

## THE FORBES TRAVELER 400



The Rittenhouse Hotel  
**Philadelphia**  
**Pennsylvania**

The Rittenhouse Hotel  
210 West Rittenhouse Square  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Tel: 215-546-9000; 800-635-1042  
87 rooms and 11 suites

**The Experience**

With an ideal location on Rittenhouse Square and the city's largest rooms (the smallest are 450 square feet), the benefits of this formal, independently owned and operated hotel often surpass the city's high-end chains. It certainly feels more grounded in the life of the city than its competitors, which are centered in more commercial -- and certainly less charming -- neighborhoods. However, the conservative vibe, while fitting for this historic neighborhood, will disappoint guests looking for something hip. General manager David Benton, an affable British transplant who opened the hotel in June 1989, is active in the city's social and cultural affairs, and stocks rooms with Philadelphia-specific freebies like CD recordings of the Philadelphia Academy of Music.

## **The Rooms**

Like the rest of the hotel, rooms are welcoming in a well-padded, old-fashioned way. Plush carpet, carved mahogany furniture, damask curtains and plump comforters feel heavy, but the effect is more calming than claustrophobic, particularly in the rooms with views of Rittenhouse Square (which you should request). Still, there are some modern touches: complimentary high-speed Internet access, seating areas with comfortable desks and marble bathrooms with separate bath and shower and Aveda bath products. Luxury suites, which run to 600 square feet, have kitchens, and some also have washers and dryers. And the Presidential Suite, with its own baby grand piano, is where Luciano Pavarotti sleeps when he's here.

## **The Service**

Well-trained staff members are quite helpful but still Philly-low-key. Concierge Frank Maradino is a font of useful local tips, including where to find the most appealing local wine store (many of the city's most interesting new restaurants are BYOB). Though taxis are plentiful, the hotel offers a Town Car to take guests around town.

## **The Highlights**

For a small property, the Rittenhouse's gym is well-equipped, including a lap pool. Skip the Adolf Biecker salon, which is less impressive, in favor of Restaurant Lacroix, named *Esquire's* best new U.S. restaurant when it opened in 2003. Enjoy the Mediterranean menu and views over the square from the surprisingly contemporary mocha-colored velvet chairs and leather banquettes (special tasting dinners are held under a Philippe Starck chandelier in the kitchen). The hotel sits on property once owned by the family of Philadelphia-born Impressionist Mary Cassatt, and the lobby's Mary Cassatt Tea Room and outdoor garden convey that family's genteel sensibility. This is not the place to come for a buzzy scene or a great cocktail, but instead for a relaxing cup of tea and -- much like the hotel itself -- some peace and quiet away from the city hubbub.

-- Jackie Cooperman