

## AAA's Top 10 Favorite Historic Hotels

AAA polled its 65 property inspectors and asked for their favorite historic hotels. Here's their Top 10 list, which includes two from the Southeast. They accumulated a bigger list of 41, and there's a link to that collection at the end of this article.

### **Boston Omni Parker House Hotel**, Boston, Mass., AAA Three Diamond Rated

Located on the Freedom Trail, this hotel claims to be the oldest of Boston's elegant inns and the oldest continuously operating hotel in the United States. Built in 1855 by Harvey Parker, the list of legends that have passed through the doors, both in the front and back of the house, is extensive. The hotel was home to the Saturday Club which consisted of great writers, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Dickens and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Baseball greats including Babe Ruth and Ted Williams wined and dined here and John F. Kennedy announced his candidacy for Congress in the hotel's Press Room. It is known as the origin of the Parker House Roll and Boston Cream Pie. There are many notables and firsts for this historic gem.

### **Brown Palace Hotel and Spa**, Denver, Colo., AAA Four Diamond Rated □

This elegant, triangular-shaped hotel has maintained its status as an elite accommodation since it opened its doors in 1892. The Brown Palace Club served as the campaign headquarters for Dwight D. Eisenhower prior to his election as president. Four of the hotel's suites are named for their famous residents: The Beatles Suite, Eisenhower Suite, Reagan Suite and Teddy Roosevelt Suite. While practicing golf in his room, President Eisenhower hit a wayward golf ball and made a dent in the fireplace mantel that remains in

the Eisenhower Suite. Today, this hotel is known for its relaxing spa, fabulous restaurants and decadent tea service.

**Casa Marina Resort**, The Waldorf Astoria Collection, Key West, Fla., AAA Four Diamond Rated □

Opened on New Year's Eve, 1920, the Casa Marina Resort was conceived by American railroad tycoon Henry Flagler. The purpose was to accommodate wealthy customers of Flagler's Overseas Railroad, which spanned from Key West to the Florida Mainland, but Flagler passed away before construction began. Architects Thomas Hastings and John M. Carrere (who also designed New York's Metropolitan Opera House, New York Public Library and the Senate and House of Representatives office buildings in D.C.) handled the hotel's interior and exterior, ensuring every detail honored Flagler's original vision. In 1942, the United States Navy purchased the property and it was used as officers' quarters for the duration of World War II. During the Cuban Missile Crisis the resort was used by the United States Army's Sixth Missile Battalion. Today the property provides guests a glimpse of the past while enjoying the upscale amenities of today.

**The Dearborn Inn**, A Marriott Hotel, Dearborn, Mich., AAA Four Diamond Rated □

Built in 1931 by Henry Ford on the grounds of the Ford Motor Company to provide food and accommodations to those flying to Ford Airport, the inn is officially the country's first airport hotel. Designed by Albert Kahn in early American Colonial style, the main inn and surrounding colonial homes have retained their original historic exteriors. In 1937, five colonial homes were added to the inn and were designed as replicas of the homes of famous Americans Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Barbara Fritchie, Oliver Wolcott and Patrick Henry. In the same year the property

also became the first hotel in the country to offer air conditioning. World War II prevented further expansion of the colonial homes; however, the inn dedicated special rooms on the first floor to pilots flying in and out of nearby Detroit airport during the war.

**Grand Hotel**, Mackinac Island, Mich., AAA Four Diamond Rated  
□

Opened in 1887, the Grand Hotel is located on Michigan's historic Mackinac Island. Located high on a bluff, resort guests enjoy an exceptional view of the Straits of Mackinac from the hotel's famous 660-foot porch. In 1895, Mark Twain lectured in the Grand Hotel Casino when admission was one dollar. Horse and carriage, walking and bicycles are the only forms of transportation permitted on the island. There are many historic sites to see including a tour of Fort Mackinac.

**The Hermitage Hotel**, Nashville, Tenn., AAA Five Diamond Rated □

The Hermitage Hotel (named after Andrew Jackson's Hermitage estate) opened its doors in 1910. As Nashville's first million-dollar hotel, it was a preferred gathering place for the city's socialites and became a frequent stop for some of the nation's most prominent figures including presidents, actresses, war heroes and gangsters. For years, the hotel served as the headquarters of the state Democratic Party. At one time the famous pool legend Minnesota Fats had his own table on the Mezzanine above the lobby. A AAA Five Diamond property, the hotel features Italian Sienna Marble floors, a beautiful vaulted ceiling and Russian walnut covered walls. This turn-of-the-century landmark is an attraction of its own.

**The Settlers Inn at Bingham Park**, Hawley, Pa., AAA Four Diamond Rated □

Located in the lake region of the Poconos, the inn was built in

1927 and has been beautifully restored in English arts and crafts tradition. Guest rooms are furnished with an eclectic blend of antiques, stained-glass lamps, luxury bedding and modern amenities. A terrace overlooks their herb garden and guests can stroll along the banks of the Lackawaxen River. The inn's AAA Four Diamond "farm to table" restaurant features quality ingredients from local farms.

**Sir Francis Drake Hotel**, San Francisco, Calif., AAA Three Diamond Rated ☐

Located just steps from Union Square on the Powell Street Cable Car line, this grand dame has a colorful past. Opened in 1928 for the pricey sum of \$5 million, the Sir Francis Drake offered impressive innovations such as an indoor golf course, ice water on tap and radios in every guest room. Owned at one time by Conrad Hilton, stars like Elizabeth Taylor graced the hotel and during wartime the military blocked rooms for soldiers. Currently it is one of the most popular hotels for brides and one of the last hotels with rooftop dancing.

**West Baden Springs Hotel**, West Baden Springs, Ind., AAA Four Diamond Rated ☐

Guests drive along a red brick pathway winding through the hotel's beautiful gardens before being met by a huge domed area, which has been restored to its original grandeur. This resort was called "The Eighth Wonder of the World" when it first opened in 1902, either due to the huge domed building or the resort's mineral baths, which were said to cure many ailments. The building laid claim to the largest free-spanning dome in the United States until 1963 and the largest in the world from 1902 - 1913.

**The Wort Hotel**, Jackson, Wyo., AAA Four Diamond Rated ☐

This hotel officially opened in 1941 with original construction

costs estimated at \$90,000. In 1950, the famous Silver Dollar Bar was added, using 2,032 uncirculated silver dollars from the Federal Reserve in Denver. Although gambling has always been illegal in Wyoming, it was tolerated for years in resort areas and the hotel had gambling from its opening until the 1950's. The hotel exudes Western elegance, from original paintings by famous Western artists to leather couches and chairs in the lobby. Located in the center of the action in Jackson Hole, it continues to be a favorite spot for locals and visitors to Jackson Hole.

Several more highly regarded historic hotels in the Southeast are on the inspectors' longer list:

<http://www.aaatravelviews.com/post/2009/06/23/AAA-Inspectors-Pick-Top-Historic-Hotels.aspx>

#