

FORBES TRAVELER 400 BEST HOTELS

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 LAUNCH SLIDESHOW

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The world's most distinguished travel experts pick the finest hotels


"A once-in-a-lifetime experience that sets a new standard for over-the-top luxurious hotels. This is a masterpiece. If you want to see what living like a billionaire is like—just once in your life—stay here."

"In 35 years of hotel design and visiting, this is the best hotel experience I have ever had. Such a wonderful location and such wonderful service—it was a magical experience. I was heartbroken to leave."

"Truly one of the most beautiful spots—and hotels—in the world. What more can I say?"

These are just three of the many comments we collected from the Forbes Traveler 400 board of travel experts who determined the 2008/2009 list of the world's top luxury hotels. You're just dying to know which hotel they're talking about, right? Well...to paraphrase the Bard, there's the rub.

When we first published this groundbreaking list two years ago, we broke rank from the other travel magazines and websites that place great emphasis on mathematically ranking the best hotels in the world. Statistically speaking, the only way to make such a claim is to ask several thousand people for their opinions. The world's best hotels, then, are often ranked by a sea of anonymous web surfers.


 **See our slideshow of Forbes Traveler 400 Best Hotels.**

Turning to the crowd is good for certain tasks. When you can't remember the capital of Belarus, ask everyone on the bus. Someone will probably remember it's Minsk (a fifth-grader, no doubt). But when picking the right hotel means the difference between an unforgettable trip and an unforgiving spouse, shouldn't you ask people who stay in luxury hotels once or twice a week—not once a year?

So, from a wide variety of industries, we assembled a board of 79 luxury-travel experts. **Arianna Huffington** is a renowned author, publisher and one-time California gubernatorial candidate; her fellow board member, **Todd English**, is a celebrity chef and restaurateur. **Adam Tihany** is a noted interior designer and architect who's responsible for several high-profile hotels around the world; **Tony Wheeler** co-founded Lonely Planet, publisher of the eponymous guidebooks.

We were fortunate to have **Erik Blachford**, current CEO of TerraPass and former CEO of Expedia, opine alongside **Peter Greenberg**, noted travel writer and *The Today Show's* travel editor. And if anyone knows about luxury hotels, it's **Matthew Upchurch**, CEO of Virtuoso, a consortium of upscale travel agents, and **Aaron Simpson**, group CEO of Quintessentially, a global concierge service for discerning travelers.

We asked our board members to rate nearly 800 highly regarded four- and five-star hotels in seven categories (click here for more about the [methodology](#)). Because new hotels need time to find their rhythm, we omitted properties less than two years old; and, we didn't include hotels that are undergoing major renovations. Our experts were promised anonymity so they could speak freely, and they had nothing to gain from any of the hotels they praised (or criticized). We then took the top-rated 400 and commissioned reviews from professional travel writers who have first-hand experience with the hotels (and did not receive complimentary stays during their visits).

 [See our slideshow of Forbes Traveler 400 Best Hotels.](#)


The result is the Forbes Traveler 400, a rundown of the world's best hotels, spread across six continents and presented geographically. Because these are world-class hotels that would rank mathematically close to one another, we do not rank them on this list. Take Italy, for example. The boot was second only to the United States with the most hotels on the list, and the winners include the 16th-century **Villa D'Este** on Lake Como, which according to our board "sails on in its own wonderful world" thanks to the "sophisticated, fine dining" and "beautiful gardens." On Capri, the terrace at the **Grand Hotel Quisisana** is "the place to watch the world go by for early evening drinks," while in Rome the **St. Regis Grand Hotel** boasts the "best concierge in Italy." Three exquisite hotels that offer three different experiences.

For your next visit to New York City, do you want Old World elegance? Then stay at the **Ritz-Carlton Central Park**, described by one board member as "the best 'European boutique' hotel in New York City, with the best barman in the city." Or would you prefer a modern, trendy vibe? Consider the **Mandarin Oriental, New York**, a "stunning property" with "wonderful" rooms and a "fantastic spa." And we've reviewed all of them in-depth, so you know what to expect.

And therein lies...the value. The Forbes Traveler 400 is more than a horse race between the world's best hotels. It's a valuable resource for trip-planning. Our reviews are comprehensive, up-to-date and as bias-free as we can make them. For every hotel, we reviewed the rooms, service and overall experience, and also presented the particular highlights that define a property. Having a personal butler, for example, isn't necessary for some travelers; they want to know about the Michelin-starred restaurant or world-class spa.

Four hundred hotels. Four hundred reviews. Four hundred vivid snapshots of the world's finest destinations. Welcome to the 2008/2009 edition of the **Forbes Traveler 400**.

And for the record, the comments up top describe **Burj Al Arab** in Dubai, **Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve & Retreat** in South Africa and **Hotel du Cap Eden-Roc** on France's Cote d'Azur—presented in alphabetical order, of course.

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© Charleston Place

CHARLESTON PLACE
South Carolina
United States



THE EXPERIENCE

The distinctly Southern gracious grandeur of Charleston Place hits you immediately upon stepping into its sweeping marble lobby: a magnificent Georgian open-arm staircase practically reaches out to hug you, while a 12-foot-tall crystal chandelier sparkles over a display of flowers of equal grandeur. Even Tara

was never like this. And this hotel, located in the dead center of the historic district, fits seamlessly into the city of Charleston—one of America's most gracious. It's a place where women are called ladies and afternoon tea is de rigueur, served in the formal elegance of the Thoroughbred Club.

Charleston Place
205 Meeting St.
Charleston, South
Carolina

Tel: 843-722-4900

VIEW WEBSITE
440 rooms incl. 40
suites

THE ROOMS

Not surprisingly, the room decor is steeped in tradition. This is not a chrome and stainless kind of place; bathroom fixtures are brass, and in your bedroom you'll find bedspread and swagged curtains, wing chairs and tapestries, lace, chintz and damask. Suites are simply more of the same, decorwise, while rooms on the top two floors give you access to The Club, which includes breakfast, afternoon tea, cocktails with hors d'oeuvres and after-dinner drinks and desserts.

THE SERVICE

Cliché or not, Charleston Place has Southern hospitality down pat. Accustomed to taking care of royalty (Prince Charles, Oprah, grand dames of Southern society), the staff is also attentive to the many families that come to stay, arranging babysitting and customized sightseeing.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

The hotel is like a clubhouse for members of Charleston society. They gather in the Thoroughbred Club, a nod to the city's former horse-racing days, sipping their Seattle Slew Cocktails. They dine in the wood-paneled Charleston Grill, one of the top-rated hotel restaurants in the country that blends Southern, French, and contemporary influences. They show up for afternoon tea, dressed in their finery, with hats and gloves. You can escape the scene in the top floor's spa and fitness center, a nifty space capped off with a heated indoor/outdoor pool with retractable roof and a sunning terrace with views of the city and its gardens.