of the most relaxed settings on the Emerald Island, complete with sweeping views of The Sugar Loaf Mountain. The Ritz-Carlton, Powerscourt, whose architecture and decor blend a neo-classic Palladian exterior and a Georgian-inspired interior, features 200 guest rooms averaging 700 sq. ft (by far Ireland's largest!) and Gordon Ramsay as its signature restaurant, who promises not to yell at, fire, demean or throw food at the guests. That's television, folks. This place? A dream!

The Ritz Paris

15, Place Vendôme; 75001 Paris, France; Tel: +33 1 43 16 30 90
www.theritzparis.com

Is it possible to feel like a star when you're amongst the likes of Lagerfeld, Valentino and Wintour? If you're staying at The Ritz Paris, the answer is yes. What is easily the world's most famous hotel also it's most fabulous, as evidenced by its claim to Paris Couture Week when it hosts all the fashion world's top designers, journalists and celebrities. And while the Louis XIV and XV reproductions, 18th century clocks, brocade drapes, marble fireplaces and brass beds are a little ostentatious (not to mention the prices, which would make Mohammad al Fayed blush ... if he didn't own the place), it's downright impossible not to get caught up in the excitement as you walk through the hotel's dimly-lit lobby, soaking up its history, window shopping through its dramatic display case corridor, or ordering a drink from Colin Field at the Bar Hemingway. Located off Paris' Place Vendôme square, The Ritz Paris has been catering to the crème de la crème of international society since Cesar Ritz first opened the property in 1898 and continues to set the standard for modern day glamour.

Hotel Plaza Athénée Paris

8, Avenue Montaigne, 75008 Paris, France; Tel: +33 1 53 67 66 65
www.plaza-athenee-paris.com

No trip to the City of Light is complete without a visit to its most fashionable address, the Hotel Plaza Athénée Paris, a 188-room boutique situated at "the crossroads of fashion, entertainment and business." Since

1911 it's catered to more of a discerning clientele who forgo the bigger brands for a more refined, Parisian experience. And that is what Hotel Plaza Athénée does better than anyone else, from its Louis XVI and Art Deco-styled guest rooms and suites, where no two are alike, to its haute chic bar and restaurants to its signature scarlet awning, warm plaza red color scheme, terracotta wares and gold and bronzes décor. The hotel radiates elegance and charm from every corner, and offers incredible views of avenue Montaigne and Eiffel Tower. With Alain Ducasse in the lobby and Paris' most in-demand mixologist Thierry Hernandez serving drinks at Le Bar du Plaza Athénée, the hotel had no trouble luring Carrie Bradshaw for Sex and the City's HBO swan-song, and you'll no doubt feel the same attraction, too.

The Beau Rivage Palace

Place du Port 17-19 – CH 100 Lausanne, Switzerland
Tel: +41 21/613 33 33; www.brp.ch/uk/navigation

Like something out of a European fairytale, Switzerland's legendary Beau Rivage Palace brings you into a rarefied world that time has simply forgotten, and thankfully so. The Belle Époque property, located off Lake Geneva in the charming French city Lausanne, will sweep you away with its 18th century frescos and neo-baroque design, and attentive white glove service. You'll soon be imaging yourself royalty, dancing under the stars with your prince or princess beneath a stained glass rotunda ceiling so beautiful it will bring a tear to your eye. The 150-year-old property, still family owned, has hosted everyone from Coco Chanel to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and has become a get-away destination for Parisians looking to flee their own horrid trappings.

The Ritz-Carlton, Berlin

Potsdamer Platz 3, 10785 Berlin Germany; Tel: +49 30 33 77 77
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Berlin/Default.htm

From the outside it looks like a classic New York City art deco skyscraper, its sandstone exterior a stark contrast to the soaring glass and steel buildings overtaking Berlin's Beisheim Center complex. One step inside, though, and you soon understand why you've entered what is said to be the most expensive Ritz-Carlton ever built. Rising like a Phoenix from the Potsdamer Platz, the 302-room Ritz-Carlton, Berlin is reminiscent of the grand hotels of old, inspired by Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel. From the dramatic, free-form marble staircase at the base of the lobby to the rich woods, imported marble and bronze accents throughout its public spaces, the hotel effortlessly fuses classic and antique elements to create a soothing yet regal environment. Its rooms are amongst the most luxurious and technologically advanced in all Berlin, including inlaid cherry wood closets, large windows with views of the city's Tiergarten Park, bedside control panels that operate everything from air-conditioning to lighting and the "do not disturb" sign outside your door to heated floors in the bathroom. The Ritz-Carlton, Berlin brings old world opulence to a city brimming with cutting edge modernity.

The Four Seasons Gresham Palace, Budapest

Roosevelt Tér 5-6. 1051 Budapest, Hungary; Tel: 36 (1) 268-6000
www.fourseasons.com/budapest

There are things you have to see in person to believe they are real. The Sistine Chapel. The Mona Lisa. The Great Pyramids. New York cat lady Jocelyn Wildenstein. Add to that list The Four Seasons Gresham Palace in Budapest. Nearly destroyed in World War II and painstakingly restored to the last regal detail, this majestic Art Nouveau landmark impeccably captures Hungarian beauty and history without feeling like a stuffy muse-

um. At the foot of the Chain Bridge with picturesque views of Buda Hills, the Royal Castle, the Fisherman's Bastion and the Danube River, the 179-room hotel features beautiful Biedermeier-style décor, vaulted ceilings, Spanish marble bathrooms and deep soaking tubs, and exceptional amenities. From stained-glass windows, clear glass chandeliers and cupolas to delicate wrought-iron vents, gold mosaic tiles and three grandiose staircases, elegance seductively climbs all over this property.

The Four Seasons Prague

Veleslavínova 2a/1098, Praha 1, Czech Republic 110 00
Tel: 420 221 427 000; www.fourseasons.com/prague

Often cited as the world's best, The Four Seasons Prague is more than just a hotel but a design marvel. Spread over four distinct buildings, each with its own history and style of architecture (including modern Baroque, neoclassical and neo-Renaissance), the hotel effortlessly merges the four independent structures into one harmonious setting, interweaving centuries of architecture with modern technology and the quality and service that has made its namesake one of the top brands in travel. Guests can choose from eight different room grades and five different types of suites, making the hotel's 161 rooms the most unique in all Prague, and giving visiting celebrities like Tom Cruise the shelter and distance they require from enemies of Xenu. Conveniently situated on the banks of the Vltava River, there's not a better address to be had in all Prague—it offers panoramic views of the city's most picture-esque castles while being steps away from Charles Bridge. Winding cobble stone streets lead guests through the charming Old Town district, where visitors can savor Prague's history while indulging in high end shops along Parizska Street.

The Ritz-Carlton, Moscow

Tverskaya Street 3, Moscow 125009 Russia; Phone: 7 495 225 8888
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Moscow/Default.htm

A thousand dollars a night is pocket change to the new ruling class in Moscow, who've made the Russian capital the most expensive city in the world. So what if they did so by stealing billions in land and resources from the public. Bygones! Instead, let's savor the world they've created, which now includes The Ritz-Carlton, Moscow, the most over-the-top hotel in the whole chain. Right off Red Square, and steps away from Bolshoi Theater and Lenin's Tomb, this 334-room property brings decadence to a new stratosphere, from its bullet proof presidential suite to the lobby vodka sommelier and nightlife butler, to the sleek rooftop bar with captivating Kremlin views and oxygen shots. And let's not forget about the \$700 Tsar breakfast in its three Michelin star restaurant, including Kobe beef, cheese and truffle omelette, foie gras, beluga caviar, quail eggs and fresh juices and Cristal champagne.

Ngala Private Game Reserve

Private Bag X 27, Benmore, Johannesburg, 2010, South Africa
Tel: (+ 27 11) 809 4300; www.ngala.co.za/

Just like dinosaurs in Jurassic Park, these attractions will eat you if you get too close, and that's part of the thrill of doing a safari adventure with CC Africa, one of the world's leading luxury safari companies. With camps spread all through the African continent, CC Africa has cultivated a high end clientele who come for the adrenaline of seeing lions, elephants, leopards, cheetahs and giraffe so up close they can taste you. And top among the company's lodges in South Africa is the Ngala Private Game Reserve, part of the country's world-famous Kruger National Park. Divided into three different accommodations—the Ngala lodge, with thatched-roof luxury rooms; the Ngala Tented Camp, featuring six per-

manent tents on the banks of the Timbavati River; and the Walking Safari which includes make-shift tents with beds, duvets and hot showers—the Ngala Private Game Reserve is truly the experience of a lifetime, offering daily game drives, delicious five star pan-African cuisine, and cocktails at dusk in the African bush.

The Taj Boston

15 Arlington Street, Boston MA 02116; Tel: 617-536-5700
<http://www.tajhotels.com/Boston>

Once the nation's oldest Ritz-Carlton, this historic Boston property was sold in 2007 and rebranded The Taj Boston, and while its name may have changed, its 75+ year legacy of timeless elegance has never been more realized. Still the "Grand Dame on Newbury Street," The Taj offers all who come into its doors the quintessential Boston experience, from a wood paneled bar to an intimate lobby, scented elevators and gorgeous rooms and suites overlooking the city's scenic Public Garden. The service and locale are still Boston's finest, as are the accommodations, which include luxurious linens in every room, and working fireplaces in all the suites, serviced by the hotel's in-house "fireplace butler."

The Ritz-Carlton Boston Common

10 Avery Street, Boston MA 02111; Tel: 617-574-7100
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/BostonCommon/Default.htm

Where else can you bump into Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Brady, Mick Jagger and Jimmy Buffet within the same weekend without psychedelic drugs? The Ritz-Carlton, Boston, which since it's opening in 2001 has served as the city's toniest address. Featuring 193 contemporary, cutting edge rooms and suites, accented by a \$1 million art collection, the Boston Common property also offers one of the city's best locales, perfectly situated in the center of the city, surrounded by the Massachusetts State House, Beacon Hill, the Public Garden and Theatre District. It's no wonder it has become a haven for celebrities and Boston's new elite, especially after an ultra-modern renovation. The Ritz-Carlton, Boston Common has become the hotel for a new millennium, housing not only an 18-screen AMC movie theater within its complex but also the 100,000 sq. ft. Sports Club/LA, featuring a lap pool, spa, salon, regulation basketball court and weight room, among other amenities.

Canyon Ranch Resort & Hotel, Lenox, Mass.

165 Kemble Street, Lenox, Massachusetts 01240; Tel: 800-742-9000
www.canyonranch.com/resorts/lenox-home

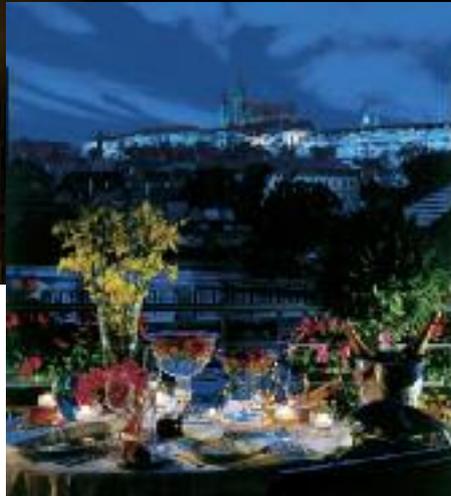
Rarely have the terms "medical staff, acupuncturists, exercise physiologists and nutritionists" been associated with such luxury, but that's what you get at Canyon Ranch Resort & Hotel, where the holistic meets the downright holy. Nestled on 120 woodland acres in legendary Berkshire country, New England's historic aristocrat haven Canyon Ranch Resort & Hotel marries architectural grandeur with utmost luxury and redefines your expectations for a world-class spa. The marble and brick Bellefontaine Mansion Home (built in 1897, copy of Louis XIV's Petit Trianon at Versailles) offers what is probably the most sumptuous setting on the spa circuit. You'll savor everything except leaving.

The Chanler at Cliff Walk

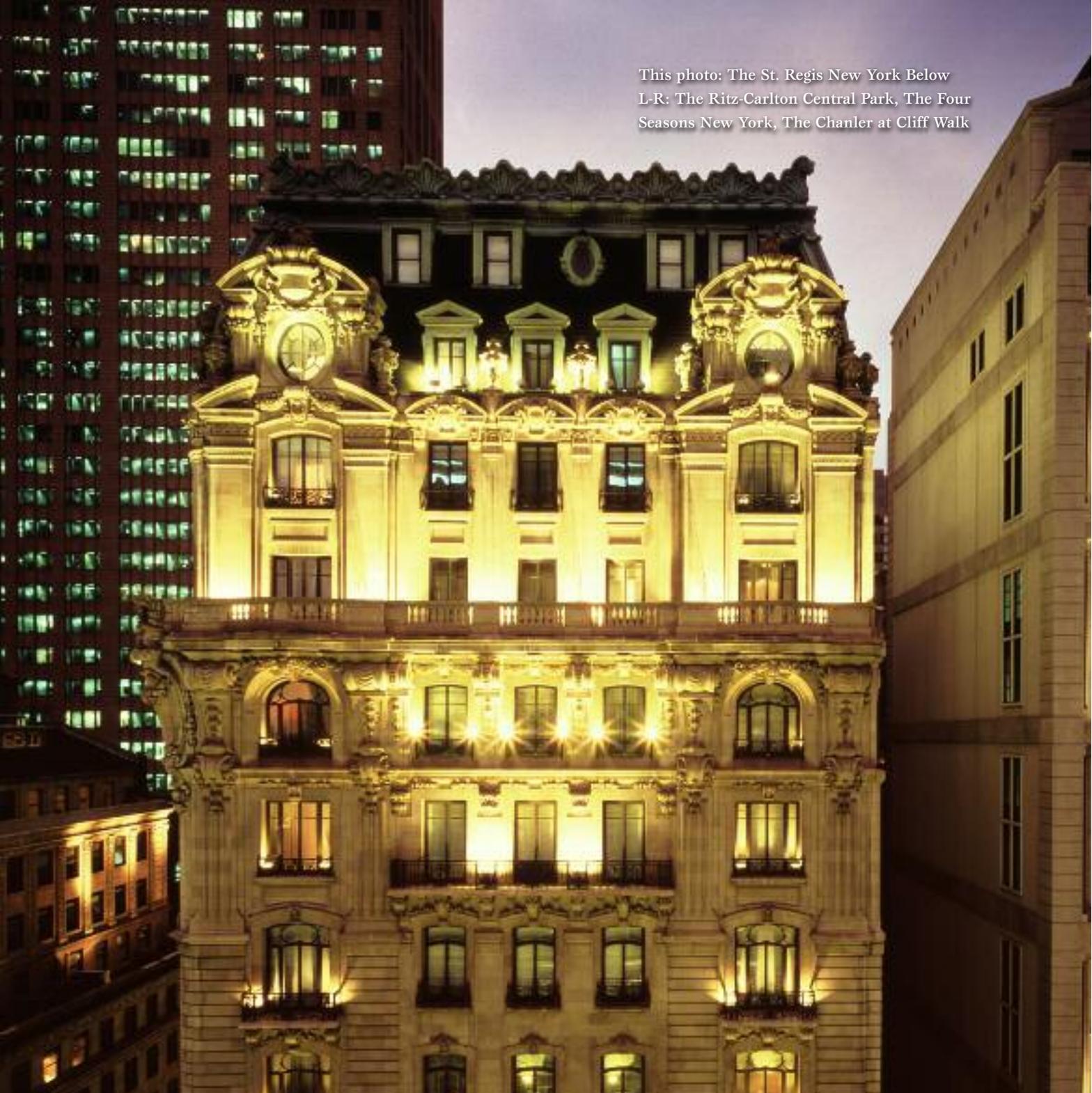
117 Memorial Boulevard, Newport, R.I. 02840; Tel: 866-793-5664
www.thechanler.com

It's hard to believe a 20-room mansion dramatically perched atop the cliffs of Newport, Rhode Island has cultivated such an international fan-base, but that is the legend and mystique of The Chanler, a 150-year-old

This photo: Ritz-Carlton Moscow
Below L-R: The Ritz-Carlton Boston
Common, The Ritz-Carlton Prague,
Canyon Ranch Resort & Hotel



This photo: The St. Regis New York Below
L-R: The Ritz-Carlton Central Park, The Four
Seasons New York, The Chanler at Cliff Walk



Georgian style home recently converted into a five star hotel. The property, which embodies “the Gilded Age elegance in America’s first resort,” includes guest rooms and suites all decorated to reflect a different historical period or theme, offering the ultimate in modern comforts to complement the hotel’s distinctive aura of old world elegance. It’s possible to dwell in a Gothic suite or revert back to the lifestyle of Kings and Queens in one of their Victorian villas. Heated marble bathroom floors, fireplaces that can be lit with the touch of a button and plush linens on antique hand carved beds is only a taste of what you’ll get when visiting this property. When not strolling the Cliff Walk and discovering the luxury summer cottages of the Vanderbilts and Astors, guests can savor The Chanler’s in-house restaurant the Spiced Pear, where Chef Kyle Ketchum offers seasonally inspired New England seafood in a stunning setting with a captivating oceanfront terrace. It’s the most romantic New England experience you can imagine.

The Lowell

28 E. 63rd Street, New York, NY 10065; Tel: 212- 838-1400
www.lowellhotel.com

You’d be hard pressed to find anything like it in all New York—an English-style boutique hotel off one of the city’s most expensive and frequented avenues. And yet few people know of this urban oasis, and for good reason. The Lowell wants it that way. The property, which to the unassuming eye looks like the traditional Upper East Side apartment building, is often considered one of New York’s best kept secrets—a pied-a-terre-style hotel frequented by discerning travelers who want understated elegance yet proximity to New York’s finest shops, restaurants and attractions. In other words, you can make it back from Hermes in 15 seconds flat and with still enough time to hide the bags from your spouse. The Lowell’s 47 suites and 21 deluxe rooms all feature 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.

The Ritz-Carltons of New York, Central Park and Battery Park

50 Central Park South, New York, NY 10019; Tel: 212-308-1900
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/CentralPark
Two West Street, New York, NY 10004; Tel: 212- 344-0800
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/BatteryPark

An embarrassment of riches is what The Ritz-Carlton Co. brings to New York through its two properties—the residential like Central Park hotel, offering what is the best view in the city, and the more family and business conference-centric Battery Park tower, the only luxury waterfront hotel in all Manhattan. Both properties offer the same exacting quality and service that has so distinguished their brand, but have also developed their own niches since opening in 2002. The Central Park hotel offers a more romantic setting, complete with a warm, intimate lobby filled with antique chandeliers, polished wood paneled walls and exotic floral arrangements, while its guest rooms come decorated in soothing color schemes like celadon, taupe and pale rose. The atmosphere is a bit more bustling at the Battery Park property, which has quickly become a hot-spot with the Wall Street crowd for power lunches and evening cocktails on the 14th floor Rise bar. The 39 story, 298-room hotel boasts an ambiance it calls “next generation Ritz-Carlton,” featuring a more modern design of lighter woods and tones, and a more youthful and contemporary atmosphere. Harbor view rooms all have telescopes to see the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island up close, and for kids, the Battery Park

Ritz-Carlton offers a night-time tuck-in service, complete with milk, cookies and teddy bear.

The St. Regis New York

Two East 55th Street, at Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10022
Tel: 212- 753-4500; www.starwoodhotels.com/stregis

You may be in the heart of midtown Manhattan but you’d never know it at The St. Regis New York. Built by John Jacob Astor in 1904, this New York landmark exhibits all the elegance, luxury and pampering you’d find in the finest European hotels, including top-of-the-line English-style service to satisfy your every whim. Named “#1 Hotel in New York City” by both *Travel & Leisure* and *Condé Nast Traveler* magazines, the St. Regis boasts 182 guest rooms and 74 suites, all featuring silk wall coverings and antiques custom-made furnishings, deeply carved crown moldings and wainscoting, and marble baths. There’s enough china in the Tiffany Suite to feed Brangelina’s entire brood (including the twins, although we recommend paper plates for them), and you can strike a pose to your heart’s content in the Bottega Venetta suite (although you can do that from any room, but trust is, it’s more believable here).

The Four Seasons New York

57 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022; Tel: 212-758-5700
www.fourseasons.com/newyorkfs

Only The Four Seasons Hotel New York has the cache to build a \$52 million dollar penthouse suite that costs more than \$30,000 a night. Such is the caliber of this hotel, which not only asks but gets that kind of rate. Rising 52 lime-stoned stories in the “city that never sleeps”, the landmark hotel cultivates perfect luxury, including 368 oversized and sound-proofed guestrooms, all featuring Frette-linens and beds so comfortable you’ll feel as if you’re sleeping on a cloud that hovers as high as the hotel, which is Manhattan’s tallest. Designed by legendary architect I.M. Pei, the Four Seasons’ floor-to-ceiling windows showcase impeccable skyline and Central Park views, and the aforementioned Ty Warner Penthouse Suite boasts panoramic skyline views, its own private elevator, marble glass fireplaces and pillows embroidered in gold.

The Rittenhouse

210 West Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tel: 800-635-1042; www.rittenhousehotel.com

In a city that bears an impeccable Four Seasons and a relatively new Ritz-Carlton, it’s amazing that an independent property has been able to not only thrive but conquer Philadelphia’s luxury hotel market, yet that’s the charm of The Rittenhouse Hotel, a 98-room urban oasis off the city’s pristine Rittenhouse Square. The hotel towers over its competitors simply by being better at raising the overall experience, whether by offering the biggest rooms, best service or most luxurious amenities, not to mention the little touches that have made it so beloved by celebrities and vacationers alike. An in-house chocolatier offers its guests creative desserts and candies, while General Manager David Benton personally sees that everyone is treated like a VIP, including the big stars like Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, Bruce Willis and Elton John, among many others. And you’ll savor Master Chef Matthew Levin’s five-course dinner tasting menu at its in-house restaurant Lacroix.

Four Seasons, Jackson Hole

7680 Granite Loop Road, P.O. Box 544, Teton Village, Wyoming, 83025
Tel: 307-732-5000; www.fourseasons.com/jacksonhole

Why go camping when you can ski, snowboard, dog-sled, rock-climb,

horse ride, hike, kayak and golf and still make it back to you luxury suite for evening cordials and a roaring fireplace? Welcome to The Four Seasons Jackson Hole, which brings first class pampering to the rustic charm of outdoors Wyoming, and really, isn't it about time? High in the Rockies, on the doorstep of Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks, this internationally celebrated resort and year-round playground for the rich and famous blends natural beauty (minus in-town spottings of Dick and Lynne Cheney) with all the comforts of a five star experience, including a "boot-warming ski-valet" and an attentive staff who will do everything but your taxes.

The Maison New Orleans

921 Canal Street, New Orleans, LA 70112; Tel: 504-524-1331
www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/NewOrleans

If you think The Ritz-Carlton is luxurious, meet its spoiled sister Maison. As in Maison Orleans, the hotel-within-a-hotel at The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans. Inspired by the Garden District Mansions that line of the streets of Uptown New Orleans and St. Charles Avenue, The Maison Orleans offers you a true NOLA experience without the raucous Bourbon Street element. The boutique property, which originally opened as its own hotel but after Hurricane Katrina was rechristened the Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans' "club level", offers guests a more intimate French Quarter experience, featuring 75 deluxe rooms with oversized sunken tubs, Bvlgari bath amenities, faux fireplaces, hardwood floors, ceiling fans, canopy beds and a DVD collection of New Orleans classics to play in your room. The Maison Orleans also offers its guests five complimentary food presentations a day—and if you haven't had alligator sausage before you don't know what you're missing. Actually you do, because it's pretty self explanatory, but still. Yum.

Fairmont San Francisco

950 Mason Street, San Francisco, CA 94108; Tel: 415-772-5000
www.fairmont.com/sanfrancisco

Luxury hotels are a dime a dozen in San Francisco, but few offer the charm, history and elegance of The Fairmont, the flagship of the growing hotel chain. Standing tall atop Nob Hill, The Fairmont San Francisco recently celebrated its 100-year anniversary, and it's hard to imagine a hotel with as tight a hold on the history of this vibrant city. And it's near impossible to walk through its marble columned lobby without hearing Tony Bennett first croon "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," ... envision the hustle and bustle sweeping through its doors during the signing of the United Nations charter ... or chuckle at the thought of the Service Service sneaking Angie Dickinson into JFK's Penthouse Suite for diplomatic relations of a different sort. And thanks to an \$85 million restoration, guests can now turn back the clock, so to speak, and experience the same turn of the century grandeur that has so endeared San Franciscans to this institution.

The Breakers

One South County Road, Palm Beach, FL 33480
Tel: 1-888-BREAKERS; www.thebreakers.com/

Just how awesome is The Breakers? Consider: With their company imploding, and about to trigger one of the biggest collapses in Wall Street history, leaders of the financial services firm Bear Sterns couldn't pull themselves away from the resort, instead attempting to do damage control from the sandy beaches and Cape Cod-style cabanas that have made The Breakers one of the world's top destinations since it first opened more than 100 years ago. There may be more plush accommodations,

trendier restaurants and more exotic locales, but taken as a whole there are few resorts that can measure up to this Palm Beach, which has been pampering the pampered since its early days hosting Vanderbilts and Rockfellers during "the season." It's since developed a niche as a vacation destination for families and business conferences, lured by its 140 acres of breathtaking oceanfront property, eight on-site restaurants, Conde Nast top 25-ranked spa, and Renaissance-era architecture reminiscent of Rome's Villa Medici, including twin turrets and a dramatic, Boboli Garden-influenced fountain. We wouldn't leave either!

The Fairmont Turnberry Isle Resort & Club

19999 West Country Club Drive, Miami, FL 33180
www.fairmont.com/turnberryisle

Sometimes the grass is greener ... right under your own feet. That's the allure of The Fairmont Turnberry Isle Resort & Club, an island oasis right in our own backyard. Just miles north of Miami Beach, this resort offers a menu of pampering delights, from its award-winning Willow Spa (the 60-minute Body Quench massage is divine!) to remarkable dining at Michael Mina's Bourbon Steak (the duck fat fries are sinfully good). As a premier golf destination, guests can enjoy scenic views and contoured challenges on its two 18-hole courses, each a masterpiece created by World Golf Hall of Famer Raymond Floyd. Even just lounging by the pool is a mind-blowing experience at this 300-acre paradise: kicking back in a daybed at the Laguna Pool surrounded by waterfalls and palm trees is mini-vacation in itself. It's the perfect weekend get-away with minimal travel required. If you can brave I-95 you're half way there.

On The Radar: La Tremoille, Paris

14, Rue La Trémoille, 75008 Paris, France; Tel: +33 1 56 52 14 14
www.hotel-tremoille.com

It's yet to earn the cachet of the Ritz or Hotel Plaza Athénée, but give it time. Paris' La Tremoille is quickly generating buzz as a worthy alternative to its glitzier competitors, offering guests an intimate setting amidst one of Paris busiest cross-sections: the "Triangle d'Or", in the heart of the 8th arrondissement. The 93 room hotel, set within a 19th century Haussmann townhouse, offers all the trappings of modern day luxury – spacious rooms, DVD players and flat-screens, and a unique in-room butler closet that makes sending clothes for pressing or cleaning that much simpler. Named after the grand chevalier of the Renaissance, the La Tremoille is just steps away from the Champs-Élysées, Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel Tower and the famous shops of the Avenue Montaigne.

Most Improved: The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas

6900 Great Bay, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00802
Tel: 340-775-3333; www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/StThomas

We've had an off again-on again love affair with this island property for years, and were pleased to learn of its dramatic, multi-million dollar renovation. Frankly, it needed it ... badly. What a difference a couple years make. Newly re-opened and refurbished, The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas rightfully takes its place among the top resorts in the Caribbean, offering guests a truly luxurious experience in one of the most romantic island settings you will find. Witness its crystal white sands and sparkling turquoise waters, and now imagine lying in its sun, or snorkeling along its shore. Or enjoying a romantic, moonlight dinner on the beach after an evening catamaran ride along the Lady Lynsay. The service at this property has always been top notch, and now its 180 rooms and suites measure up, too. We can't wait to go back! ^{stt}

This photo: Fairmont San Francisco
Below L-R: The Ritz-Carlton St. Thomas,
Four Seasons Jackson Hole, La Tremoille

