

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Friday, July 28, 2006

THE FINICKY TRAVELER / By Laura Landro

Where to Chill Out This Summer

To Build Business on Weekends,
Hotels Create Urban Resorts;
Poolside High Above Chicago

RELAXING BY the pool in the afternoon sun, I'm watching attractive young folks in skimpy bathing suits sip cocktails and toss a beach ball, as birds soar overhead and boats glide by on a nearby waterway.

Never mind that the birds are pigeons, the waterway is the Hudson River and the pool is on the 15th floor of the Hotel Gansevoort, not quite high enough to muffle the traffic noise in

Plus

A look at package deals at hotels with pools in five different cities

See Page W10

New York's gritty meat-packing district. As the song says, it's hot town, summer in the city, and this feels like a pretty good spot to ride out a heat wave.

While the crowds rush to the beach or the lake this summer, it's increasingly possible to have a relaxing minivacation

right in town—and work on your tan—without getting stuck in traffic. A growing number of hotels in cities from Boston to Chicago to San Diego have added pools, sun decks, fancy spas and new fitness facilities in recent years—and many offer special packages that include romantic dinners or tickets to local attractions.

Atlanta's Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead, across



The rooftop pool at the Hotel Gansevoort in New York.

David M. Appert

from two massive shopping malls, features a big indoor pool with an atrium ceiling, a hot tub and a terrace for sunbathing; the hotel's "Aquarium Package," starting at \$249 a night, includes hard-to-get tickets to the new Atlanta Aquarium and a \$50 credit toward any meal in the hotel. The Fairmont in Washington, D.C., offers a 50-foot indoor pool with inner tubes, water boards and a whirlpool. Its \$229-per-night "Panda" Package includes discount coupons for

the National Zoo and a stuffed version of one of the zoo's famous black-and-white residents.

Of course, in some cities it's easier to find an urban oasis. Miami has dozens of beachfront hotels, and Los Angelenos can retreat to any number of spots with lushly landscaped pools and cabanas, from the hipper-than-thou Chateau Marmont to the glitzy Peninsula Beverly Hills, which offers a "Summer Splendor" package starting at

Please Turn to Page W10

Angie Sabonis

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NANCY J. FRIEDMAN
PUBLIC RELATIONS

Circulation: 2,049,786

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Continued From Page W1
\$1,000 a night that includes a one-hour Swedish massage. In San Diego, the W Hotel has a rooftop pool and fitness center with a sun deck, open-air fire pit and a beach bar with real sand; its "Ballpark" package includes baseball caps and starts at \$219.

But urban escapes are equally available in the Midwest. The Chicago Peninsula has a half-Olympic-length indoor pool and sundeck overlooking the city; its "Summer Splendor" package includes lunch or access to its Chocolate Bar buffet for two. In St. Louis, the Ritz-Carlton, with an indoor pool, whirlpool, steam room and sauna, offers a \$229-a-night "Glass Getaway" package that includes breakfast and tickets to the exotic Dale Chihuly glass exhibit at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

Back in New York, the Gansevoort, which caters to a hip urban crowd but welcomes families, also has special summer offers. Its "Who Needs the Hamptons" package, starting at \$570 a night, includes a spa treatment, a tote filled with sunscreen and a water mister, two reserved chairs at the rooftop pool (weekdays only) and lunch at the adjacent Plunge bar, while its "Honey, We're Stuck with the Kids" package, starting at \$620, offers a licensed babysitter for the children and a guaranteed reservation at the hotel restaurant or a hot one in the neighborhood for the parents.

We decided to try the Gansevoort on a recent Monday night, when we figured it would be less frantic. The two-year-old hotel is generally booked solid, not only because of the scene at its top-floor pool and garden—both beneath a stunning roof that's retracted in summer—but for its rollicking nightlife, including a subterranean day spa called G that turns into an exclusive nightclub. The Gansevoort, which plans to open outposts in Miami, Los Angeles and elsewhere, fits the mold of the typical hip hotel—not usually my cup of tea—with dimly lit hallways, stark modern décor and somewhat smallish rooms. But during our stay, I was pleas-



antly surprised to find the hotel had considerably more style and personality than most of its ilk, with illuminated glass pillars that change colors at the entrance, and eel-skin-covered columns, mohair wall panels and velvet couches in the lobby. It also has a competent and professional management team recruited from luxury hotels such as the St. Regis.

Though many of the guests have a downtown look, we saw plenty of business folk in suits and briefcases so we didn't feel entirely out of place. General Manager Elon Kenchington, to whom I spoke after my stay, says the hotel gets a diverse mix of leisure and business travelers, and aims to cater to both, but its main goal is to create an "urban resort" in a neighborhood packed with shops, restaurants and nightlife. On its rooftop pool oasis, he adds, "you could be anywhere."

After checking in, I found my way to my assigned suite on an upper floor. It had a lovely view of the Hudson over rooftops but smelled of tobacco smoke and seemed too small and cramped, with a bedroom area barely big enough to move around in. I called the front desk to ask if there was a better option, and got a call back from Tim, an assistant manager, who promised to see what he could do. (As usual, I don't use my name or disclose my Wall Street

Summer in the City

More hotels are offering lavish pools, spas, sun decks and other amenities, as well as package deals, to lure people to stay during summer weekends.

HOTEL	TYPE OF POOL	DEAL	DAY GUESTS?
Fairmont Olympic Hotel Seattle	Heated, 42-by-16-foot pool is covered by a solarium that is open in summer.	In August, AAA members get 20% discount and room upgrade (if available). The "Sea Family Package" includes passes to the Seattle Aquarium.	Not allowed
Four Seasons Hotel Houston	Outdoor resort-style pool	"Cool by the Pool" package includes a deluxe room that opens onto the fourth-floor pool deck. \$195 for superior rooms; \$250 for deluxe poolside rooms.	Not allowed at pool
Little America Hotel Salt Lake City	Large indoor-outdoor pool and outdoor lap pool	Getaway packages include a steak dinner. Rates start at \$199 on weekends, \$249 on weekdays.	Hotel-pool access with \$25 day pass to nearby spa.
Peninsula Beverly Hills, Calif.	On the roof, with a tropical garden.	"Summer Splendor" package includes a one-hour Swedish massage at the spa. Suites start at \$1,000.	Not allowed at pool
The Warwick Denver Hotel Denver	Outdoor rooftop pool with full-restaurant and bar service	"Summer Splash" package rates start at \$139 on weekends and include two drinks.	Not allowed

—Hannah Karp

Journal affiliation.) Shortly after, he came up to show me another suite four floors down. When we opened the door, an industrial-size fan was drying a large patch of wet carpet that had just been spot-cleaned. Though I traded the view of the Hudson for some storefronts and the street, the room smelled fresher and had a small balcony and a more spacious layout. (Although that carpet never did dry, the hotel provided nice rubber-bottomed slippers that could also be used for the pool area.)

Before leaving me, Tim gave some important information the front desk had neglected to impart: that as a suite guest I would have priority admission to the nightclub version of G, which I'm sure the likes of me would never gain entry to under any

other circumstance. (Mr. Kenchington says admittance is still at the discretion of the doorman, and capacity is only 75, so it isn't a *guaranteed* admission.)

After settling in, I decided to check out the spa by day while waiting for my husband to arrive. A dimly lit, intimate space, it feels like a luxurious bunker for self-indulgence, with a bar, three infinity-edge hydro pools (two of which are covered at night to hold tables) and massage and treatment rooms that convert into intimate seating areas for nightclub patrons. A Paris Hilton look-alike, down to her little dog, was having a pedicure in a big comfy chair. (Day guests can book treatments at the spa; a \$400-a-person Renewal Day Package includes a re-



Hotels pools such as at the **Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead**, in Atlanta (left) and atop the **Peninsula Chicago** (above) are aimed at attracting urban vacationers.

served deck chair at the pool.) But I was eager to get up to the pool, where I took a nice swim while listening to the faint sounds of piped-in underwater music, then plopped down on a chaise.

My husband arrived and checked out the small but well-equipped fitness center before we went back up to the room to get ready for dinner. Our \$725-a-night suite (rooms start at \$395) was done in muted gray and black with Ultrasuede fabric on the headboard. It had an extra half-bath, and the main marble-lined bath off the bedroom had a stainless steel sink, a separate tub and a steam shower. It also had an iPod dock, stereo, wireless Internet access and two flat-screen TVs. While I poked around in the minibar for a snack, I found not only upscale jellybeans and caramel popcorn but also a choice of two kits, priced at \$19.95 and \$8, that included condoms and other intimate items.

We met friends for dinner in the lobby's Garden of Ono, a sprawling indoor-outdoor Asian restaurant the hotel owns with restaurateur Jeffrey Chodorow of China Grill fame, which has soaring ceilings, striking metal chandeliers, a 50-foot sushi bar and an elevated seating platform surrounded by a pond. The menu was confusing but interesting; our waitress had to spend what seemed like 15 minutes explaining to us that the food

comes from different kitchens and how we should share things. We ordered some tasty lobster, sushi, tempura and Kobe beef that came on a little tabletop grill. Though service was slow, I happily sipped a "peachy lychee martini" and observed the scene. By the end of the evening, the place was packed, so we left to have a nightcap on the rooftop deck. That too, was jammed, but we enjoyed people-watching for a few minutes. (On weekend nights the lines to get into the hotel's bars and clubs can stretch into the lobby, but there's a separate elevator for guests.)

We decided to use our suite advantage to get into the G nightclub, but we discovered it is closed Mondays. (Tim, the assistant manager, didn't tell us that.) Just as well, though, because it was past midnight and my husband had an early meeting. The next morning, we had the complimentary buffet breakfast in the Garden of Ono, now transformed into a serene sanctuary where shorts-clad bohemians and businessmen in suits were having meetings or reading newspapers.

After my husband took off, I made one last trip to the rooftop pool for a few laps and a look at the view. Even with the pigeons flying overhead I really did feel as if I could be anywhere.

—Hannah Karp
contributed to this article.