

## Travel

CHECK IN, CHECK OUT

### Houston: Hotel ZaZa

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The Urban Oasis pool area at the Hotel ZaZa.

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#### THE BASICS

In [Dallas](#), the [Hotel ZaZa](#), with over-the-top décor and glittery clientele, has been a hot spot since it opened in 2002. In 2005, its owners sought to replicate the heat in [Houston](#) by buying the old Warwick, once the grande dame of Houston hotels (known for its elaborate antique furnishings). After a radical makeover, the second Hotel ZaZa opened in June, with 315 rooms and some of the most unusual interior decorating this side of, well, Dallas. For starters, there is a sculpture of a woman crouching in a Lucite cage hanging midlobby. Fashion photographs — some of them risqué — cover the walls. I wouldn't want some of these items in my house, but, like everything at ZaZa, they make for a memorable stay.

#### THE LOCATION

A mile southwest of downtown, where Houston's commercial district gives way to an expanse of parks. ZaZa overlooks the parks and is in walking distance of a half-dozen museums; it's hard to imagine a nicer setting.

## THE ROOM

My room, No. 542, had sliding glass doors leading to a half-moon terrace, and from both inside and outside, there was a glorious view — trees as far as the eye could see, with the green-tiled roof of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in the foreground and a few skyscrapers in the distance. The décor, which featured chocolate-brown walls, a lot of lacquered furniture and silver-painted lamps, stopped just short of being gaudy. A 40-inch plasma TV, the largest I've ever seen in a hotel, was mounted on a mirrored wall across from the claw-footed bed. The minibar offered snacks and a surprisingly large variety of liquor. The Wi-Fi worked flawlessly (as it did throughout the hotel). Turndown services included a box of spicy candies and a votive candle, burning when I returned after dinner.

## THE BATHROOM

Not large (a leftover from the Warwick days), but beautiful (with walls and floor of brown marble). Mine didn't have a tub, but it had a terrific shower. Toiletries were from Bulgari. But why, I found myself wondering, do hotel rooms come with so many superfluous products but no toothpaste, the one thing everybody needs?

## AMENITIES

The restaurant, Monarch, served a terrific lunch: a delicious salad of calamari over greens was \$15. At night, Monarch turned pricey (entrees start about \$30) and formal — I was turned away from the front door for wearing sneakers. After some pleading, my friend and I were admitted, and we proceeded to enjoy everything we ate, including the wild-mushroom-crusting halibut with lobster cannelloni (\$33). Meanwhile, the adjacent lounge had turned into a crowded singles bar. During the day, the scene moves to an outdoor swimming pool surrounded by cabanas. The [spa](#), called ZaSpa, was first-rate; I received great service during my visit for a touch of man-scaping. Another nice touch: every morning, the hotel puts out coffee and tea in the elevator lobby on every floor, so you don't have to call room service.

## ROOM SERVICE

Breakfast, ordered at 8:24 a.m., came 30 minutes later, as promised. The egg-white frittata (with bits of chopped tomato and pesto on top; \$11) was a triumph.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

On the surface, ZaZa is all about decadence. But don't let that fool you; it is also a very good hotel. Doubles begin at \$255 (suites are as much as \$2,500); various packages are offered on the hotel's Web site. Hotel ZaZa, 5701 Main Street, Houston, Tex., 77005; (713) 526-1991; [www.hotelzaza.com](http://www.hotelzaza.com).