



THE JEFFERSON HOTEL

Oyster Hotel Review

Reporter: Michael W. | Updated: December 21, 2009 ([CLICK TO SEE ORIGINAL REVIEW](#))

●●●●● 5 PEARLS | OYSTER REVIEW SUMMARY

PROS

- Beautiful, elegant rooms
- Attentive, personalized service
- Large variety of room types; themed suites
- Premier restaurant and bar
- Boutique luxury spa
- No extra charges for amenities and services

CONS

- Some rooms are quite small.
- Business-oriented neighborhood is dead at night.
- Rooms lack impressive views.
- Spa treatments are tres pricey.

BOTTOM LINE

After a massive renovation, this boutique recently reopened, and regained its place among DC's elite hotels. It's not as famous as the Hay-Adams, but its subtle blend of technology (TVs embedded in bathroom mirrors; electronic housekeeping buttons) and colonial charms (intimate library, working dumbwaiter) are second to none. All that's missing is T.J. himself. (Oh wait, no. Here he is. ...)

SCENE

Elegant, stylish, multifaceted, and right in the heart of the action -- just like its famous namesake

In describing the Jefferson, the hotel's PR team has written the following, which you can find both on the homepage and in the detailed information booklet in the rooms: "Thomas Jefferson once said, 'Every generation needs a new revolution.' At the Jefferson, Washington, DC, a revolution in comfort and hospitality is at hand." That may be a bit extreme, or at least tenuously related -- I'm pretty sure Jefferson would scoff at the connection -- but it would be difficult to overstate the class and comfort of the Jefferson experience. I loved almost every aspect of this place, from the big stuff (service, food, rooms) to the little (hallway art, bath products, the head bellman's curved-brim top hat).

The Jefferson made its debut in 1923 as the Jefferson Apartment, a luxury residential building. In 1955, it was converted to a hotel, and has remained one of D.C.'s most prestigious ever since. Several years ago, the Jefferson closed in order to undergo a complete overhaul. They gutted the entire building, all the way down to the wiring, and added a number of new features, including the spa. The result of the project, the cost of which the manager could not disclose (and besides, he said, "We're still counting"), is spectacular.

The staff went to great lengths to incorporate aspects of Thomas Jefferson's life that are less known than his accomplishments as a statesman and author. Jefferson the architect? The custom-made toile draperies in the rooms depict scenes from Monticello and other buildings he designed. Jefferson the book lover? Check out the lovely library and its impressive collection of vintage hardcovers (Writings of Thomas Paine, The Age of Voltaire, Encyclopaedia Americana). Jefferson the oenophile and inventor?



OYSTER HOTEL PHOTOS (click to see all photos)

Oyster undercover reporters photographed this hotel. See the hotel exactly the way we did when we stayed there.

Witness the private dining room, the Cellar Room, where a working dumbwaiter (a Jefferson invention) transports wine from the hotel's 1,000-bottle collection in the basement to within feet of the dining table.

As you've probably gathered, the Jefferson's pleasures are in the details. From the high-tech (flat-screen TVs embedded in the bathroom mirrors) to the old-school (atmospheric meeting rooms) to the admittedly useless (black leather sleeves for TV remote and room key card), it's clear that every amenity, every flourish, was given great care to improve the guest experience, however subtly. Some touches are even designed for guests not to notice. When you place your room-service cart outside your door after you finish, a microchip inside the cart syncs with an electronic signal in the hallway and alerts housekeeping to come collect it. Way wicked cool, as Jefferson might have said.

I have few quibbles. Some of the rooms are small, especially for the price (take a look at mine, which was literally the smallest in the building); none boast impressive views. And the neighborhood is sleepy at night and on weekends. But all of that is out of the hotel's control. For doting service, great rooms, and unparalleled attention to detail, you can't do better than the Jefferson.

SERVICE

Warm, attentive, and efficient -- like a home away from home

"We want it to feel like you're visiting the home of a good friend," the manager of the hotel told me when I interviewed him at the end of my stay. "A very wealthy friend," he added with a smile. You should be so lucky to have friends like these. If your wealthy buddies open the front door for you every time you enter and exit, sit you down at a desk to personally check you in, and deliver shaving and dental care kits to your door five minutes after you call -- on a silver tray, no less -- you'll have some idea what it's like staying at the Jefferson. Quite simply, they'll do everything in their power to guarantee your stay is as enjoyable as possible. In my case, that mentality manifested itself in the strangest over-the-top service touch I've ever experienced. One night, I returned to my room after dinner to find, as part of my turndown service, the toothbrush I had thrown away earlier that evening

"rescued" from the trash and neatly placed next to my razor on an immaculate white washcloth on the bathroom counter. A little too above-and-beyond for my tastes. (And no, I didn't use it.)

24-hour room service

Nightly turndown service

Knowledgeable concierge -- ably answered all my questions and offered an unsolicited tip on events taking place one day I was there

Choice of morning newspaper(s)

Complimentary overnight shoeshine service

One clothing item per night pressed free of charge

LOCATION

In quiet downtown D.C., but just a 10-minute walk from the dining and drinking in Dupont Circle

The Jefferson is in the heart of "old downtown," just a short walk from the White House. Lots of must-see historic sites are within easy walking distance, but while the immediate area around the hotel is bustling with nine-to-fivers during the day, it can border on eerily desolate at night. Your only dining and drinking options in the immediate area are on-site or at other hotels like the Hay-Adams or the St. Regis. For a night on the town,

you can walk (or take a quick cab) to the restaurants and nightclubs in Dupont Circle. Also, it's just a short walk to the 14th Street Corridor and its fresh new restaurant and bar scene.

Three Metro stops within five blocks -- can get virtually anywhere in the city

Lafayette Park, which could be considered the White House's backyard, is great for tourist-watching and statue-spotting. Just four blocks south.

National Geographic Society's excellent museum is right around the corner (when I was there, the rotating exhibit was about the Terra Cotta Warriors).

20- to 25-minute stroll to the Capitol, Smithsonian museums, Lincoln Memorial, and other points of interest on the Mall (though you can also take the Metro)

Two miles to Union Station; 10 minutes by cab, depending on traffic

Five miles to Reagan National Airport; 10 minutes by cab (about \$15), depending on traffic

25-plus miles to Dulles International Airport; at least 45 minutes by cab (about \$60)

ROOMS

Some are small for the price, but they're all phenomenal: elegant yet understated, high-tech yet homey.

Except for a few that are smaller than you'd hope at this price point, the Jefferson's rooms offer everything you could want: that is to say, a delicate balance of comfort (sumptuous beds, lovely bathrooms) and attention to detail (high design, state-of-the-art technology). "Variety" is the operative word here. Accounting for all the variations in size (Classic, Premier, Deluxe; standard rooms and suites), layout, color schemes, and themes, there are 50 different room types out of the 99 rooms at the Jefferson. A bit overwhelming, to be sure. I cannot comment on all those options, much less account for taste, but I can say that my Classic Room, the smallest in the entire hotel, was awfully cozy -- too small, even, to set up my room-service cart or an ironing board. The king bed dominated the room. At the end of my stay, I had the opportunity to see a Deluxe Room; if you can nab one of those without breaking the bank (and let's be honest, your bank must be fairly sturdy if you're considering staying here in the first place), I recommend upgrading.

Standard rooms range from 300 to 440 square feet -- about standard for D.C. For details on the three types, [click here](#).

Distinctive custom-designed themed suites -- the "Butterfly" Suite, the "Science" Suite, and so on

Suites range 590 to 760 square feet. For details on both types, [click here](#).

Also, three specialty suites, including the only spa suite in the Mid-Atlantic.

Plush beds with pillow-top mattresses, Porthault of Paris 100 percent Egyptian cotton linens, and the biggest, softest "backup" pillows I've ever cuddled

32-inch LG high-def flat-screen TVs

Bose iPod docks

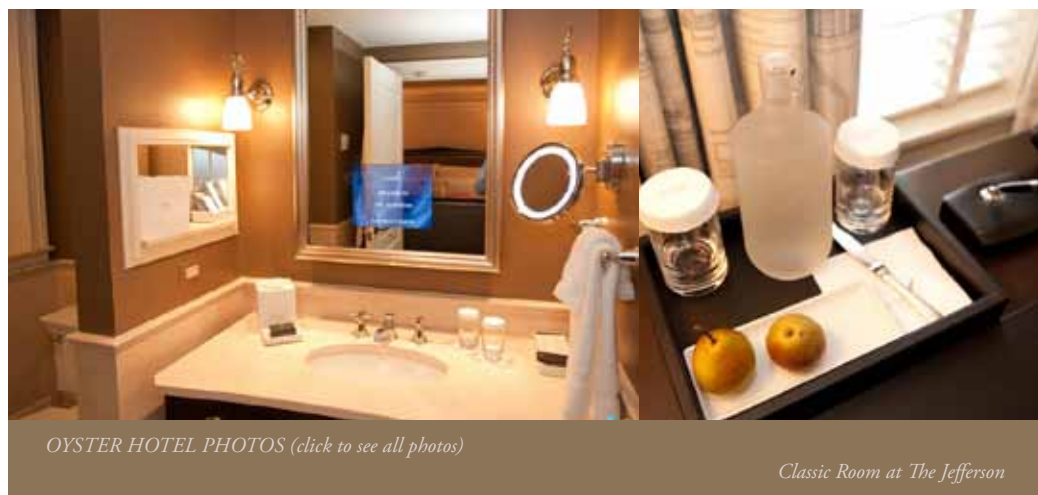
Free high-speed Wi-Fi

Electronic housekeeping buttons, enabling you to control the do-not-disturb device or request housekeeping without opening your door

Bag of office supplies in desk

Complimentary bottles of water

Minibars and snack baskets



OYSTER HOTEL PHOTOS ([click to see all photos](#))

Classic Room at The Jefferson

Umbrellas, bathrobes, and the softest, most cushioned slippers I've ever put on my feet

Small but lovely bathrooms with walk-in showers

Rain showerheads; excellent water pressure

17-inch flat-screen TVs embedded in bathroom mirrors

Red Flower bath products; line/scent custom-designed for the hotel

FEATURES

Everything is small but beautiful (and free), highlighted by a lovely boutique spa.

The Jefferson offers the standard big-city array of amenities -- gym, business center, meeting rooms -- plus a luxury spa, which is rare for D.C. The features echo the hotel itself: small, but classy all the way, and more than sufficient given the number of guests. The boardroom, for example, can only accommodate about 20 people, but it boasts state-of-the-art technology: Everything is automated, down to the blinds that close for optimal projection sharpness; gas in the door's windows (yes, you read that right) enables them to be either translucent (for privacy)

Charming book room with fireplace, newspapers, magazines, and huge collection of hardcover books about the Jefferson era.

Intimate "cabinet" rooms perfect for reading, cards, or watching TV. Also available to rent out for small meetings.

FAMILY

Not great for young kids, but no reason not to take the family

Because of its mature vibe (antiquish furniture, historical relics, book room, conservative decor), the Jefferson isn't ideal for families with young children. But then, neither are the other luxury hotels in the area. Given the special kid-friendly features (see below) and dotting staff, it's probably your best option.

Fun extras personalized according to age of kids -- milk and cookies; hotel scavenger hunts; child's name spelled out in plastic letters; etc.

Kid-size bathrobes (yes, seriously)

Wii, PlayStation, and Xbox game systems available upon request

Free cribs and rollaways, but note that they can fit only in certain rooms and suites

Pullout sofas in suites



OYSTER HOTEL PHOTOS (click to see all photos)

Meeting Room and Spa at The Jefferson

or transparent (for a more casual vibe). Almost as cool? There are no additional charges for the amenities, which is rarer than you might think in D.C., even for luxury hotels (the Four Seasons, the St. Regis, and both Ritzes, for instance, charge for Internet).

Boutique luxury spa with three treatment rooms. Highlights include specialized "vinotherapies" to reflect Thomas Jefferson's love of wine.

For treatment menu, click here; for prices, first brace yourself, then click here.

Business center has two PCs and a printer.

24-hour fitness center with cardio machines (each with individual TV screen), free weights, exercise mats, and more. (Unfortunately, it hadn't yet opened when I stayed, so I can't comment on it. According to management, though, it will be open by the time you read this. If you've been there since it opened, feel free to tell us about it here.)

Several lovely, intimate meeting rooms, perfect for big-time dealmaking in small numbers. (For bigger rooms -- and more of them -- try the St. Regis, down the street.)

Safe neighborhood (though, as in all of D.C., vagrancy and panhandling are common)

For a roundup of D.C.'s most family-friendly hotels, click here.

PETS

All pets welcome

In keeping with its "home away from home" mentality, the Jefferson gladly welcomes pets of any size. Just be prepared to pay a hefty deposit (you'll need to inquire for details on those charges).

Water and food bowls with biscuit to greet your pet

"Pet menu" available through in-room dining

Leashes, pooper scoopers, and bags available upon request (if you can bring yourself to say the words "pooper scooper" out loud in this place)

CLEANLINESS

Brand spanking new

Fresh off a complete overhaul -- it just reopened in fall 2009 -- the Jefferson was immaculate when I visited. Given the attention to detail there, the smart money is on it remaining that way for quite a while.

FOOD

A highly regarded restaurant on-site, but the area's not known for its dining

The Jefferson's main eatery, Plume, represents a rare breed: a hotel restaurant that wields enough cachet to draw beyond its hotel-guest base. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to eat there during my stay (if you did, drop a line to let us know what you thought), but I did get a taste (heh heh) of the chef's skills by dining at the Greenhouse, the Jefferson's other restaurant. It was delicious, as you can see here.

Seasonal contemporary French/American cuisine at Plume, inspired by the kitchen gardens Thomas Jefferson maintained at Monticello

Tasting (\$85) and a la carte menus (entrees \$30 to \$38)

Closed for dinner Sundays and Mondays

Breakfast, lunch, and Sun./Mon. dinner at the Greenhouse

For all menus and prices, [click here](#)

Neighborhood is business-oriented, so most of the eateries are lunch and after work spots. Your best bets: Blackfinn, BLT Steak, and Adour at the St. Regis.

ROOM TYPES

Classic Room

Premier Room

Deluxe Room

Premier Suite

Deluxe Suite

Spa Suite

Martha Jefferson Suite

Thomas Jefferson Suite

Butterfly Suite

Science Suite

Presidential Suite

Bridal Suite

