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5 hotels to head for

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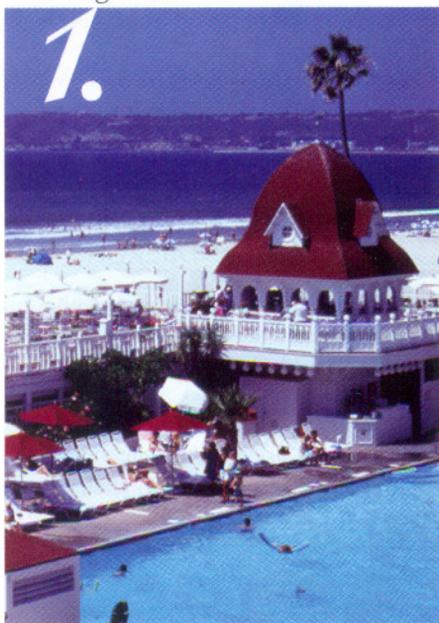
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5 Grande-Dame Getaways



NOT ALL HISTORIC HOTELS ARE GRANDE DAMES. SOME ARE JUST PLAIN OLD — AND CRANKY. GRANDE DAME-DOM REQUIRES CLASS, PEDIGREE, HISTORY, CULTURE, ARCHITECTURE, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND A GREAT LOCATION. GOOD GENES ARE ESSENTIAL, AND FREQUENT FACE LIFTS THAT SOOTH THE RAVAGES OF TIME WITHOUT ERASING CHARACTER DON'T HURT EITHER. SETTLE INTO A GRANDE DAME HOTEL AND YOU'LL BE WHISKED AWAY TO ANOTHER PLACE IN TIME WHERE SERVICE-WITH-A-SMILE IS THE NORM RATHER THAN THE EXCEPTION.

THE FOLLOWING FIVE GRANDE DAMES combine the elegance of days gone by (300-count sheets, feather beds, real silverware) with modern-day amenities such as fitness centers and spas, plus easy access to outdoor recreation where you can celebrate the scenic splendor of fall while breathing air as fresh as a peppermint patty. It's easy for a *travelgirl* to find her oasis at these places: Hike through mountain forests flaming gold, orange and red; stroll along a deserted beach and watch the waves erase your footprints; or explore luminous dunes and Kodachrome canyons in the vast desert, where a single blazing tree stands for fall.



California Seaside Grande Dame
*Hotel del Coronado,
San Diego, California*

Cross the bridge from San Diego to the tranquil island of Coronado and you arrive at “The Del,” as the locals affectionately call it. The Victorian seaside resort set on 31 landscaped acres overlooking two miles of sugar-white sands

Left: Marilyn Monroe on location for “Some Like it Hot” in 1958 at San Diego’s Hotel del Coronado.

was recently named among the world’s top 10 beaches by The Travel Channel.

The hotel — the country’s first **seaside resort** — was built in 1888 by a railroad tycoon and soon became the “talk of the Western world.” For starters, it was the largest structure with electrical lighting outside New York City. Thomas Edison himself supervised the installation of his incandescent lamp invention and even pulled the switch to light up the resort’s first Christmas tree before an astonished audience of hotel guests.

THE DEL HAS ATTRACTED MANY CELEBS AND DIGNITARIES, INCLUDING 14 PRESIDENTS AND L. FRANK BAUM, AUTHOR OF “THE WIZARD OF OZ,” WHO WAS SO ENTRANCED BY THE HOTEL HE MODELED HIS EMERALD CITY AFTER IT.

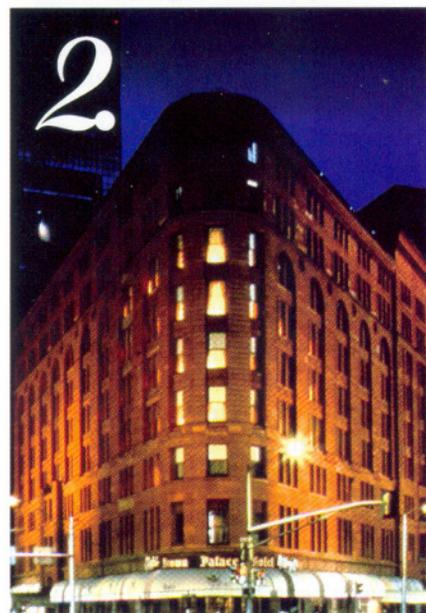
Today, this grande dame’s old-fashioned bird-cage elevator is still in use and stands near the door to the Crown Room, a majestic dining room that has been the scene for everything from stuffy state dinners to celebrity bashes, including a gala honoring Charles Lindbergh’s solo flight across the Atlantic.

Recently renovated to its original splendor, the resort now includes the original five-storey hotel, the newer Ocean Tower annex and a brand new oceanfront fitness center and spa. (Don’t miss getting a salt glow or a peppermint foot rub.) There’s also an Olympic-size pool as well as tennis courts, a boathouse, a paved recreational pathway that hugs a glimmering coastline for cycling, inline skating or jogging, and of course, the beach. Dip your toe in the surf just to say you’ve been there (it’s a bit chilly for fall swimming!) or take on sea kayaking or beachcombing. Or just sack out in a deck chair with the latest issue of *travelgirl* and enjoy the view!

From the hotel, it’s just a few blocks to downtown Coronado, where quiet residential neighborhoods are lined with pastel-colored beach cottages and the

turn-of-the-century downtown has gourmet Mexican restaurants, elegant boutiques, bookstores and vintage clothing shops. Rent a bike or bring your inline skates for a scenic spin around town. Want to see what’s across the water? Just head to the pedestrian ferry dock (you can take your bike, too) for the short, scenic ride across the bay. The boat will drop you off in San Diego’s nostalgic Gaslamp District, where cobblestone streets flaunt tempting boutiques, restaurants, cafes, late-night dance clubs and some of Southern California’s best antique shopping.

For more information, call (800) 582-2595 or visit www.hoteldel.com.



Grande Dame Meets Wild West
*Brown Palace Hotel,
Denver, Colorado*

In the late 1800’s, fortune hunters headed West in search of silver and gold, and most of them stopped in Denver. Among them was the original owner of the Brown Palace, who purchased the land the hotel now stands on to graze his cows. In 1892, he decided to hell with the cows — what Denver really needed was a grand hotel. So he moved the herd to greener pastures and built an Italian Renaissance Hotel with a Wild West touch — 26 stone carvings of wild animals found in the Rockies

look out from between the seventh and eighth-floor windows.

Today, the Arizona sandstone and Colorado red granite hotel rises like an ancient redwood in a glass and steel forest. As much a museum as a hotel, the Brown Palace Hotel houses a wealth of architectural and artistic treasures. From the lobby, your eyes are directed up past six tiers of cast-iron balconies to a Victorian-day stained glass window. Murals in the lobby elevator depict the history of travel from stage coach to airplanes — and a man in a trench coat bears a striking resemblance to Howard Hughes.

When it comes to service, then as now, no request is too great or small. Legend has it that in the early 1900's, a tunnel connected the Brown with a house of ill repute across the street so that gentlemen guests could visit discreetly. A good source tells us that tracks leading to a brick wall have been found beneath the former brothel — now Denver's esteemed Museum of Western Art! Former guests have included President Eisenhower (who dented the molding in the fireplace suite while practicing his golf swing) to the Beatles (the hotel was deluged with applications from teenage girls before their arrival.)

Other visitors have included Prince, (who brought his own mattress); actor Richard Harris (he brought his own soup) and Zsa Zsa Garbor (who brought her cat, which got lost behind a radiator). An ailing fox terrier from Philadelphia with a \$50,000 trust fund once checked into the VIP suite on the advice of his vet, who said the Rocky Mountain air would cure his consumption.

Like all grand dames, The Brown is big on variety. No two rooms are the same and motifs range from brooding Edwardian to screaming art deco. The restaurants are equally eclectic, ranging from the Palace Arms, one of Denver's more upscale restaurants, to the Ship Tavern, a casual pub that looks exactly like its name implies.

In late afternoon, guests gather for high tea in the lobby, striding across the Mexican onyx floor to another era. If

you prefer a stronger sort of brew, you can walk a few blocks and get a buzz at one of the town's many microbreweries (so much for Coors; Denver's real claim to fame is its nickname as the microbrewery capital of the universe). Near the brew pubs are lots of lively comedy, jazz and dance clubs, as well as the Denver Performing Arts Center.

Back at the Brown, you can get a great workout in the hotel's high-tech fitness center, or rent a bike or inline skates for an urban spin along Denver's hundreds of miles of bike paths. More options nearby the hotel: take a yoga class and/or get a massage at one of several walk-in day spas. A ride on the hotel elevator to the sky-lit atrium reveals a view of your other aerobic options — hundreds of miles of soaring Rocky Mountain peaks. A fall hike among the flaming meadows and shimmering aspen could be calling your name.

For more information, call The Brown Palace Hotel at (800) 321-2599 or (303) 297-3111 or visit www.brownpalace.com.



This Grande Dame's Just Ducky

The Peabody Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee

Talk about lucky ducks: The Peabody's famous mallards have been living in the

lap of luxury for 80 years. Each morning at the leisurely hour of 11 a.m. (Heaven forbid they should leave their palatial penthouse before a sumptuous brunch!) the mallards ride a hotel elevator down to the lobby, where, accompanied by John Philip Sousa's "King Cotton March," they waddle around a red carpet and march on to the Travertine fountain, where they revert to duck behavior and splash in. If you miss the morning "Duck March," you can catch the whole spectacle in reverse at 5 p.m., when the ducks march back to their rooms to dry out for the evening.

Cordial bellmen, many of them old-timers, escort you to your gracious

EVEN IF YOU DON'T QUACK,
YOU'LL ENJOY "5-DUCK
TREATMENT" AT THIS
NATIONAL HISTORIC LAND-
MARK WHERE GUESTS HAVE
INCLUDED ANDREW JACKSON,
WILLIAM FAULKNER AND
CHARLES LINDBERGH.

room or Romeo-and-Juliet suite with a marble staircase leading to the balcony. Up on the 12th floor, exclusive suites have Jacuzzis with views.

You can work up an appetite in the pool, spa, athletic club or lighted tennis courts before enjoying fine French dining at Chez Philippe or a more casual Italian dinner at Capriccio Grill.

After dinner, you can join the Memphis elite in the hotel's restored ballroom for a tango high above town or take a short stroll to famous Beale Street, the home of the blues, and shake your tail feathers at a variety of clubs that wail all night long.

For more information, call The Peabody at (901) 529-4000 or visit www.peabodymemphis.com



Rocky Mountain Grand Dame

Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, Alberta, Canada

Sheltered by towering peaks, this storybook castle is set in an enchanted forest with hot springs and secret gardens housing rare flowers. Inside the hotel is a hushed world of plush elegance: carpeted corridors, grand ballrooms, roaring fires, the tinkle of crystal chandeliers and wine glasses, and chocolates on your pillow at night. After the discovery of nearby hot springs in 1833, the general superintendent of the Canadian Pacific Railway predicted that wealthy tourists would flock here for “the cure” and would need a grand hotel to accommodate them.

“If we can’t export the scenery, we’ll import the tourists,” he said — and the

rest is Banff Springs history. When it was completed in 1888, the 250-room hotel was the largest in North America. Today, several expansions and face lifts later (the hotel was originally modeled after a Scottish baronial castle), the Banff Springs Hotel looks like it’s on loan from “Cinderella,” and includes everything except the prince. (If you’re bringing your own, consider renting one of the romantic suites in the towers for ultimate privacy).

Cinderella would have headed straight for the resort’s recently renovated Willow Stream Spa — a great suggestion for you modern-day princesses too. The enormous 38,000-square foot spa/fitness center has a high-tech health club with the latest and greatest equipment, personal trainers (in case you’ve gotten too grand for your ball gown) and various soaking springs designed to

mimic the sulfur-rich waters of historic Banff Springs. The spa’s indoor mineral pool contains therapeutic crystals from Sarvar Springs in Hungary, and underwater music enhances the relaxing effect. Or soak in surrounding hot springs pools fed by crashing waterfalls. If you want a water workout, you can swim laps in the indoor saltwater pool. The outdoor heated pool is a great place to soak on a frosty autumn night, where you can lay on your back and stargaze through billows of steam.

The hotel is located in a national park, so there are miles of trails through evergreen forests ignited by golden aspen. Alpine meadows and cool canyons create magical settings where you may spot migrating deer, elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats. Just a five-minute walk from the hotel you can watch Bow River thunder down

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cliffs in sparkling cascades, stroll around the golf course at sunrise or sunset and watch for herds of elk, who come to graze on the manicured grounds. You can follow a trail from the resort up the mountain for an inexpensive soak in sunlit pools set in towering pine forests. Or hop the gondola from town to the 7,500-foot summit of Sulphur Mountain; even from way up there the hotel looks bigger than life.

The town of Banff, like the resort, also looks like it dropped from a children's storybook. Rent a bike for the short, scenic pedal to this historic town where Victorian buildings house trendy outdoor shops, elegant, chic boutiques, sidewalk cafes, gourmet restaurants and even a 50's-style diner that serves the best cheeseburgers and milkshakes in town. Or take an evening stroll through town and watch the moon rise over the Rockies.

For more information, call (403) 762-2211 or visit www.fairmont.com.

Grande Dame in the Sunshine State

Boca Raton Resort & Club, Boca Raton, Florida

In the early 1900's, hauling tuckered-out Yankees became lucrative for the railroads as Northerners traveled to Florida to escape long, cold winters. Those ailing ranks included a wealthy, self-made architect who thought he only had a few years to live. By 1926, Florida's tropical climate had so restored his vigor that he had the energy to build a Spanish-style hotel, then furnish it with rare antiques. He then proceeded to parade about in silk pajamas with a pet monkey perched on his shoulder. (Okay, so maybe the guy wasn't completely cured!) The hotel folded a year later during the Florida land bust, but was resurrected by a succession of owners to become the sort of plush hotel that attracted guys who liked to parade

around in silk pajamas without monkeys, like the duPonts and Herbert Hoover. In 1942, the hotel's elaborate furnishings were put in storage to make room for military bunks; soldiers called it "the most elegant barracks in history."

Today, lodging options are elegant and extensive: You can holiday in the resort's signature building, The Cloister, with hidden gardens, tile roofs, ornate columns, intricate mosaics, fountains, beamed ceilings and archways. Or find respite at the Boca Beach Club, set on a private beach overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway or the Atlantic.

IN 1942, THE BOCA RATON RESORT'S ELABORATE FURNISHINGS WERE PUT IN STORAGE TO MAKE ROOM FOR MILITARY BUNKS; SOLDIERS CALLED IT "THE MOST ELEGANT BARRACKS IN HISTORY."

Or perhaps your oasis lies in the ultra-deluxe Yacht Club, in villas overlooking the golf course or in a high-rise overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway. The place is so huge you take water taxis from one area to another.

In summer, it gets hot and humid enough that you can almost work up a sweat standing still. In fall, you may want to head to one of three fitness centers or enjoy outdoor sports like swimming (there are six pools), boating, sailing, snorkeling or scuba diving; golfing on two championship courses or tennis on day and lighted courts. (A wide variety of golf and tennis clinics are also available.) For your pampering pleasures, the elegant Spa Palazzo offers palatial gardens and opulent treatments. (It was recently named one of "The Best American Spas" by *Departures*.)

There are six restaurants, ranging from casual to elegant, from Italian to Southwestern. 27 Ocean Blue features gourmet food on the 27th floor and is a favorite with celebrities. Star sightings have included Robert Redford, Bill Cosby, William Hurt, Tom Selleck, Bette Midler and even the grand dame of lounging around in silk pajamas herself, Elizabeth Taylor. For more information, call the Boca Raton Club at (561) 447-3000 or visit www.bocaresort.com.



The Brown Palace Hotel, Denver, Colorado