



Grand hotels: Live it up like a Rockefeller without breaking the bank

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER • Special to the Post-Dispatch | Posted: Sunday, January 22, 2012 12:00 am

Let's face it, you could choose anywhere to stay on a vacation in the U.S. from a Motel 6 to the Ritz, depending on your budget. But why not go for something with a sense of history and style that captures the elegance of a bygone era, such as one of America's "grand dame" properties?

Yes, a night in the arms of one of these dowagers will set you back a bit, but with a little digging you'll uncover a deal or a package that saves you a few bucks. And your accommodations won't be dowdy, either. A few face-lifts over the years have added modern amenities to these American palaces.

BOCA RATON RESORT & CLUB, BOCA RATON, FLA.

Eccentric would be one way to describe Addison Mizner, the self-taught architect who designed this pink castle in ornate Spanish-Moorish style. When it opened in 1926, the corpulent Mizner walked around in his silk pajamas like Hugh Hefner, with a monkey on one shoulder and a macaw on the other.

Today Mizner's original 100-room Cloister Inn has morphed into a 1,047-room resort with five styles of accommodations, two 18-hole golf courses, 30 clay tennis courts, a 32-slip marina on the intracoastal waterway and a half-mile of beach on the Atlantic. Cabanas with flat-screen TVs and butler service flank pools and beach. The Spa Palazzo, built to resemble Spain's Alhambra Palace, is one of the largest spas in the country.

Vanderbilts, du Ponts and Hollywood stars once journeyed to South Florida in private railroad cars. Today, a parade of Bentleys, Ferraris and Rolls Royces moves around the resort's circular drive along with plenty of Hondas and Fords.

Rates • \$369 to \$1,199 in peak winter season.

Deals • Uniquely Boca package from \$249 to \$349 including breakfast, parking, resort fees, late checkout and discounts on recreation and services. Best of Waldorf from \$149 with breakfast and \$50 resort credit. In summer, bungalow rooms start at \$169.

More info • 1-888-543-1286, bocaresort.com

GRAND HOTEL, MACKINAC ISLAND, MICH.

Late afternoon sun streams through the open windows of a guest room, letting in the breeze off Lake Huron and the sound of horses clip-clopping as carriages pass below. The setting hasn't changed since the hotel opened on July 10, 1887, when Native Americans camped in tepees on the shores below the bluff where the gleaming white structure served as a beacon to guests arriving by steamship. Today, passengers on the ferry to the island still point to the hotel's long white porch. At 660 feet, it's the world's longest and the hotel's most distinguishing feature.

Open from late April through October, the island in the straits of Mackinac, between upper and lower Michigan, is a swanky place to escape the summer heat. Motorized vehicles are banned on the island, so guests arrive by a horse-drawn carriage and spend their days on the golf course, tennis court, and croquet grounds or in the outdoor pool.

None of the Grand's 385 guest rooms are alike, but all bear the splashy floral prints of designer Carleton Varney. Guests dress up for dinner in the main dining room but find plenty of alternative restaurants where men can shed a coat and tie. There are music recitals with afternoon tea in the parlor, dancing to an orchestra after dinner and showings of "Somewhere in Time" a Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour movie filmed at the hotel.

Rates • From \$249-\$399 per person full American plan (breakfast, lunch and dinner).

Deals • Bed and breakfast, from \$279-\$335 per room.

More info • 1-800-334-7263, grandhotel.com

THE BROADMOOR, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.

Since your grandparents' day, couples have dined and danced to live entertainment in the Penrose Room atop this resort, a swanky restaurant (jackets required; no denim) with hardwood dance floor and view of Cheyenne Mountain. The Penrose Room also holds one of the Broadmoor's triple crown of Forbes five stars. The top rating also goes to the Spa at Broadmoor and to the Broadmoor itself, a distinction the resort has earned for 51 years.

Built in 1918 in the Italian Renaissance style, the Broadmoor is the creation of mining millionaire Spencer Penrose, who also built the road to the summit of nearby Pikes Peak. An ardent anti-Prohibitionist, Penrose hosted VIPs soon after opening and advised them to bring five bottles of their "favorite cologne." This and a flatbed rail car of what Penrose called his "gasoline" no doubt fueled many a party. Bottles dating from the Prohibition era are displayed along Bottle Alley, next to the Tavern restaurant.

The resort has grown to 744 rooms from standard guest rooms to eight-bedroom cottages and has 54 holes of golf including the original course built by golf architect Donald Ross and a second by Robert Trent Jones. It has three pools, a first-run movie theater and tennis courts.

Rates • From \$300.

Deals • Spectacular Winter Savings package, \$90 per person and Spring Break Getaway, \$95 per person.

More info • 1-800-634-7711, broadmoor.com

THE GREENBRIER, WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, W. VA.

If the Cold War had erupted into nuclear combat, members of Congress would have hunkered down in an underground bunker built beneath this resort deep in the Allegheny Mountains. Officially known as a U.S. Government Relocation Facility, it remained top secret for 30 years before the Washington Post blew the whistle. Now it's open for tours.

The Greenbrier's beginnings date to the late 1700s, when mineral springs were discovered on the property, and spring water still figures into some of the treatments at the Greenbrier Spa. Golf is a big draw here with three 18-hole courses, including the historic links-style Old White TPC course named for the original hotel. In 2009, a new owner put together a PGA Tour, added the Prime 44 West steakhouse and the Casino Club with roulette, blackjack, poker, slot machines and other gaming.

With 710 rooms, 10 lobbies and a formal main dining room, the resort maintains its Old World elegance while offering adventurous activities, such as kayaking and white-water rafting, mountain biking and an off-road driving school.

Rates • From \$359 April through October, \$179 offseason.

Deals • Discover package, \$359 per night, two-night minimum, including breakfast, \$100 resort credit, taxes, fees and gratuities. Bed & Breakfast Golf, \$475 per night, including a round of golf and cart rental, breakfast, tennis, taxes, fees and gratuities.

More info • 1-800-453-4858, greenbrier.com