



Andrew Harper

South America | 2015 Grand Awards

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Grand Awards 2015: South America

Each year, we have the pleasure of singling out a number of particularly memorable hotels and resorts. Here are the properties that Andrew Harper selected in South America.

Casa San Agustin, Charleston Casa Medina, Hotel Santa Teresa, Ponta dos Ganchos



Courtyard at Casa San AgustinCasa

San Agustin © Andrew Harper

In colonial times, Cartagena served as the most important gateway to South America, as well as a storehouse for gold and precious stones on their way to Spain. Today, the city bursts with renewed vibrancy. Several universities attract youthful energy, and cultural institutions host noteworthy events such as a contemporary art biennale. Many of the grand 17th-century mansions have been restored and converted into atmospheric museums, restaurants, bars and hotels.

The most appealing of the colonial conversions is the 30-room Casa San Agustin, comprising three whitewashed buildings on a diminutive plaza. A wrought-iron gate leads to a lobby lounge with terra-cotta tile floors, wall sconces and a wrought-iron chandelier hanging from a 25-foot wood-beamed ceiling. Beyond lies the main courtyard, with a palm-shaded L-shaped pool. An adjacent bar with white daybeds and neutrally upholstered ottomans feels too formal for relaxing in a bathing suit, but two roof terraces provide both sunny and shady spaces in which to recline, along with views of the city's ornate bell towers. A labyrinth of halls and indoor/outdoor lounges laces the rest of the hotel. My favorite retreat was the tranquil air-conditioned library, with its whitewashed walls and partially exposed frescoes.

Our stylish Junior Suite came with a wood-beamed ceiling and limestone floors. A white love seat sat atop a sisal rug, and orchids adorned the wicker coffee table and mahogany writing desk. White Moroccan-style nightstands flanked an iron-framed bed, and double-glazed glass doors leading to the balcony further ensured a good night's sleep. Colorful Spanish-style tiles clad the walls of the bath.

The staff at the Casa San Agustin are reliably warm, obliging and English-speaking. My sole reservations concern the lackluster restaurant, *Alma*. Fortunately, numerous commendable restaurants are just a short walk away, and *Alma's* deficiencies are no reason to avoid an otherwise delightful hotel.



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