

Zagat Surveys U.S. Hotels, Resorts & Spas

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Four Seasons is Top Hotel Chain; Peninsula Chicago - Top Large Hotel; Other Winners: Four Seasons Big Island -Top Resort and Public Facilities; Twin Farms -Top Small Hotel, Top Rooms, and Top Service; Inn At Little Washington - Top Dining; Four Seasons Maui, Top Spa

New Guide Covers 1,011 Top Places To Stay And Play

14,461 Surveyors (including 936 Travel Professionals) Report Rises in Spending

Celebrity Chefs Join High Tech And Luxury Services As Major Selling Points

New York City, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco are Favorite Destinations

Zagat Survey today released the results of its 2007 U.S. Hotels, Resorts and Spas Survey. The new guide is based on the shared experiences of 14,461 frequent travelers. Thanks to the assistance of the American Society of Travel Agents 936 travel professionals who rated and reviewed 1,011 of the best places to stay nationwide. Among its other findings, the survey indicates that hoteliers are benefiting from high occupancy rates and travelers with bigger budgets. In turn, guests are enjoying luxury amenities, from celebrity chefs to WiFi to in-lobby flight check-ins and more.

Winners: The Four Seasons once again was named Top Hotel Chain. The Peninsula Chicago was rated No. 1 large hotel, i.e., with 100 rooms or more, while the Four Seasons Big Island, Hawaii is the No. 1 large resort. Among small hotels, Twin Farms in Vermont is a multiple winner as Best Small Hotel plus Best Rooms and Best Service.

I Love NY: When asked what cities they most like to visit, surveyors spoke loud and clear: New York City came in first with 25% of the vote, followed by Washington, D.C. (20%), San Francisco (17%), Las Vegas (7%) and Chicago (5%).

Average Cost: Among the lodging options in this year's survey, the average cost of a standard double room is \$361.08. It's not surprising that, at \$524.41 a night, New York - the city that never sleeps - is the most expensive to sleep in. Spanning a wide range are Washington, D.C. (\$413.16), Los Angeles (\$371.36), Las Vegas (\$311.72), and the least costly, Denver (\$265.63). All of these prices are higher than those charged only two years ago. Unless occupancy rates decline, these prices are likely to stay high.

Getting a Bang for Your Buck: Given the inflation in hotel room rates, it's not surprising that travelers are increasingly concerned about getting value for their money. The new guide includes a list of Best Buy chains, hotels and resorts, led by Homewood Suites, The Boulders and Deetjen's Inn. The new guide also includes top discount travel websites and a number of Travel Tips that help stretch the travel dollar.

Traveling by The Web: With costs up, informed travelers are increasingly using the web to make their reservations and save a few bucks. A whopping 75% of surveyors say they now use the Internet as their primary means of booking, particularly air travel. The most commonly used website to book travel is Expedia.com while TripAdvisor.com takes the honors when it comes to finding travel information.

Eating, Slimming and Swinging: When it comes to special features, Virginia's Inn at Little Washington wins the Top Dining award. The No. 1 hotel spa is at the Four Seasons Wailea in Maui while California's Golden Door is the top stand-alone spa. As for golf, the Straits Course at Whistling Straits Golf Club in Wisconsin hit a hole in one with an unprecedented 30 i.e. "perfect" on the Zagat scale of 0 to 30.

High-Teching: Most leading hotels are launching themselves into the 21st Century by adding high-end electronics (flat screen TVs, ipod docking stations and WiFi access). Over half (53%) of surveyors consider WiFi access to be among the best new hotel amenities. Indeed, many of them consider it a deal breaker when picking a hotel.

Choicer Check-In: Among the many service upgrades that hotels have recently begun offering, perhaps none is more widely appreciated than the ability to check in for a flight before leaving one's hotel. Over a quarter of surveyors (27%) cite this as a favorite new amenity and both Hyatt and Hilton have taken notice, adding kiosks that will print boarding passes for more than a dozen airlines to their lobbies.

Puffless Patrons: Following the lead of many cities and states, lodging giants are just saying NO to smoking - and that's fine with guests, 71% of whom say it's the best 'innovation' they've seen. Marriott has kicked the habit in all of its rooms and public spaces in the U.S. and Canada and Starwood has a similar policy in its Westin Hotels.

Celebrity Chefs: More than ever, hotels are bringing in top chefs. It's a win-win-win deal: the hotels boost their brands; the chefs get favorable leases; and diners reap the ultimate reward - great meals. This trend, which has revolutionized dining in Las Vegas in the past few years, is accelerating with renowned chef-restaurateurs such as Alain Ducasse, Bobby Flay, Emeril Legasse, Nobu Matsuhisa, Georges Perrier, Wolfgang Puck, Gordon Ramsay, and Joel Robuchon, just to name a few, each hanging their shingles at one or more hotels. The best example of this trend is Jean Georges Vongerichten's recent contract with Starwood Hotels to open 50 new restaurants.

Branding Bonanza: And finally, some hotels are using the popularity of an existing name to create altogether new brands. Hilton has inaugurated the Waldorf-Astoria brand based on the NYC property while Starwood is launching the Crillon label based on its Parisian stalwart. The NYC based Hotel Gansevoort will extend its name with openings in LA and Miami and the Thompson plans to expand to Beverly Hills.

Irritants: Not all the news is good news: When asked what irritates them most about the hotels, resorts and spas which they visit, surveyors gave "poor service" a resounding 55% of all their complaints. "Dirty, small, bad" rooms were cited by 22% of surveyors while 12% pointed at their noisy fellow guests.

Under the Covers: The 2007 Survey not only covers top hotels and resorts, it also features handy lists of Beach and Mountain Resorts, B&Bs, Condos, Casinos, Sports, Trendy Places, Outstanding Views, Notable Newcomers and a host of other special places from across the country, as well as all major Web Sites and Toll Free Numbers.

Summing Up: Reviewing the results of the new survey, Tim Zagat, CEO of Zagat Survey, said: "Even though top hotels and resorts are more expensive than ever, they are getting better and better all the time. With more services and amenities, it may someday actually be nicer to travel than stay at home -- and you won't have to wash the dishes or make the bed."

The 2007 Top U.S. Hotels, Resorts & Spas guide (\$15.95) was edited by Donna Marino Wilkins with Troy Segal and is available at bookstores and other retail outlets, through Zagat.com or by calling 888/371-5440.

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