

PLUS: SPAIN'S NEW WONDERS · ADVENTURE CRUISING · COOL CAIRO

# Condé Nast Traveler

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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

JANUARY 2008

SPECIAL 51-PAGE SECTION

## GOLD LIST

### 721 WORLD'S BEST PLACES TO STAY

TOP HOTELS, RESORTS, CRUISE LINES

FEEL-GOOD  
VACATIONS

20 ECO-TRIPS  
FOR EVERY  
TASTE & BUDGET

PULLOUT EXTRA

AUSTRALIA  
INSIDER'S GUIDE



Celebrating its eightieth anniversary in 2008, the Renaissance hotel, at the intersection of Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Boulevard, has "shopping right outside." Contemporary guest quarters in blue, green, and amber include "gorgeous bathrooms." The 8,000-square-foot spa is equipped with aromatherapy crystal steam rooms and a tranquility lounge. The Blvd has an 18-foot illuminated onyx bar; Cut serves "top-notch steaks."

\$\$\$; 395 rooms; pool, spa; 310-275-5200; fourseasons.com.

#### The Peninsula, Beverly Hills

94.7 93.9 92.3 91.7 91.5 92.8

Inspired by an eighteenth-century French country estate, this property has rooms that juxtapose antiques with modern amenities and Italian-marble bathrooms that are "filled with incredible products." Spa treatments include Shiffa precious-gem treatments, which use oils that contain rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. Expect "excellent, personable service." The Belvedere offers modern American cuisine; the more casual Roof Garden serves breakfast and lunch adjacent to a 60-foot lap pool.

\$\$\$; 194 rooms; pool, spa; 310-551-2888; peninsula.com.

#### Raffles L'Ermitage, Beverly Hills

93.3 93.3 86.4 88.9 88.6 90.1

This former apartment building on a tree-lined street "appears private and exclusive while being not far from downtown." Asian-minimalist rooms with European furniture and sycamore paneling are "light, airy, and functional"; most have private balconies. "Gracious staff always treated us as if we were their highest priority." Jaan serves dishes like maple roasted duck. A 2007 expansion of the spa facilities added a waterfall and Sebastian, a leopard shark (in his own tank).

\$\$\$; 119 rooms; pool, spa; 310-278-3344; raffles.com.

#### Post Ranch Inn, Big Sur

90.7 89.4 89.4 95.1 95.1 91.9

Rooms of slate, marble, and wood are designed to complement the environment at this mountain-ridge property; some have roofs covered in native grass and wildflowers. "It's one of the most memorable spots—you forget the rest of the world." Breakfast is taken in the room or at the restaurant; dine at Sierra Mar, where the dinner menu focuses on organic produce and meals come with Pacific views. The hotel will unveil ten new rooms in 2008.

\$\$\$; 30 rooms; pool; 831-667-2200; postranchinn.com.

#### Ventana Inn & Spa, Big Sur

87.4 85.9 88.3 93.7 86.6 88.4

This "scenic retreat," which opened in 1975 on 243 acres, has rooms with redwood floors, glass tiles, bronze, and bamboo accented by a palette of sage, rust, gold, and brown. Follow a wooded path to Cielo, which stocks 600 wines and has an outdoor cocktail lounge with a fireplace and a terrace with ocean vistas. Treatments at the Allegria Spa are "wonderful and unique" and include a pine-forest body polish.

\$\$\$; 60 rooms; pool, spa; 800-628-6500; ventanainn.com.

#### Four Seasons Aviara, Carlsbad

95.2 91.7 88.6 79.6 88.7 89.0 88.8

While it's "convenient for shopping and freeway travel," beachcombers, beware: This is not an oceanfront property—it sits on a plateau above the Batiquitos Lagoon ecological reserve. Contemporary rooms in rose, melon, and ocean blue have "expansive bathrooms that come with fragrant aromatherapy candles." "Staff made us feel like the most important people staying there." A round on the Arnold Palmer-designed course "is challenging, but the terrain is beautiful." The Argyle Steakhouse opened in early 2007.

\$\$\$; 329 rooms; golf, tennis, pool, spa; 760-603-6800; fourseasons.com.

#### Highlands Inn, Carmel

84.6 83.1 87.8 89.2 82.8 85.5

A Monterey pine, cypress, and redwood forest is the setting for this "charming stone lodge." Cedar-shingled buildings pepper ten acres of hillside and have

rugged decor. Frank Lloyd Wright-influenced peaked and skylighted ceilings, and stone fireplaces. Pacific's Edge Restaurant, set where its name suggests, serves grilled ahi tuna, seared prime beef, and more.

\$\$\$; 48 rooms; pool; 831-620-1234; hyatt.com.

#### L'Auberge Carmel, Carmel

88.5 88.5 96.0 96.2 88.5 91.5

At this wood-and-stucco inn four blocks from Carmel Beach, activity centers around the brick courtyard. "Sophisticated and romantic rooms" in forest tones have original black-and-white photography by Helmut Horn. The 12-table restaurant marries contemporary California cuisine with European influences to wine from its 4,500-bottle collection. "Everyone must try the tasting menu once—11 outstanding courses over four hours."

\$\$\$; 20 rooms; 831-624-8578; laubergecarmel.com.

#### Bernardus Lodge, Carmel Valley

97.2 97.2 95.8 86.1 93.1 93.9

Situated among vineyards, these adobe guesthouses "perfectly combine rusticity and luxury." Rooms have feather beds, limestone fireplaces, beamed ceilings, and French doors that lead to private balconies with views of the Santa Lucia Mountains. The service "leaves nothing to be desired." Marinus has seasonal California cuisine that includes scallops with prawn beignets; wines are from the property's vineyards. The spa's antioxidant facial uses a mask of mud and crushed grape seeds.

\$\$\$; 57 suites; tennis, pool, spa; 831-658-3400; bernardus.com.

#### Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel, Dana Point

90.8 91.2 89.1 94.4 91.5 86.8 90.7

Fountains and French doors that open onto private terraces give this property the feel of a Mediterranean villa. Sun- and sea-hued interiors with walk-in closets reflect the resort's location on a 150-foot bluff. "Staff do everything for you," including booking surf lessons at nearby beaches. The tasting room, Eno, provides selections of wine, cheese, and chocolate.

\$\$\$; 393 rooms; golf, tennis, pool, spa; 949-240-2000; ritzcarterton.com.

#### St. Regis Monarch Beach, Dana Point

93.2 85.9 83.4 85.0 85.9 85.0 86.4

Tuscan-inspired design incorporates European stone and marble as well as balconies and terraces throughout this resort an hour from Los Angeles. Furniture in warm earth tones fills the guest rooms, which have Italian linens, fresh flowers, and "heavenly beds" with down comforters. Stonehill Tavern serves small plates of modern American cuisine. Swim to the beat of the underwater sound system at the spa's three-lane lap pool.

\$\$\$; 400 rooms; golf, tennis, pool, spa, water sports, beach; 949-234-3300; stregis.com.

#### Blue Lantern Inn, Dana Point

91.7 91.7 54.8 93.8 85.1 84.1

\$\$; 29 rooms; 800-950-1236; bluelanterninn.com.

#### L'Auberge Del Mar, Del Mar

86.7 88.0 88.0 93.3 83.8 69.9 85.0

\$\$\$; 120 rooms; tennis, pool, spa, beach; 858-259-1515; laubergedelmar.com.

#### Ritz Carlton, Half Moon Bay

90.8 85.7 85.7 92.9 90.7 89.2

"The view cannot get any better" at this shingle-style hotel between the Pacific and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The architecture mimics nineteenth-century seaside lodges, and the rooms, decorated in gold and ivory with marble bathrooms, are "well appointed though a bit small." "Beautiful sunsets" accompany coastal cuisine at Navio; the 16,000-square-foot spa has a Roman mineral bath and a lavender facial treatment, among others.

\$\$\$; 261 rooms; golf, tennis, pool, spa, water sports, beach; 650-712-7000; ritzcarterton.com.

#### Lodge at Torrey Pines, La Jolla

87.3 86.5 86.4 91.2 87.3 84.8 87.3

Guests of this sandstone-and-brick blufftop resort enjoy twice-daily guided hikes through the Torrey Pines State Reserve. Rooms have "lovely fireplaces," but "the

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2008

THE BEST BY

## SERVICE



### UNITED STATES

#### Lodge on Little St. Simons Island 100

St. Simons Island, Georgia

#### Tu Tu'Tun Lodge 97.9

Gold Beach, Oregon

#### Bernardus Lodge 97.2

Carmel Valley, California

### EUROPE

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Capri

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Dublin

#### Baur Au Lac 97.7

Zurich

#### Château Les Crayères 97.7

Reims, France

### THE AMERICAS

#### La Casa Que Canta 100

Zihuatanejo, Mexico

#### Secrets Capri Riviera Cancún 100

Riviera Maya, Mexico

#### Four Seasons 97.0

Carmelo, Uruguay

### ASIA, AUSTRALIA & PACIFIC NATIONS

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Phuket, Thailand

#### Huka Lodge 100

Taupo, New Zealand

#### Oberoi Udaivilas 100

Udaipur, India

#### Oberoi Vanyavilas 100

Ranthambore Tiger Preserve, India

### AFRICA & THE MIDDLE EAST

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#### Khwai River Lodge 100

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