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Five-Star Luxury at Family Prices in Sedona, Arizona

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By Anne Z. Cooke



Morning clouds and blue skies over red rock country (Sedona, Arizona)

te! a Friend f t M ...

For as long as it's been open, Enchantment Resort (www.enchantmentresort.com), in Arizona's Red Rock Country, has earned dozens of stars and diamonds, climbed onto most "top ten best" lists and generated thousands of adjectives, many of them, rather oddly, starting with the letter M.

Magical, mystical, mythical, magnetic, magnificent and monumental head the deluge, at high tide since 1987 when the resort opened at the end of secluded Boynton Canyon, five miles from central Sedona.

So much has been written, in fact, that a beleaguered writer, taking up the challenge, has to scratch for a creative spin on what is annually acknowledged as one of the seven wonders of the resort world.

To be fair, part of Enchantment's success is its location

Scattered over 70 landscaped acres, the resort is embraced by the Southwest's most scenic cluster of red-and-buff sandstone formations, a fantasy world of towers, spires, pinnacles, peaks and hoodoos. Fortunately the builders, reluctant to improve on nature, eschewed the ideal of a steel-and-glass high-rise and instead built a village, a community of one-story pueblo-style houses, each painted a dusty plum.

If you didn't know otherwise, you might think you'd stumbled onto a surprisingly preserved relic of pre-European vintage. And if you left the resort boundaries to amble along the trail above the resort, you'd see that Enchantment melts into the landscape, half-hidden by juniper and pinon pines, cypress and sycamores.

Simple outside, the resort's 220 casita rooms and suites are plush within



Enchantment's Casitas' Adobe style matches the red rocks and juniper and pinon pines in Boynton Canyon. (Sedona, Arizona)

We swiped our key in the lock, turned the handle and stepped into contemporary elegance, western style. Muted browns, reds and ivories met and mixed in pillows, spreads, upholstery and carpets.

A select few framed prints caught the eye.

Good lighting and silky bedding beckoned. The sliding glass door opened on a deck and a postcard-

perfect view.

Our bathroom had a separate tub, shower and toilet stall, with two sinks and a large closet.

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WOLFGANG PUCK RECIPE

Extras included a mini-frig for our convenience (not stocked and locked), a safe, wireless Internet access and a coffeemaker.

The lodging, scattered over the hillside and separated by gardens and access roads creates a feeling of privacy and seclusion.

Paved pathways wind through the area and down to the Clubhouse, as the main lodge is called, a 15-minute walk from the farthest point; or you can call for a shuttle (electric cart) ride. Drivers, on duty around the clock, come on a moment's notice.

Down the hill from the Clubhouse is the main swimming pool below (one of nine), the tennis courts, the mountain bike center, and below those, a pitch and putt golf course with three greens.

Enchantment's Mii Amo Spa, a destination Spa in its own right, is on the other side of the canyon.



Enchantment's main pool and tennis courts, with the red-rock spire, "Kachina Woman," at rear. (Sedona, Arizona)

Close by is lodging for its own overnight guests, plus treatment rooms and day use facilities open to all Enchantment guests.

The name, Mii Amo, or "journey" in the Yavapai language, is in the inspiration behind the spa's minimalist design, with sparse use of stone, wood and tile to create a quiet, even hushed atmosphere.

Long empty hallways lead to a community room with a seating area grouped around a fireplace, next to an inviting swimming pool, and a second larger pool outside, with a hot tub.

A reading room, an exercise gym with machines and weights and a bistro-style café with a juice bar serves eclectic (but healthy) meals three times daily.

Catering to guests who want to stay busy, the resort offers an "Activities Schedule," an exhaustive list of items for people to let even one vacation hour go unfilled.

From morning until dinner, you can do something different every hour, from tennis lessons and play, to putting, mountain biking and power walks.

Also offered are nature walks, guided hikes into Boynton Canyon, four kinds of yoga classes, native American cultural experiences, aerobics, tai chi, stargazing, watercolors, belly dancing and cooking demonstrations.

Though there's no per-use charge for the activities or the equipment, you are paying nevertheless.

A \$22 resort fee added to your daily room rate covers these items, as well as use of Mii Amo Spa's facilities, local telephone calls, credit-card-call access, wi fi connections and use of the self-serve laundries installed throughout the resort.

What's not included?

Treatments at Mii Amo; Camp Coyote, a supervised program for children 4 to 12 (\$70 for a full day; \$35 for a half day); and meals, bar drinks and tips.

To ensure privacy, a fence encloses Enchantment's acreage, from the entrance kiosk to the border farther up Boynton Canyon. But several key-operated gates connect to hiking trails up to the end of the canyon. One of the gates is at the upper end of the resort. Another is behind Mii Amo, which is where we joined the trail through the Coconino National Forest trail. Gradually climbing up into the canyon, it rises through a ponderosa pine forest as it goes.

Seeing the towers and spires above you, close up, is not just inspirational. It's rare.

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Don't let the opportunity pass; it was the highlight of our stay.

At the end of the canyon, look for remains of the ancient cliff houses built by some of the first Americans who lived in the area. They, too, thought it a special place. As will you.

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The first problem you have to deal with when you finally decide on your "Trip of a Lifetime" -- is where to go in Alaska and what to see and do. Alaska is enormous: 663,267 square miles -- one-fifth the size of the entire continental United States.

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Eating and drinking in Europe is sightseeing for your taste buds. Every country has local specialties that are good, memorable, or both. Here are many of the fun experiences that stick in my mind after 30 years of travel. Seek out any of these on your next trip.

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