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## WATER SIDE AT THE RITZ CARLTON, LAKE LAS VEGAS

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services,  
[World's Fare](#)

HENDERSON, NV -- Why does the Ritz Carlton Hotel Lake Las Vegas attract so many repeat customers? Because, though travel is as much about discovering the new and exotic, when it comes to a warm welcome and a good bed, people prefer the familiar.

The hotel may be out back and beyond, improbably located on the shore of an artificial lake in an arid moonscape of a valley. Not only that, it is 17 miles from the glitz and glitter on the Las Vegas Strip. But as a vacation destination, more affordable than Europe, easy to reach by car and utterly unique, it's flourishing.

Unemployment, soaring gas prices and mortgage prices be damned. Though there are hot summer days when this classic five-star hotel is only half full, and the Medici Restaurant doesn't fill up until 8 p.m., the hotel stays on top of its game.

The staff -- officially known as "ladies" and "gentlemen" -- bustle as cheerfully as ever, the chef creates new dishes and offers new menus the concierge is on hand to explain the fine points of Lake Mead kayaking and Grand Canyon helicopter flights.

As loyal Ritz Carlton customers will tell you, your booking information is stored in the hotel's VIP files before you drive under the Tuscan-style porte cochere. The doorman who unloads the luggage knows you're expected, and the reception clerks have already printed your paperwork and tucked your card key into the little envelope.

In the high-ceilinged lobby, where the predictable large table supports a huge vase of flowers, air conditioning tempers the blinding desert sun. Guests, surrounded by polished granite pillars and bespoke carpets, relax among plump, pillowed sofas. You feel swaddled in comfort, just as you would in any Ritz Carlton, anywhere.

A closer inspection shows that this particular hotel uses local stone, leans toward desert creams and tans and feels more cleanly contemporary than its staid sister in Boston, its palatial cousin in Madrid or its exotic cousin in Singapore. But it doesn't matter. In every Ritz Carlton you can shut your eyes and feel it: the RC brand is unquenchable.

The difference here is the desert and the lake. The vivid contrast

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between the hotel's tidy four walls and the untamable Nevada desert, crowding against the horizon outside the windows, enhances both. The hotel's commanding location at the head of this sparkling blue lake, and its Tuscan-style wing that spans the water, offer a classic view of the lake, all six miles down to the dam, and of MonteLago Village, a developer-built copy of a tiny Mediterranean port that wanders down four narrow streets with a marina and boat dock, restaurants and pretty shops

This Ritz Carlton has no casino; MonteLago Village has the casino, open 24-7. But few guests make gambling a priority. Typically, they've already spent two or three high-energy days gaming and night-clubbing in Las Vegas. Here at the lake, they expect to swim in the pool or the lake, visit the spa, play golf and relax.

In these tough times, the Ritz Carlton hasn't been afraid to discount some room rates, create special packages and offer low-season dates. That makes it even easier to spend more to book a Club Room in the hotel's over-the-lake wing. Kids 11 and under stay free with parents (in all rooms).

The bonus to these luxurious rooms and executive suites is unlimited access to the Club Lounge, a private lounge with tea tables and sofas where the staff lays out buffet breakfast, tea and coffee, sandwiches and salads, tea and cake, and hors d'oeuvres, all served all day long. There's a television, books, games and a cookie jar.

Considering that dining alternatives in MonteLago Village are limited, it's worth the extra you'll spend.

#### **INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE:**

The Ritz Carlton Lake Las Vegas is in Henderson, on the east side of the Las Vegas Valley. Lake Mead and Hoover Dam are a 30-minute drive east.

Double rooms for two in January 2009 (high season), start at \$259 per night, not including taxes or daily \$25 resort fee. The same room in August (low season) costs \$199 a night. Club Rooms, with access to the Club Lounge -- with free daily breakfast, buffet salads, sandwiches and hors d'oeuvres served all day -- start at \$399 and \$299. Children 11 and under are free in all rooms. Twelve and older are \$50 each per night. Call 702-567-4700 or visit [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com).

(Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif.)

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