

Analysis of the Downtown San Jose Convention Center Hotels

Hotels:

San Jose Hilton Hotel
San Jose Marriott Hotel
Hotel Sainte Clare
San Jose Fairmont Hotel
Hotel Montgomery

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January 5, 2010
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San Jose is known as “the capital of Silicon Valley” since it is the largest city in the valley. As part of the Silicon Valley, many large high-tech companies, including Adobe, call San Jose home. Also, there are several large universities sending thousands of engineering and computer science graduates into the local economy every year.¹ All this makes San Jose a business destination for the high-tech industry. However; as a tourist destination, San Jose seems to be more of a secondary destination. Besides high-tech, the only other real attractions are the San Jose Sharks and possibly San Jose University. There are several things nearby that would draw tourists more than San Jose, such as San Francisco, Napa Valley, and even Santa Cruz or Monterey. San Jose would be best advised to draw on its strength for the tourism dollar, and that seems to be business and the high-tech industry.

With this in mind, we will look at five of the hotels in the downtown area and analyze how they are meeting the needs of business tourist. The hotels include The San Jose Hilton and Marriott, which are both connected to the downtown convention center. The Sainte Claire hotel, the Fairmont, and Hotel Montgomery are all within 2 blocks of the convention center.

The San Jose Hilton Hotel is connected to the west end of the McEnergy Convention Center. It was built in 1989 along with the Convention Center. As you enter the hotel you see that the lobby area is small, not well lit, and makes no real statement except to say, we are all about business. It seemed a little cold, and as one Yelp reviewer put it, “the lobby is like a cement bunker”. There was no doorman (which may be due to the time of year and day) but even the unmanned concierge desk was around the corner and could not be seen from the door. So no one was there to greet us except the front desk clerk who greeted us with a polite “Good Morning”. It was also very quiet and no music was playing which made it feel little like a library.

Their food and beverage program seemed very small. There was a Starbucks Coffee stand outside the side door of the hotel that had some rather plain seating (a straight row of small tables and two chairs each) in the middle of an entry way in to the convention center. They have a restaurant and bar called Infinity that is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and I believe it also performs the room service for the hotel. It is pretty small but does add a little extra room with a patio seating area. The décor was a change from the earth tones of the hotel lobby area as it was pretty colorful and had a more modern feel. The food was simple and nothing really stood out but reviewers do say the food was good.

Their website is listed under the Hilton Hotels main site and follows the standard format of all their hotels web sites. It’s nothing fancy but is professional, simple, quick, and efficient; a user can get to almost anything they need with one click from the home page. The website lacks a link to photos and the ones that are on different pages of the site are small and do not give you a good idea of what it looks like. It goes along with the feel of the actual hotel that says, this is a business hotel and we’re not really here for fun.

So the overall impression of the hotel by just doing a walk through is that this is a business hotel. That’s why they are there and they are not catering to the family or leisure tourists. There is a certain class of travelers that this hotel meets the need of, they want a nice clean place, with the facility to do any business they need to do and provide them with a good bed to sleep in.

After walking through the convention center you come to the Marriott Hotel, connected to the east end of the convention center. Like the Hilton it was also built in the 1980s along with the convention center. However, once you enter the lobby, that’s where the comparison of the hotels end. The lobby is tastefully done and well lit. There was color on the walls, a deep calming red, nice stone floor design, music playing, and nice artwork on the walls. There were small things like a monitor on the wall with traffic information, a dispenser with drinking water and orange slices in it, and a computer area with free 15 minutes of internet usage. All-in-all the lobby, though professional, was also a place that said “come in, relax, and enjoy yourself”.

The food and beverage was also an upgrade from the Hilton. They had a small market place in the hotel just before entering the lobby that served food to go and Starbucks Coffee along with a little gift shop. They also had a separate bar called Tanq with the bar in the center of the room and seating around it. The décor was black with some decorative metal walls with party lights on them. This seemed like it would be a fun bar to

hang out in after your business was over or even late into the night. It is also a departure from the Characters Sports Bar that is seen in many of the Marriott hotels. The hotel restaurant is called Arcadia, and is a fine dining experience serving breakfast, lunch, dinner, and room service for the hotel. The breakfast buffet at Arcadia was simple but the food looked fresh and well prepared. The lunch and dinner menus showed it to have many American classics but with a modern twist. The atmosphere was nice and carried in the theme of the hotel to come in, relax, and enjoy some good food and wine.

We came in from the convention center where there is no doorman, so we were not greeted by the doorman but were greeted with a “Good Morning” or “Hello” from several staff members. The doorman area was just inside the front entrance of the hotel and was manned by two or three attendants. They seemed friendly and greeted us as we were leaving the hotel.

The Marriott actually has two different websites; the first is a standard corporate template site that can be accessed through the main Marriott Hotel website. This is a little fancier than the Hilton site and includes a photo tour. It also is professional, quick and provides most information directly from the home page. However, it seems to be a little busy; maybe a little too much info on one page. The other site is their own website accessed through their own URL (<http://www.sanjosemarriott.com/>). I personally don't think it is as nice as the standard corporate template but it does link to corporate site for rates and reservations, which is good to avoid duplicate reservation sites. The San Jose site is a little cheap looking and doesn't really portray a professional quality. I would recommend that they stick with the standard corporate template.

The overall impression of the hotel is that while this is a business or convention center hotel, they want this to be a place you can come back to and relax and enjoy yourself after a hard day at work or long day of meetings.

The Sainte Claire hotel is across the street from the Marriott but was around long before the Marriott. The hotel was built by T.S. Montgomery, sparing no expense, it was meant to be a luxurious hotel and it became the focal point of the San Jose downtown renaissance when it opened in 1926. The hotel fell in to disrepair for several years but has since been restored to its original elegance.² Today it is one of the city's most recognized architectural landmarks and it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.³

As you walk up to the hotel you are struck by its historic architecture including the front entry that faces the corner of Market Street and W. San Carlos. That same architecture carries into the hotel lobby and adjoining rooms, displaying the elegance and luxury that the hotel was originally designed for. After being restored recently it seems to be kept well in order to maintain that luxury feel. It also seems to meet more than the business client need, though those amenities are available. The bigger theme seems to be, “This is a place you can come and be pampered in the lap of luxury”. However, they seemed to fall somewhat when you went downstairs to the fitness center, ATM machine, phones, and restrooms. That area was not maintained well at all; it had dirty carpets and baseboards, cracked stone on the floor, and the girl's bathroom toilet flooded. It was a little disappointing since the rest of the hotel was maintained so nicely.

Unlike the Hilton and the Marriott that had a restaurant integrated as part of the hotel, The Sainte Claire has Il Fornaio restaurant that serves the hotel as a separate entity. Il Fornaio has a small café serving coffee, pastries, and even some Olive oil and gift baskets. They also have a large high end restaurant that serves the hotel for breakfast, lunch, dinner, room service, and special catering events. While Il Fornaio does good dinner and event business, the lunch crowd was very thin, while right next door at Original Joe's the restaurant was filling up. They would be well advised to plan ways to fill up their seats at lunch time also. However, the quality of their food at events such as the Mother's Day brunch brings in many visitors, who are all impressed with the elegance and luxury of the hotel. This can help bring business to the hotel.

The Sainte Claire website uses the standard Larkspur Hotels corporate template but seems to be more elegant than either the Hilton or Marriot websites. This reflects the fact that the Sainte Claire is more of a luxury hotel than the others. Even though it is elegant it is still professional looking, quick, simple, and again has one click access to most user needs from the home page.

The overall impression of the hotel was one of elegance and luxury, with more of a secondary emphasis on business. It would probably be good if they emphasized the business part a little more since the business traveler seems to be San Jose's largest tourist group. Also, they need to maintain all parts of the hotel, that the public sees, as well as they do the main floor. The small things can ruin the impression they are trying to maintain.

The Fairmont Hotel is the largest of the five hotels with over 800 rooms and suites. The doors opened in 1987, presenting a first-class image for a downtown San Jose that was dirty, ugly, and largely ignored. The Fairmont set the quality standard for development of the downtown that was still to come. It cost the city a \$28.2 million subsidy to get it built which still hasn't been paid off to this day. However, many argue that the risk was worth it because of the image and other business it has provided to San Jose.⁴

As you first walk up to the Fairmont, you are greeted by the doorman who is outside waiting for guests. He opens the door for you, and as you walk in to the lobby of the Fairmont you immediately notice the statement of grandeur and you are impressed that this is a first-class hotel. There are large marble pillars and marble floors, a large and beautiful chandelier in the center of the lobby, comfortable seating areas, nice artwork and sculptures, and seasonal flowers. The lobby lounge does tend to hide the front desk, which is past and to the right of the lounge, but this is probably intended so you get the grand impression before you even check-in.

The rest of the street level floor was similar but that look of grandeur starts to break down when you go up to the banquet and meeting room area on the second floor. The entire second floor of both the north tower and the newer, south tower are completely dedicated to meeting space. In the north tower, the carpet is old and dirty and wrinkled, the artwork is a mish-mash of different types with no particular theme to be found, and the colors seem to transport you back to the 1980s when the hotel was built. This area really needs to be renovated, brought up to date, and made to reflect the theme of the rest of the hotel. There is a bridge on the second floor that connects the north tower to the south tower. When you cross that bridge it seems you have transported in time, to a newer era (which is expected since the south tower was built in the early 2000s). The color scheme was nicer, the pictures were more cohesive (mostly sketches), and the meeting rooms had some elegant chandeliers. However, this floor was also starting to show signs of maintenance neglect, the meeting room walls were all very dirty around the air ducts and alarms, the carpets were starting to get some stains, and there some painting brought in that did not really match the cohesiveness of the other artwork. This is showing that the attention to detail is slipping in what is expected to be a first-class hotel.

The Fairmont food and beverage program is extensive. In the alley between the north and south towers are 2 high-end restaurants (The Grill on the Alley and McCormick & Schmick's), a bakery with beautiful cakes and pastries, and a café, all of which are separate entities from the hotel. Inside are the hotel's Pagoda Restaurant, the Fountain Restaurant (which needs to be totally renovated to match the grandeur of the rest of the hotel or changed out), an express café cart in the lobby, a sushi stand in the lobby, a banquet kitchen on the second floor, room service, and a lobby lounge. To me the lobby lounge is the best place in the hotel, you can sit and relax there, and order food from the lobby kitchen, or drinks from their extensive drink menu from the lounge bar. They also have an afternoon tea in the lobby lounge where you get tea, finger sandwiches, and pastries for a set price. You can also sit in there and read a book, listen to the piano player, or watch sports on the different TV monitors around the lounge.

The Fairmont website also uses a standard corporate template for the Fairmont Hotels. It is professional and simple looking but is a little slower than the others as it uses a mix of web page technologies. And like all the others it has most of the useful information on the home page or within a click. However, it only has a few pictures, which seem to be out of date, and there are no pictures of its most grand feature, the lobby. This seems to follow the hotel along the lines of not paying attention to the details in all areas of the hotel.

The overall impression of the Fairmont is initially grandeur and an air of it being a first-class hotel and it mostly, really is. It also seems to meet the need of the business traveler as it provides many meeting areas, food choices, and business amenities, as well as a great lounge to relax in when the day is over. However, they

have areas that seem to be neglected that can cause a negative impression to guests that might see these areas. The Fountain Restaurant is one area that needs an upgrade in décor and in food to keep the same quality as the rest of the hotel. The banquet and meeting area is also another area that is not up to the standards of the rest of the hotel. It needs a renovation and then it needs to be maintained as well as the rest of the hotel.

The final hotel, the Hotel Montgomery was built in 1911, also by TS Montgomery, and was San Jose's first truly modern hotel in the downtown area. It is considered historically significant, because of its early concrete reinforced constructions, architectural style, and ties to important people in San Jose California's history. It is eligible for the National Register of Historical Places, and is on the California Register of Historical Places. The hotel was moved, in one piece, 186 feet south of its original position to make room for the Fairmont Hotel south tower in the year 2000 and was reborn in 2004.⁵ With only 86 rooms today it is the smallest of the hotels looked at.

The first impression of the hotel from the outside is that it is small and not the prettiest of hotels. However, it does look well maintained. As you walk down the side of the hotel to its entrance, there is an outdoor seating area with shrubbery and lighting, and 2 bocce ball courts, which seems to be a nice little touch but also gives you a hint that they may be targeting a younger crowd. As you go in the entrance, you see what looks to be the front desk straight ahead; however, it used to be the front desk but is now what looks like a small business area. The front desk is in the room directly to the right after entering the hotel. The other thing you notice is that while hotel is all very classic architecture, the décor is all very modern "techie". It is a contrast that actually works very well and drives home the emphasis of the young, techie, business traveler.

The hotel rooms are all being renovated as the hotel is branding into a Four Seasons Sheraton hotel. A tour of one of the rooms showed again the modern décor with the classic architecture. There was a lot attention paid to the details of the room from the leather headboard, nice sheets and bed, and the window and wall treatments. The rooms also had the touches needed for that techie traveler, MP3 player and docking station, wireless and wired internet, an ergonomic task chair, a two-line speakerphone, and a safe that is laptop compatible.

There is only one small restaurant and bar, called The Mosaic, in the hotel. This serves the hotel for lunch, dinner, 2 happy hours (early and late night), and room service. The menu looked good with some original menu items and the décor was again geared towards the younger crowd. The furniture in the lounge area was in dire need of reupholster and the tables needed refinishing, but would expect this to be completed as part of the changeover to Sheraton.

The Hotel Montgomery website is the only one to use a more technology rich website design using java script. This makes a very nice site that is possibly a little harder to use for non-computer savvy people and is slow loading initially but then is very quick after it is fully loaded. However, it is professional looking and has most user needs only one click away. This fits with the hotel's emphasis towards the "techie traveler" as stated on the website and as seen by the guests that were in the hotel.

Overall impression is that the hotel renovation is the early 2000s, along with the current changes, has been very successful. They are not big, they don't make a grand statement, but their theme is carried out throughout the hotel in a very effective method. Hotel Montgomery probably has the most targeted clientele, that being the young "techie" business traveler. I think that is probably a market that it can attract in San Jose since San Jose, as stated earlier, is the capital of Silicon Valley and the main tourist is the business traveler.

All in all, the hotels seemed to meet the needs of the business traveler; however, they all seem to have a different approach. Whether it be business only, relax and enjoy after a hard day, enjoy the lap of luxury, first-class all the way, or we love techies, they all seem to meet the need of a business traveler. There seems to be a diversity in the market that gives travelers a choice.

¹ San Jose, California, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jose,_California

² Christine Bude Nyholm, Haunted Sainte Claire Hotel in San Jose CA, 9-26-2007,
http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/388898/haunted_sainte_claire_hotel_in_san.html?cat=37

³ National Park Service, Hotel Sainte Claire, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/santaclara/hot.htm>

⁴ Barry Witt, "San Jose's Gamble on Fairmont Hotel Wins Praise 20 years Later, Even Though Substantial City Subsidy Nowhere Near Being Paid Off", 2007 Mercury News,
http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2007_4th/Oct07_FairmontSanJose.html

⁵ Hotel Montgomery, San Jose, CA Website, <http://www.hotelmontgomerysj.com/>