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Waldorf Astoria Named Best Luxury **Hotel Brand in North America**

Ritz-Carlton has won the accolade from J.D. Power for nine of the past 10 years. This year, it fell to second place.



The spa at the Waldorf Astoria, Cancun, in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Source: Waldorf Astoria











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By Nikki Ekstein

July 26, 2023 at 8:00 AM EDT

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Waldorf Astoria is the most loved luxury hotel brand, according to a consumer satisfaction survey released on Wednesday by J.D. Power. It's the first time in roughly a decade that the designation has gone to a brand other than Marriott International Inc.'s Ritz-Carlton.

According to Andrea Stokes, hospitality practice lead at J.D. Power, the 2023 North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study surveyed 33,754 hotel guests about their satisfaction during hotel stays that took place from May 2022 to May 2023. Among criteria newly added to the survey are such details as whether hotel rooms have sufficient outlets and USB ports or whether the brands' mobile apps add to the overall guest experience. In all, hotels are rated on 37 individual factors.

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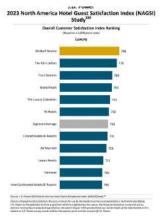
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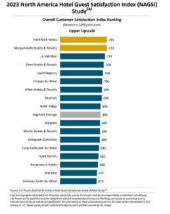
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Staff service, guest room quality, and food, however, are the categories that made the biggest, broadest impact, with those scores correlating tightly to overall guest satisfaction. None should surprise as culinary travel takes on increased cultural importance and service rebounds from a pandemic-era low.





A snapshot of the survey results Source: JD Power

"It kind of made sense to us, given the recent increase in hiring," says Stokes. "The leisure and hospitality sector has added a lot of jobs back, so guests are seeing more workers in hotels, and the 'staff service' metric is reflecting that."

Ritz-Carlton, which has topped the list annually since 2015—apart from 2020, when Marriott's Luxury Collection briefly held the spotlight—has fallen into second place with a total score of 776 point, of a possible 1,000. The winner, Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc.'s Waldorf Astoria, earned 788. The brand has 18 North American locations, everywhere from Los Cabos to Hawaii and Washington D.C.; its flagship, in New York City, has been closed for renovations since 2017.

Runners up, in order, include Four Seasons, Grand Hyatt, Luxury Collection and W Hotels; Marriott brands took three of the top six spots. In the "upper upscale" category, Hard Rock Hotels and Margaritaville Hotels & Resorts tied for first place, at 723 points, outscoring brands that might be seen as more sophisticated and design-forward, such as Marriott's Le Meridien (714) and Hilton's Autograph Collection (689).

Stokes explains that the survey is limited to brands with sufficiently sizable footprints in North America, measured by the number of properties and rooms. Whether a brand is considered luxury, upper upscale, upscale and so forth is determined by industry insights firm STR. Such brands as Rosewood and Auberge are therefore left out of the standings for not having reached the minimum thresholds in quantities of hotels or hotel rooms. (STR deems them "boutique," a segment not included in J.D. Power's survey.)



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"As those brands grow, we'll keep an eye and see if they become big enough to include in our study," Stokes says.

So what made Waldorf Astoria shine, specifically? Stokes says this is a closely guarded secret. But she says brands in general would do well to think beyond their guest rooms. "These days, it's basically table stakes that you would have a great room as a luxury hotel."

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