

BEST AIRLINE SEATS — WHO HAS THEM, WHERE THEY FLY

# Condé Nast Traveler

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

MAY 2011

**124**  
**Best New**  
**Hotels in the**  
**World** (Including  
40 under \$300)

**The Hot**  
**List** 2011

**21 Top Restaurants**  
**40 Sensational Spas**

PLUS

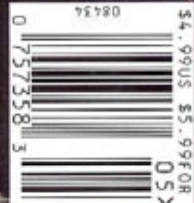
**BEIJING**  
Insider's Guide  
to the World's  
Wildest City

**CARIBBEAN'S**  
Sleeping Beauty

**THE SEXIEST**  
**PLANE**  
**IN THE SKY**



TIBET TODAY: At the St. Regis Lhasa Resort





with its red-and-black color scheme, sliding wall panels, beanbag chairs, and private pool. At the beach, which curves around a headland, villas have either a sunset or sunrise view, but a public access road means the area isn't completely private. Drink service that's limited to the bar area (and is not available in the beach loungers) is also a drawback, but the cocktails still come with fine sea views, as do the tables at the Japanese-inspired restaurant, Namu, where chefs work in an open kitchen. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** Wow Ocean Haven villas 172 and 173 open onto the west-facing beach, for a flawless sunset. But the hillside Ocean View Escape rooms offer better overall vistas of the area (66-77-915-999; [whotels.com](http://whotels.com); villas, \$708-\$1,385). 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷

#### TUNISIA

**Dar Hi, Nefta**  
🔥 Patrick Elouarghi and Philippe Chapelet have followed up their quirky-hip Hi Hotel in Nice with this pioneering 18-room resort of peach-painted concrete structures overlooking the palms of a sunken desert oasis (for photos, see page 30). The idea here is indigenous Tunisian architecture with a witty twist of modernity—and designer Matali Crasset's results are charmingly offbeat, if a little monastic. A vast lobby/bar/lounge/restaurant with glass doors leading to a communal terrace is done with pine, apricot wood, and palm furniture designed by Crasset, and has flowing spaces devoted to different activities. A cozy library/lounge fronts a fireplace, a tiny movie theater

offers television viewing (there are no TVs or telephones in the guest rooms), and a self-serve refreshment alcove abuts the open kitchen, where local women prepare the delicious Tunisian meals that are served table d'hôte style. Of the three types of accommodations, Piloti rooms, on concrete pillars, have a terrace with a shower and a lounge bed with views of the oasis; Troglodyte rooms are partially underground and naturally cool; multi-bedroom Dune rooms sit on the sand. The pool is filled with warm springwater, and stairs through a cactus garden invite a wander in the shady oasis. For anyone used to the normal drills and social boundaries of a conventional hotel, Dar Hi's free-form hospitality can be a little disorienting, but after you downshift into the laid-back communal mind-set, this lodge proves to be a fun hideout. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** Piloti room Ain Moussa has spectacular views and is very private (216-764-32779; [dar-hi.net/en](http://dar-hi.net/en); doubles, \$360). 🍷🍷🍷🍷

#### UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

**Armani Hotel, Dubai**  
🔥🔥 Joining the world's constellation of over-the-top hotels, Giorgio Armani's first namesake property soberly anchors the first eight floors plus levels 38 and 39 of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper, its 160 rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the starchitect-studded skyline. Rather than artwork, curved walls show off flourishes of padded bronze silks and brown, gray, and taupe textiles from the Armani collection. In case the style wasn't definitive

enough, nearly every object is branded, down to pencil sharpeners, erasers, and sugar cubes. A counterpoint to the usual gold-leaf Orientalist style of luxe Dubai hotels, the rooms inject minimalism with mystery: Sliding panels reveal closets as well as a refreshment station with an espresso machine, a minibar (soft drinks are on the house), and other complimentary extras like Armani/Dolci chocolates. The hotel staff are the best-looking and best-dressed in town, including the personal "lifestyle managers," available at the touch of a phone button or a computer click. Eight eateries comprise Dubai's fanciest food court and display flashes of culinary brilliance. At the dinner-only Ristorante, try the bavereuse with vanilla cream, cassis and violette crème brûlée presented within an impossibly thin-walled pearlescent globe of "glassblown" sugar. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** Some of the fifth-floor Armani Ambassador suites have vast balconies; otherwise, request a room with a view of the world's largest dancing fountain (971-4-888-3888; [dubai.armani.hotels.com](http://dubai.armani.hotels.com); doubles, \$653-\$762). 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷

**One&Only The Palm, Dubai**  
🔥 This resort compound of modern, sea-facing mansions (each holding six to nine guest rooms), private villas, and a restaurant wing (called the Manor, with additional accommodations) backed by a beautiful pool garden occupies the best position on the man-made Palm Jumeirah island. The 103 rooms come with calming beige and dark-wood decor, free-standing tubs, excellent South Af-

rican wine in the minibar, and thoughtful, not just token, hi-tech fixtures such as bedside headphone jacks so insomniacs can watch TV without disturbing a partner. At the tip of the outer breakwater, the beach feels authentic, with starfish and swaying palms, yet also with arresting scenes of Dubai's coastal skyscrapers. The resort is a long taxi ride from town, but a water shuttle offers a shortcut, ferrying guests to the much larger One&Only Royal Mirage resort on the mainland. The clientele ranges from fashionable young Japanese couples to older sun-seeking Germans, few of whom feel the urge to leave the premises thanks to a full-service spa and three restaurants under the direction of three-star Michelin chef Yannick Alléno. The sea-terrace beer garden has divans for night and day alfresco chilling, while Stay restaurant's *ménu dégustation* offers delicious taste combinations such as Jerusalem artichoke foam with hazelnuts, and ravioli with prawns, cabbage, and black truffles. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** The nine sea-facing mansions have vast rooms off a central courtyard; rooms in mansion No. 9 offer both beach and city views (971-4-440-1010; [thepalm.oneandonlyresorts.com](http://thepalm.oneandonlyresorts.com); doubles, \$926-\$2,058). 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷

#### UNITED STATES

**Under \$300**  
**The Redbury, Los Angeles, California**  
🔥 All hotel rooms are stages to a large degree, carefully calibrated sets designed to evoke particular moods. Leave it to Tinseltown photographer Matthew Rolston to



**ONE TO WATCH** The famed Spanish colonial **Hotel Bel-Air** will once again welcome visitors to a quiet corner of Los Angeles in October, after a two-year refit of all 91 guest rooms and public areas and the addition of a dozen new villas and a 12,000-square-foot La Prairie spa ([hotelbelair.com](http://hotelbelair.com)).

# Hot Hotels

take the idea to the extreme with the eccentric Redbury, his first foray into hotel design. Owned by nightlife impresario Sam Nazarian, The Redbury has just 52 guest rooms, the smallest measuring a whopping 750 square feet and including a well-stocked kitchen, and it's precisely this homeyness that guides the design aesthetic. Living rooms are souped-up Victorian parlors, with gold-paisley wallpaper and plump crimson settees. In the boudoir, Suzani fabrics drape the four-poster bed, and still lifes salvaged from flea markets hang above. You'll also find turntables with an amusing selection of records (Glen Campbell, Coldplay, KC and the Sunshine Band), and a tea kettle at the ready. Staff are sweet and some are even in character, donning pinstripe vests and mustaches. But not everything at The Redbury is picture-perfect. Rooms are dark and sport exposed air ducts, the unfortunate trademark of the "New York-style" lofts they were built to mimic. And the location, on star-paved Vine Street opposite Capitol Records and next to the Avalon nightclub, is brimming with Hollywood history but not polish. Yet that too is changing. A branch of Katsuya, L.A.'s sceniest sushi bar, is just across the street (and delivers), and Cleo, already one of the town's top tables, is on the first floor, just past—what else?—a velvet curtain. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** No. 505 has a terrace and prime city views (323-962-1717; [theredbury.com](http://theredbury.com); doubles, \$299-\$425). 🍷 🍷 🍷

**UNDER \$300** **Hotel Yountville,**  
Yountville, California  
📞 707-967-7900; [hotelyountville.com](http://hotelyountville.com); doubles, \$265-\$695.  
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**UNDER \$300** **Four Seasons Hotel,**  
Denver, Colorado  
📞 303-389-3000; [fourseasons.com/denver](http://fourseasons.com/denver); doubles, \$235.  
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**Four Seasons Resort,**  
Vail, Colorado  
🍷 Tucked into what must have been the last available 2.7 acres in Vail, the Four Seasons carves out its niche in this luxury-saturated valley by elevating service to new heights. Where else will you find a handwritten note asking how that freshly waxed snowboard rode? Even the hotel's slope-side ski center has all the comforts of home and then some, from hot cocoa and heated lockers to a fleet of ski valets eager to help take off your boots. All 121 rooms and 24 suites are spacious—the smallest are just under 600 square feet—and the decor is aptly Western, with limestone gas fireplaces, leather club chairs, and hickory and leather headboards on the coma-inducing beds. The public areas are cozy, especially the inti-

mate wood-paneled lobby, where you can gather around the massive fireplace for après-ski cocktails and nibbles (bison roll, anyone?). The property isn't ski-in/ski-out, but its location in the heart of Vail Village means you're steps from the top restaurants, boutiques, and galleries. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** If the seventh-floor Gore Range Suite doesn't fit into the budget, opt for a Deluxe Mountain View on floors six, seven, or eight (970-477-8600; [fourseasons.com/vail](http://fourseasons.com/vail); doubles, \$675-\$715). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

**Hotel Beaux Arts,**  
Miami, Florida  
🍷 "What time would you like your ice delivered?" That's the question you might find yourself pondering upon check-in here, where seemingly minute decisions take on a heightened sense of gravity. That's because all your other concerns have been worked

out in advance via e-mail by the diligent staff. Ensnared on the top three floors of the JW Marriott Marquis in downtown Miami, this 44-room hotel-within-a-hotel couldn't differ more from its larger, business-minded sibling. For starters, there's a private check-in desk on the 39th floor and an intimate guests-only lounge. Swathed in dark brown and white hues, rooms have impressive city vistas from floor-to-ceiling windows, and are smartly equipped with Bang & Olufsen electronics, illy espresso makers, and iPads. Huge marble tubs and sinks have touch-controlled faucets that illuminate based on water temperature. Venturing to the bustling JW Marriott will provide plenty of other diversions, including a Jim McLean Golf School, a basketball court, and a virtual bowling alley, as well as chef Daniel Boulud's excellent seafood-centric DB Bistro Moderne. **WHICH**

**ROOM TO BOOK:** Corner rooms ending in 01 on the building's southeast side have eye-popping views of Brickell Key and Miami's waterways (305-421-8700; [marriott.com](http://marriott.com); doubles, \$550-\$950). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

**Soho Beach House,** Miami Beach, Florida  
🍷🍷 This addition to the portfolio of British private club Soho House has given Miami the whiff of exclusivity it's been missing of late—and it has every conceivable amenity required for a decadent seaside weekend, right down to a hair-straightening iron in guest rooms. A rework of the Art Deco Sovereign Hotel with a new 16-story tower, the 50-room hotel is in what's been dubbed "Mid-Beach," and attracts Miami's media and music heavy hitters, plus a considerable Brit contingent. Interiors mix retro Latino with the eclectic Anglo look for which the group is





**STAR STRUCK** Back-lit megaphotos of Hollywood sirens like Marlene Dietrich grace The Redbury in Los Angeles. PAGE 120

known: Rooms have Cuban-style tiled floors, leather armchairs, raw concrete beams, *Mad Men*-esque wet bars (complete with a lemon and a lime), and family-size showers stocked with products from the hotel's spa. Blue-and-white towels cover wide loungers on the strip of private beach (complete with red iceboxes and watering cans to rinse feet) and daybeds by the large downstairs pool, and cabanas flank the eighth-floor plunge pool and cocktail bar. There are two more bars—a Latin-themed lounge serving punchy *caipirinhas* and a tiki bar abutting the beach—and the lively Cecconi's restaurant does pricey but pitch-perfect steaks and pizzas. The labyrinthine Cowshed Spa takes its name to heart with rough-hewn wooden walls. There's even a small screening room should the weather turn inclement. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** For a turquoise view, spring for a Beachside room, the smallest of

which measures 700 square feet (786-507-7900; [sohobeachhouse.com](http://sohobeachhouse.com); doubles, \$400-\$625). ☺☺☺☺☺☺

**UNDER \$300** **The Waikiki Edition,** Honolulu, Hawaii

▲▲ In this latest collaboration of a big hotel group (in this case Marriott) and a "lifestyle" brand (courtesy of hotelier Ian Schrager), the result is the best of both worlds: a stylish property with a one-of-a-kind feel that still hums with corporate efficiency. The staff are relaxed but professional, and the room gadgetry (such as lighting, TV, and Internet access) is user-friendly without being gimmicky. Housed in a white cube building that was formerly part of Waikiki's enormous Ilikai Hotel, The Edition's 353 rooms are done in clean lines and a calming palette of white and natural wood, with floor-to-ceiling windows looking onto the property's two

pools and the beach. The decor whimsically nods to the Hawaiian tradition, with brightly colored mini ukuleles, a sculptural surfboard installation behind the reception desk, framed surf photos, and books about the area in the lobby—enough to remind one of the aloha spirit while staying sophisticated and fresh. With future Edition hotels in the works for Istanbul, Mexico City, and Miami, among others, the formula should in fact travel very well. The only misfire is at Morimoto restaurant, one of the hotel's centerpieces—the kitchen seems a bit overwhelmed at being the it place on the beach, and the quality of the sushi needs an upgrade. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** Ask for a corner double with views of the property's two pools and part of the beach (808-943-5800; [editionhotels.com](http://editionhotels.com); doubles, \$295-\$995). ☺☺☺☺☺☺

**UNDER \$300** **JW Marriott Chicago,** Chicago, Illinois  
▲ 312-660-8200; [jwmarriott.com](http://jwmarriott.com); doubles, \$279-\$454. ☺☺☺☺☺☺

**UNDER \$300** **Longman & Eagle,** Chicago, Illinois  
▲▲ Over wild boar sloppy joes and tumblers of rye, foodies and rockers find common ground at Longman & Eagle, the year-old gastropub in bohemian Logan Square. Its six newly opened and—management forewarns—not entirely soundproofed guest rooms just upstairs are as nonconformist as the restaurant known to whip foie gras into hot chocolate. Guests check in with the restaurant hostess to get keys to an exterior side door leading to the hotel. A flea market aesthetic prevails in the randomly numbered rooms (4 through 76). Each is unique, but all have open plans with wood floors, glassed-in showers, vintage mirrors, original art, and Apple TVs programmed with a library of videos by local bands. Witty amenities include bedside books spanning Walt Whitman to Shel Silverstein, low-to-high minibar selections including Pabst Blue Ribbon in the can and Vosges Haut Chocolat bars, salon hair products by Kevin Murphy and, in three larger rooms, retro tape decks complete with mixed tapes. Staffing is minimal—once you check in, there is no service other than housekeeping. But along with tokens for free whiskey, hotel residency seems to confer insider status with barroom staffers, who not only fast-track you to a table but offer advice on other area hot spots. **WHICH ROOM TO BOOK:** No. 55 has a freestanding tub with a street view (773-276-7110; [longmanandeagle.com](http://longmanandeagle.com); doubles, \$75-\$225). ☺☺

**Ranch at Rock Creek,** Phillipsburg, Montana  
▲▲▲ A ranch, by popular definition, is a place where dedicated hands work to ensure the well-being of the beasts in their care. Replace the livestock with guests, and the corrals with plush accommodations, and you have this 6,000-acre mountain playground of singular solitude. The rate (upwards of \$1,000 per person per night) includes all activities, meals, and most drinks, but a hotel has to deliver more than unlimited cocktails and other diversions to justify a price so dear. And the Ranch at Rock Creek does, thanks largely to its relaxed yet professional staff, who aim to please and hit the mark every time. A kaleidoscope of cowhide rugs, leather furniture, and Native American-inspired textiles, the ranch deftly blends a high standard of comfort and the spirit of the Wild West without veering into cowboy cliché. There's no gym and no in-room TV (and, oddly, most rooms lack tubs), but there's also no shortage of activities, which include horseback riding, cross-country skiing, skeet