



AAA Corporate Travel Newsletter November 13, 2009

113 hotels get AAA's top award

Despite how hard luxury hotels have been hit in the past year by both the economy and travelers' reluctance to appear ostentatious, AAA today will announce it is awarding Five Diamond status to 113 hotels, up from 103 last year.

Sixteen lodgings in the USA, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean gained top-notch status, and six lost a diamond. "To achieve and maintain the highest level of hospitality during these difficult economic times is a significant accomplishment," Michael Petrone, AAA tourism information development director, said in a statement.

Three hotels have kept Five Diamond status for 34 consecutive years, or since hotels could apply for AAA's diamond rating. They are the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs; Camelback Inn, a JW Marriott Resort & Spa in Scottsdale, Ariz.; and the Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.

Two 2009 Five Diamond hotels are under renovation or closed for renovation. Four lost a diamond for 2010. Three are in the USA: The Langham Huntington Hotel & Spa in Pasadena, Calif.; the St. Regis in Houston; and Houston's Four Seasons Hotel.

The Four Seasons put a positive spin on the loss in a statement to USA TODAY, saying the Houston hotel had maintained Five-Diamond status for 14 consecutive years, so now "our employees are more driven and motivated than ever to focus on the individual needs of our guests."

Florida and Nevada top the list for new winners in 2010; each gained three new Five Diamond properties. In Florida, The Ritz-Carlton, Fort Lauderdale; The Four Seasons Resort, Palm Beach; and Acqualina Resort and Spa on the Beach in Sunny Isles Beach attained top status. In Nevada, The Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas in Henderson and Encore Las Vegas and The Palazzo Resort Hotel Casino in Las Vegas made the leap.

Mexico also gained three new Five Diamond lodgings: The St. Regis Punta Mita Resort in Punta Mita and Rosewood Mayakoba and the Mandarin Oriental Riviera Maya, both near Playa del Carmen.

California and New York each have two new winners – California's The Resort at Pelican Hill in Newport Coast and The Grand Del Mar in San Diego; Manhattan's renovated The Plaza Hotel and redone The Pierre New York-A Taj Hotel.

Massachusetts, New Mexico and Texas scored one additional Five Diamond lodging: Mandarin Oriental, Boston; Encantado, An Auberge Resort in Sante Fe, N.M.; and The Ritz-Carlton, Dallas.

Robert Mandelbaum of PKF Consulting says luxury hotels are forecast to experience the greatest decline in revenue of all hotel types this year. As a result, some could struggle to maintain the amenities and services required to attain Five Diamond status going forward.

USAToday.com, November 9, 2009

Hotel rates down 8.8% in 2009, decline forecast for next year too

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. hotel room prices are expected to drop a total of 8.8% in 2009 compared to 2008 and will continue creeping down in 2010, though at a much slower rate, according to the 2010 lodging forecast from PricewaterhouseCoopers Hospitality & Leisure Practice.

"It is expected that the steepest declines in ADR (average daily rates) have passed, but that year-over-year ADR levels will continue to decline, resulting in a 1.8% decline" next year, PricewaterhouseCoopers said.

A 3.2% increase in the number of hotel rooms this year added to the hotel industry's problems, PricewaterhouseCoopers said, expanding supply just as consumer demand weakened and further hurting the ability of hotel operators to maintain stable pricing.

Many new hotels, including a number of luxury projects and high-end renovations like the Fontainebleau in Miami and the Roosevelt in New Orleans, have opened during the recession as projects that were planned before the downturn came to fruition.

Occupancy levels for 2009 are expected to decrease 8.4% over the previous year to 55.2%, PricewaterhouseCoopers said, meaning that hotels in 2009 will be on average just over half-occupied.

The number of hotel rooms available is expected to continue to grow next year but so will demand, leading to a slightly higher hotel occupancy rate for 2010 of 55.8%, the report said.

That's still seven percentage points below the long-term average for the industry of 62.8% occupancy.

While the decreases have resulted in lowered revenue for the hotel industry, they've been a boon for consumers looking for travel bargains, as hotels have slashed rates and offered deals in order to lure guests.

USAToday.com, November 10, 2009

Delta going cashless onboard

Don't forget to pack your credit card. Delta is switching to plastic-only to expedite their onboard payment process.

Beginning December 1st, they will only accept credit cards - no cash - on Delta and Northwest Airlines® flights traveling within North America, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, Bermuda and the Caribbean.

So just swipe your card to purchase tasty selections from their EATS menu, a refreshing signature cocktail, premium Delta on Demand entertainment and other in-flight amenities.

SkyMiles Credit Cards from American Express® are warmly welcomed in-flight, and they also accept most major credit cards.

Flying across international waters? Delta will continue to accept cash and credit on all trans-Atlantic, trans-Pacific and South American flights as well as for all duty-free items.

Delta.com, November 9, 2009

Continental might rethink a merger with United

Although merger talks in early 2008 between United and Continental Airlines were terminated with no agreement, Continental apparently is willing to take another look at the possibility now that it is a member of the United-led Star Alliance.

Jeff Smisek, who will take over in January as Continental's new CEO, said in an interview with Bloomberg News that if the Delta-Northwest merger proves to be successful from a bottom-line standpoint, Continental might want to restart merger talks with United. Smisek told Bloomberg that Continental is "watching Delta to see whether Delta outperforms us financially." So far, Delta/Northwest hasn't become profitable, he noted. Before it joined Star Alliance last month, Continental had been a partner in the Delta/Northwest SkyTeam alliance.

United chief Glenn Tilton has long maintained that both United and the industry in general would benefit from additional consolidation.

In other remarks, Smisek told Bloomberg News that although business travel remains at low levels, Continental is seeing signs that it is beginning to stabilize, and there are “early signs” of a recovery in advance bookings for premium-class seating.

Executive Travel SkyGuide e-Alert, November 9, 2009

Frontier reconfigures four seating rows with more legroom

Frontier Airlines, which recently became a sister company of Midwest Airlines following its acquisition by Republic Airways Holdings, said it is changing the configuration of its fleet to provide extra legroom for some customers.

Frontier said the first four seating rows will be altered to a configuration called Stretch, adding five inches of legroom, or a minimum seat pitch of 36 inches. The company said the new seating option is already available on four E190 aircraft and will be expanded to all of Frontier’s Airbus fleet by February 1, 2010.

Persons who purchase Frontier’s Classic Plus fare level will get Stretch seats automatically at no extra cost, subject to availability; purchasers of Classic or Economy fare categories will be able to upgrade to any remaining extra-legroom seats when they check in online or at the airport for a fee of \$15 (Classic) or \$25 (Economy) per segment.

Members of the airline’s EarlyReturns frequent flyer program who have attained the Summit level can upgrade to Stretch seats for no charge at check-in regardless of their fare category, and so can companions traveling on the same reservation.

In other changes, Frontier said that EarlyReturns Summit and Ascent members can now check in two bags on Midwest Airlines for no charge when they show their membership card, and can get priority check-in and boarding as well.

Frontier also announced that EarlyReturns award ticket change and redeposit fees have been reduced from \$75 to \$50; and that standard award tickets now incur a charge of \$20 for the first checked bag and \$30 for the second. Elite-level members will still get two free checked bags.

Executive Travel SkyGuide e-Alert, November 9, 2009

Pittsburgh may see some regional routes restored

The massive downsizing at Pittsburgh International Airport in recent years by US Airways and US Airways Express included the elimination of non-stop service to a number of smaller cities in the region; but now airport officials say they are close to a deal that could restore some of that service.

The Allegheny County Airport Authority said last week it is in talks with Ft. Lauderdale-based Gulfstream Airlines to begin flying some of those abandoned routes - a project called the Pittsburgh Connector. Gulfstream VP of corporate development Mickey Bowman said the airline is “very interested” in the deal.

“Since 2003, important destinations within a 400-mile radius of Pittsburgh no longer have non-stop air service, among them the state capital in Harrisburg,” he said. “Gulfstream is committed to providing reliable, quality regional air service at reasonable prices. We hope this new service can begin as early as the first quarter of 2010 and grow to encompass four to eight communities within the year.”

He did not identify any target markets other than Harrisburg. Gulfstream, which has code-share relationships with Continental and United, operates 23 aircraft on 150 daily departures in Cleveland, Florida and the Bahamas.

Executive Travel SkyGuide e-Alert, November 9, 2009

The rules on names could bend a little

The Transportation Security Administration and the airline industry are trying to address public anxiety over how the new Secure Flight identity-matching program will affect travelers. The program is rolling out smoothly, the airlines say.

The next phase of the program comes after airlines get their reservations and other customer information in order early next year. That is when passengers' full names are expected to be the same on reservations, boarding passes and government-issued identification.

Right now, travelers experience Secure Flight through dealings with airlines. Starting in late summer, airlines began asking customers to make reservations under the exact name that appears on the ID to be used at airport security. That is, a John Thomas Smith who makes a reservation should be using an ID with that name — and not, say, John T. Smith. Airlines have also been asking that customers ensure that all personal information, including frequent-flier accounts, appear under the same full name.

Once the airlines are finished with the initial phase, the T.S.A. plans to begin more closely matching names on boarding passes with IDs at the checkpoints. This prospect is where confusion lies. Will passengers whose IDs have slight variations from their boarding passes be delayed at checkpoints for an extra measure of scrutiny? On its Web site, the T.S.A. is less than crystal clear on this point. "For the near future, small differences between the passenger's ID and the passenger's reservation information, such as the use of a middle initial instead of a full middle name, or no middle initial at all, should not cause a problem for the passenger," it says.

Now if that statement were written in the form of a contract, a good lawyer would flag language like "for the near future" and "should not cause." But the T.S.A. says not to worry.

"We do understand there are slight variations in the way airlines book their reservations and print their boarding passes," said the T.S.A.'s director of Secure Flight, Paul Leyh. A "slight variation" between a name on an ID and a boarding pass "should not delay the passenger's travel," he said.

Secure Flight was intended to solve a relatively small but widely publicized problem — the extra security screening and resulting delays that some people routinely encounter because their names match or approximate the identities of people on a secret security watch list maintained by the government. That so-called selectee list contains the identities of people deemed to be subject to extra security before flying. Given more precise information at booking, the T.S.A. expects to be able to match more precisely a passenger's identity against those on the watch list. This should reduce the number of false positives — people who are flagged at security until it can be determined that they are not the person with a similar name who is on a watch list.

"The Secure Flight watch-list matching process occurs before a passenger even gets to the airport," Mr. Leyh said. "So if you get a boarding pass, the Secure Flight watch-list matching process is done." In other words, you are clear once you get that pass.

But is that person showing up at the checkpoint with your boarding pass in hand actually you? To prove it, IDs and boarding pass names are supposed to match. But boarding passes have limited spaces for letters and sometimes truncate or otherwise mangle names.

The T.S.A. says that in those cases, it is up to the discretion of the screener to scrutinize the ID, including the photo, and decide whether the person holding the boarding pass is the same as the person it was issued to.

NYTimes.com, November 10, 2009

Christmas shopping in New York

Are you looking for a special get-a-way? Please click on the following links to view New York packages which combine the convenience of shuttle service from Lunken with land packages from Yankee Holidays.

[Simply New York](#)
[Big Apple](#)
[Ultimate Jetcharters information](#)