

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

STYLE & TRAVEL



## PERSONAL JOURNAL.

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**SPORTS D5**

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Thursday, May 3, 2012 | D1

## What \$1,000 a Night Gets You



**Guaranteed Ocean Views**  
Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton  
Reserve hotel (Dorado, Puerto Rico)  
Entry-level room:  
About \$1,900

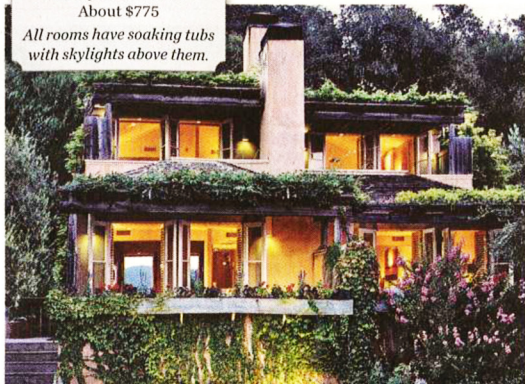
*Each room has ocean views and  
private outdoor space.*

### Skylit Soaking

Auberge du Soleil  
(Rutherford, Calif.)

Entry-level room:  
About \$775

*All rooms have soaking tubs  
with skylights above them.*



### Vineyard Included

Castello di Casole (about  
45 minutes southwest  
of Florence, Italy)

Entry-level room (all are  
suites): About \$1,575

*The 4,200-acre property has  
a working vineyard, 13 acres  
of olive groves and a  
5,400-square-foot spa.*



### Signature Chef

Mandarin Oriental Paris (Paris)

Entry-level room: About \$1,175

*Features two restaurants by  
celebrated chef Thierry Marx.*



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By ANDREA PETERSEN

Get ready for more luxury hotels to charge \$1,000 a night for a room.

Paying that price won't snare you a special suite—just an entry-level room. Several companies specializing in smaller, ultraluxury hotels with high-season rates nearing—or breaking—the \$1,000 mark are expanding.

How is \$1,000-a-night hotel better than a \$500-a-night one? A gorgeous setting and a large room are generally a given. There can be guaranteed ocean views and legions of fawning staff. Hotels are generally small, but have the 24-hour room service, full-service spas and a choice of restaurants seen at large resorts—but you only have to share them with maybe 80 people instead of 800.

Small, pricey hotels also can promise exclusivity. After all, a couple that typically stays in \$200-a-night hotels may splash out for a \$500 room on their anniversary. But rates approaching \$1,000? Probably not.

"We want to be taken care of; we want to be pampered; we want our daughter to be happy and we don't mind paying for that," says Ava Late, who has stayed at Montage

## Ski Valets, Few Neighbors and More Hotel Staff Per Guest Are Part of the New Standard Luxury Rate

Hotels & Resorts' Deer Valley property in Utah—where high-season rates start near \$900—with her husband Steve and 12-year-old daughter, Olivia.

Mrs. Late, a 52-year-old co-owner of a BMW and Mini Cooper dealership in Austin, Texas, says she particularly appreciates Montage's children's program, Paintbox. When her family arrives at a Montage property, there are always hand-painted posters in their room from Paintbox employees welcoming Olivia.

And the concierge at Montage Beverly Hills was able to snare Olivia and her parents tickets to a taping of the TV show "American Idol." "They can make anything you want to happen happen," she says.

The Oetker Collection, owners of the 142-year-old Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc on the French Riviera (high-season price: \$750, or about \$986), is planning to open 10 new hotels by 2020. Montage, a company with three

U.S. properties, has two more projects in development—one in Mexico and the other in the Bahamas—and is searching for sites in New York and Miami.

Auberge Resorts, which recently took over the Hotel Jerome in Aspen and is embarking on a \$20 million renovation there, also plans to announce "a couple more" properties in the next few months, says Chief Executive Mark Harmon.

Marriott International Inc.'s Ritz-Carlton is set to unveil at least six new "Ritz-Carlton Reserve" resorts in the next five years. The properties will be smaller, but with larger rooms and a higher staff-to-guest ratio than the main Ritz-Carlton brand. High season rates will run between \$1,100 and \$1,200.

In a few major cities, such as London and Paris, the price tag for a standard room at established, high-end hotels has also broken the \$1,000 mark. New York is close behind. At the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London,

for example, rates begin at about £735 (\$1,190).

The Ritz Paris says it has seen three years of increasing rates, from between about \$790 and \$920, to about \$960 now, says general manager Christian A. Boyens.

Of course, a guest has long been able to spend more than \$1,000 a night at African safari camps (though those usually are all-inclusive) and remote enclaves in places like the Maldives, a group of atolls in the Indian Ocean. Also, Amanresorts, a 24-year-old company with 25 resorts around the world, has been a pioneer of very small, very exclusive resorts. High-season rates often run north of \$1,000 a night at its properties, which have between 10 and 72 rooms.

Hotel companies say that the new uber-high-end projects are a response to increasing demand from wealthy travelers who want smaller, unique hotels with stellar service. They also can offer greater bragging rights for well-heeled travelers than bigger, better known luxury hotels. And they don't suffer from some of the inconsistencies that can dog bigger brands, where some properties

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## What \$1,000 a Night Gets You

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are impeccable and others feel tired.

Hoteliers say small, ultraluxury properties have weathered the recession remarkably well. Since they tend to avoid group business, they weren't as affected by the sharp drop in business travel and didn't have to discount rooms to lure guests.

Overall, the average daily rate at U.S. luxury hotels was \$257.42 in 2011, up from \$239.25 in 2009, but still not back up to the 2008 level of \$286.35, according to data from PKF Hospitality Research.

The clientele is critical to the atmosphere at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc, says general manager Philippe Perd. The 121-room hotel, which recently underwent a \$66 million renovation, experimented with online booking three years ago, but quickly abandoned it.

"Regular clients said, 'Why do you want to open the doors to any-

body?'" says Mr. Perd. Then, a few customers who had booked online complained about the \$65-a-person tab for breakfast. "You realize these clients are not used to paying that amount of money," Mr. Perd says. Now, potential guests can request a room online, but must wait for a personal response before booking.

Ultraluxury hotels say their steep price tags reflect the high number of employees. Hotel du Cap, for example, has about three employees per room. That translates into more personalized, polished service, they say.

At Montage's Deer Valley, a ski-in-ski-out resort, "we put your boots on for you," says Alan J. Fuerstman, the company's founder and chief executive. Ski valets buckle guest's boots and lay out their skis on the snow. When guests return from the slopes, staff are waiting to unbuckle the boots, hot chocolate at the ready.

"It is another level of pampering," Mr. Fuerstman says.

The 174-room resort (there are also 81 residences), which opened in 2010, also has a nightly, complimentary s'mores-making event with four different flavors of marshmallows.

Some ultraluxury hoteliers do say that the recession has made them work harder to convince guests that they are getting value from their

very high rates.

The Auberge du Soleil in California's Napa Valley includes free Wi-Fi, breakfast and in-room snacks. But three years ago, the hotel upgraded its snacks from more readily available goodies such as Carr's crackers and Nature Valley granola bars to locally sourced specialties such as olive oil-roasted almonds with smoked salt.

In 2008, Auberge entered into a partnership with Mercedes-Benz to offer guests at its Calistoga Ranch property the free use of several cars. Auberge extended the program to its other eight properties in 2009. "We had to make the guest experience even more extraordinary," says Auberge's Mr. Harmon.

Tom Knotek, a 46-year-old retail executive in New York, has been to Calistoga Ranch six times in the last four years with his partner, Paul Hilepo. Mr. Knotek loves the outdoor shower, the unique turndown treats (jelly beans one night, chocolates the next) and the departing gift of frozen grapes.

As for the price he pays, from \$850 a night in low season for his favorite room, to \$1,500 a night in high season: "I don't want to be somebody old dying with all my money," he says.



Rooms go for around \$985 during the high season at Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in France, above. Below, a room at Phulay Bay, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve hotel in Thailand.



### Hotels Hit \$1,000 a Night



Watch a video on your phone about the new breed of ultraluxury hotels, or visit [WSJ.com/Video](http://WSJ.com/Video).



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