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I Love Hotels

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I remember the first time--I stayed in a hotel. I was eight and my dad sent me on a mission to find ice. I have been in love with hotels ever since. I even once slept with Paris Hilton--Who hasn't, right?--no not that Paris Hilton, the real Hilton Paris Orly Airport hotel.

Indeed, I have always had a soft spot for hotels. And the grand hotel lobbies of the world too because they were a place where anything could happen and where you could meet someone who could change your financial and romantic destiny. The fact that I haven't had to buy shampoo or shower gel in decades is also a plus.

Recently, I conducted a rough, down and dirty count of the hotels I have stayed in over the years; looking through my various hotel stationary, matches and travel sticker collections, old credit card bills and a few decades worth of monthly calendars. I was astounded to find that I have slept on average, more than 80 nights a year in hotels and that means thousands of different hotels over the years--good ones, bad ones and really ugly ones too.

I have stayed in capsule hotels, concept hotels, hostels and penthouse suites, ice hotels, haunted hotels, theme room hotels, cave hotels, prison hotels, historic hotels, plane hotels, tree house hotels, resort hotels, dock hotels, halal hotels, riads, tent hotels, Japanese ryokans, clothing optional hotels and even love hotels--not the same thing! I have stayed in hotels that had been foreclosed on (the manager was trying to earn a few extra bucks), and hotels that would be more aptly renamed Hotel Insomniac and the Bates Motel.

Over the last decade, serving as the Event Director for the annual world travel championships, known as The Global Scavenger Hunt, it has become my job to find fun, interesting and comfortable hotels for our traveling competitors to stay in while they travel around the world. The hotel is not the main event for those participating--the secret destination is.

That said, finding their homes-away-from-home, I am always thinking temporary oasis, not resort destination. Our hotels serve a utilitarian purpose: as a way to better facilitate their daily experiences--outside the hotel. We want our participants to be out and about 14-16 hours a day site-doing; yet know at the end of that busy day that they have a safe, comfortable and convenient refuge to lay their weary memory and experience-filled heads.

The things I love about hotels are: personal wake-up calls, plush robes, room service, pools (for midnight swims), city views, heated-towels, comfortable beds, conversation-filled bars, balconies, and the sense of theater in grand hotel lobbies.

The things I miss about hotels today are: hotel stationary, wake up calls from an actual person, vibrating beds (Oh, come on you do tot!), big brass room keys, windows that actually open, hotels that give you a pair of white gloves to read the morning paper with and lobby shoe shines.

The things I dislike most about hotels are: bean-counting revenue managers, inadequate water pressure, Wi-Fi charges, intrusive housekeeping staffs, bathroom phones, inconvenient power supplies, bedspreads, resort fees, portage fees, mystery stains and Guest Behaving Badly (BTW: There is a GBB list--the no-fly list for hotels!).

Some hotels simply try too hard but that is better than the ones that don't try at all; while some get it just right--the Hotel Borg in Reykjavik, the Boathouse in Phuket, and the Regent Taipei, to name a few.

Some hotels are guilty as (over)charged of being bloated, ego-stroking, self-satisfied establishments living on their perceived celebrity--when in fact their fifteen minutes ended long ago. No names...but boy could we!

Some hotels are too ostentatious to the point of making you feel uncomfortable, while some brands are so bland and homogeneous that you'd think you were in Cleveland while staying in Borneo. And some of the newer boutique brands are just too painfully self-consciously hip.

Here are ten hotels across five continents that I have really enjoyed recently--and you would too:

- Heritage Suites Hotel (Siem Reap)
- Komaneka at Bisma (Bali)
- Governor's Residence (Yangon)
- Hotel Montasterio (Cusco)
- Shangri-La Hotel Vancouver
- The Bangkok Oriental
- Mena House (Egypt)
- Palais Jamai (Fez)
- Oberoi Rajvilas (Jaipur)
- San Francisco Palace Hotel
- The Thief Hotel (Oslo)

Why do you like hotels and what are some of your favorite global places to rest your head?

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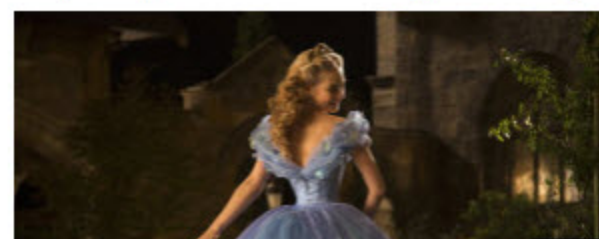
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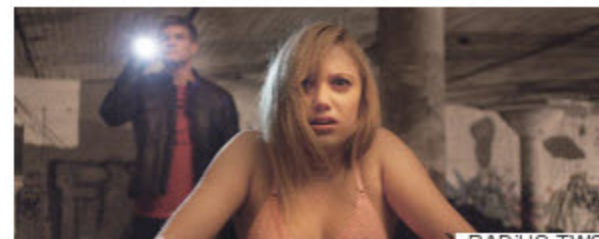
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