



Photography courtesy of Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas Resort

# 5 Remarkable NEW Resorts (from the Desert to the Sea)

*By Maryann Hammers*

OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO, SEVERAL EXCEPTIONAL RESORTS HAVE OPENED THEIR DOORS. ESTATES WEST INTRODUCES YOU TO FIVE OF THE BEST.

NEED TO RELAX? THESE FIVE RESORTS CAN HELP. THEIR “ah” SPAS, CUSHY ACCOMODATIONS AND SAVORY SCENERY MAKE IT EASY TO KICK BACK.

WHETHER SITUATED ON OCEAN OR LAKE SHORES, against a stark desert backdrop or along a river, each resort property exhibits an individual sense of place and character, be it ancient Mayan, European-evocative or Old California-inspired. But despite their differences in location, ambiance and architecture, excellence is shared by all. Stay at any of these five retreats and you can count on five-star service, fine dining, deluxe amenities, ample entertainment or recreational opportunities and splendid spas.

If your spirit seeks a change of scenery, if you feel a bit of wanderlust, or if work sends you packing, we hope this guide inspires you. The West is waiting...

#### IN GOOD (AND GRANDIOSE) TASTE

*You won't believe you're in Vegas at this lakeside Ritz.*

I stretched out by the enormous pool, dreamily watching kayakers float by on the nearby lake and contemplating my afternoon options. I was tempted to stay put to order a fruit smoothie or hike up nearby Rattlesnake Trail to get my adrenaline pumping. Then again, I considered wandering into the spa for a massage or anti-stress aromatherapy scrub. Later I thought I'd check out a yoga or spinning class.

Was I at a mountain resort? An exclusive destination spa? A private, peaceful retreat? Nope. I was just outside Las Vegas, a mere 17 miles from the Strip. Yet I felt worlds away at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Las Vegas, a new and luxurious 349-room golf and spa resort on the shores of the country's largest privately owned lake.

If you're lucky enough to have visited Florence, Italy, this Tuscan-themed Vegas resort will no doubt elicit déjà vu. The exclusive "Club Level" wing, designed to resemble the beautiful Pontevecchio Bridge, straddles the lake, offering views of the clear blue water, rugged grey mountains and harshly beautiful deserts. Club Level guests are also spoiled with a personal concierge and elegant private lounge that serves complimentary light gourmet meals, snacks and wine.

The resort's Medici Café and Terrace serves up an amazing weekend brunch with complimentary drinks from the vodka and prosecco bar. These things, along with the sumptuous Spa Vita di Lago, sandy beach, lagoon and fantastic lake views, provide the necessary ingredients for a true escape.

#### *Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas*

*Rates: From \$329; suites from \$479;*

*Club Level rooms from \$429; suites from \$579.*

*Contact: 800.241.3333 or 702.567.4700; ritzcarlton.com*



Photography courtesy of Lake Las Vegas Resort



Photography courtesy of JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa

**DESERT DREAM**

*This resort was made for fun in the sun.*

JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, Scottsdale, Arizona's largest and grandest resort, wowed me with its celebrity-chef restaurants, gorgeous spa, two well-equipped fitness centers, five swimming pools and two scenic 18-hole championship courses. But the place really stands out because of its spectacular grounds.

The hot spot isn't so much landscaped as it is "waterscaped." Four acres of waterways weave through the premises, with waterfalls (one crowned by flames dancing against the sky), fountains, lakes and whirlpools at every turn—plus a "lazy river" and toe-cooling wet deck. Whether you bring the kids—or not—you'll appreciate the separate children's pool. And when it's time to dine, the resort's 10 restaurants, including Mark Miller's Blue Sage and Roy's (of Hawaiian-fusion fame), all offer elegant indoor or al fresco dining under colorful umbrellas.

The resort's premier "Cloud Club" level includes a private lounge with complimentary breakfast; Starbucks coffee bar; wine, beverages and hors d'oeuvres; limo service to and from airport; priority golf, spa, and restaurant reservations; extra-luxurious bath/spa amenities, plus a "guardian angel" (personal concierge), who even offered to unpack and pack my bags.

You may also opt to stay in the resort's Canyon Villas. These large and lavish residences are actually marketed as time-share units, but you can rent them by the night (or longer) to take advantage of all the conveniences and amenities of home, including a fully equipped kitchen, washer/dryer and plenty of space and privacy for the whole family, as well as a separate, exclusive pool complex with more waterfalls, fountains and whirlpools.

*JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa  
Rates: Cloud Club from \$249; suites from \$449;  
Canyon Villa residences from \$479  
Contact: 480.293.5000 or 800.228.9290; [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)*

#### RIGHT ON THE MARK

*San Antonio's newest and most elegant riverfront lodging makes its debut.*

Bucolic by day, boisterous at night, San Antonio's River Walk is the perfect venue for a morning stroll and watching the ducks paddle by. But when the sun sets, revelers pack the dozens of bars and bistros, and music and song fill the air.

The new Watermark Hotel & Spa is at the heart of the merrymaking, but from my riverview room, it's all peaceful, all the time. More classic than chic, more timeless than trendy, more traditional than Tex-Mex, this establishment is cool, calm and elegant, with dashing white-suited doormen; a soft, muted color palette; and gleaming dark wood floors and walls throughout. The hotel evokes its sense of place with huge iron-trimmed light fixtures hanging from high ceilings, walls of Texas limestone, historic photos and so many pieces of leather furniture—even leather wall tiles—that the entire place smells something like a fancy new car.

Guest rooms—while on the smaller side—boast 12-foot-high ceilings, dark-wood ceiling fans and sound-proof walls and windows that silence the howling nightlife below. Additional luxury touches include marble baths with whirlpool tubs, delightful citrus-scented bath products, extra-large down pillows and plush over-sized towels. Guests who plan to have a spa treatment or two may choose to stay in a spa suite—extra-deluxe guest rooms with private spa access, large riverfront balconies and whirlpool tubs for two.

#### *Watermark Hotel*

*Rates: From \$250; one-bedroom spa suites from \$489*

*Contact: 866.605.1212; [www.watermarkhotel.com](http://www.watermarkhotel.com)*

#### SIMPLY PERFECT

*Less is more at this simple yet sophisticated jungle hideaway.*

Bird songs were my wakeup call at Ikal del Mar, a seaside refuge carved in the rainforest on the white sands of Mexico's Riviera Maya. Sweet chirps, noisy chatters, flirty whistles and an incessant peck-peck-peck outside my villa announced the day's arrival and told me it was time to open my eyes, fling open the gauzy netting draping my bed and greet the morning. By the time I rose, croissants, muffins, pan dulce (Mexican sweet rolls) and strong coffee were already awaiting me on my patio table. As I stepped outside to savor the simple feast, I could hardly believe that yesterday at this time I was fighting traffic on Los Angeles freeways.

Ikal del Mar, minutes from ancient ruins and the quaint town of Playa del Carmen, rivals any five-star hotel in its service, attention to detail and innovative menu offerings, starting with a half-dozen ceviche varieties and including the spicy portobello mushroom version. Yet with just 29 ultra-private, unmarked villas scattered amidst 40 lush rain-forested acres steps from the sea, it's the perfect place to lose—and find—yourself.

Every villa boasts a private, palapa-roofed patio, shrouded in dense tropical flora, with a heated plunge pool for skinny-dipping, outdoor garden shower, hammocks and fat white lounges with colorful pillows. Interiors are spacious, but sparse and Zen-like, with furnishings consisting of little more than a king-sized bed, small table and well-stocked refrigerator. But really, what else do you need? And come nightfall, you will find a poem on your pillow—just another simple, creative, peaceful gesture.

#### *Ikal del Mar*

*Rates: Villas from \$475; Presidential Villa from \$900*

*Contact: 888.230.7330; [www.ikaldelmar.com](http://www.ikaldelmar.com)*



RELAX INSIDE OR OUT AT IKAL DEL MAR (BELOW) AND THE WATERMARK HOTEL & SPA (ABOVE).





Photography courtesy of Montage Resort & Spa

#### RAISING THE BAR FOR BEACH RESORTS

*Casual, chic and very California.*

I had no sooner pulled my car up to the porte cochère when the door was whisked open, my luggage was promptly tended to and I was escorted by concierge to my ocean-view room where a chilled bottle of champagne awaited.

Montage in Laguna Beach sets a new standard for Southern California beach resorts. Each of its 262 guestrooms, suites and bungalows features a gorgeous Pacific Ocean view, as well as luxe touches such as lofty feathertop beds and down-filled pillows; ultrathick, super-size towels; and elegant marble baths with amenities including bath pillows, showers with shaving mirrors and piped-in audio from the television.

Being an exercise fanatic, I was impressed with the glass-wall fitness center overlooking the ocean, complete with yoga and Pilates rooms, lap pool, resistance and weight-training equipment and cardio machines with built-in DVD players. The beautiful seaside spa offers the expected massages, beauty treatments and salon services, as well as exquisitely soft cashmere-like robes.

Despite all the elegance, the place is very warm and casual. It's so So. Cal, too—from the shingle-roofed, California craftsman-style architecture to the period lighting and museum-quality display of vintage photographs and paintings by local artists. And don't forget the primo beach and the mile-long stretch of sand sitting just outside the door.

*Montage Resort & Spa Laguna Beach*

*Rates: From \$570; suites from \$1,100*

*Contact: 949.715.6000 or 888.715.6700;*

*montagelagunabeach.com ✨*