



GOOD SERVICE AND FOOD, EXPENSIVE BEDROOMS, HUGE RECIPROCAL NETWORK

PENN CLUB, NYC

by Lew Toulmin



SUMMARY

We visited the Penn Club, viewed a bedroom, and ate dinner there in early August 2010. The building has a traditional look, the bedrooms are attractive but priced at the high end for reciprocals during the fall-winter-spring season, the food quality is good, and the service is excellent. The Club was designated as a Platinum Club of America in three of the last several years.

CLUB HISTORY AND FACILITIES

The Club was founded in 1886 as an alumni group. In 1900 the group secured rooms in the Royalton Hotel, and subsequently moved several times, eventually ending up as associates of the Princeton Club. The present location at 30 West 44th Street was secured in 1994. This building was formerly the Yale Club, the Army & Navy Club, and the US Maritime Service Center. About 9000 charter members of the new location pitched in to buy the building for \$15 million and rehabilitate and expand it for \$10 million more. The resulting 14 storey building has recently been designated as a historic landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission of New York.

The Club is located in the NYC “club land” between 5th and 6th Avenues. It is about 450 yards west of Grand Central Station and 400 yards east of Times Square.



The Club has a surprising reciprocal network of over 250 clubs around the world; this is the largest network I have encountered. This large number comes from aggressively including normal reciprocal clubs, and being a participant in the ClubCorp network. Access to a separate network of about 200+ golf, country, yacht and dining clubs through the International Club Network (ICN) is additionally available, apparently for an extra

annual fee. Penn Club staffers were knowledgeable and helpful. There appeared to be little activity in the Club on the weekend in the summer; this was true of all the NYC university clubs except the Yale Club.



Facilities at the Club include six attractive meeting rooms and a lounge done in a warm traditional style, with the largest at 2900 square feet able to accommodate 250 persons for receptions. The Palestra Fitness Center is modest sized, about 30 x 40 feet, with 3-4 weight machines, several upright and seated bicycles, and several treadmills. Classes offered include Pilates, yoga, nutritional counseling, personal

training and weight loss. The library is small and is located in the main lounge on the ground floor. There are 39 bedrooms. There are several computer stations with Internet access throughout the Club.

Club members can benefit from an interesting variety of discounts, including 66% off on Zipcars, and other smaller discounts on group health care (!), clothing, parking, car rentals, tutoring for children, babysitting, golf, hotels and resorts.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to persons who have attended the University of Pennsylvania, MIT or Johns Hopkins, and various other affiliate groups. The families of Penn alumni may also join, including parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters or children.

Initiation one time fees for persons who recently graduated from college vary from zero to \$800, depending on how many years ago graduation was. For graduates over age 35 years, initiation fees are \$800 for NYC residents, \$800 for NYC suburban residents, \$400 for non-resident US members, and \$400 for international residents. Annual membership fees are \$1450 for NYC residents, \$960 for suburban residents, \$580 for non-resident US members, and \$360 for international members. Current UPenn students can join for an annual fee of \$200, and the initiation fee is waived.

DRESS CODE AND RULES

The dress code is “business casual” year round throughout the facility, which is defined as “collared shirts, sweaters, dress slacks, khakis, corduroy trousers, skirts and dresses.” “Relaxed casual attire” is permitted at all times in the Grill Room, lobby, guest rooms and business center; this is defined as neat jeans, knee length shorts, and athletic shoes. Cell phone usage is restricted to a few designated areas. There are no gender restrictions

in the Club. The entire facility is non-smoking except the 8th floor sleeping rooms. All floors are wheelchair accessible.

BED ROOM DESCRIPTION

We visited one bedroom, which was about 14 x 16 feet, attractive, and large for New York. It had a queen bed, no closet, an armoire, TV, room safe (no extra charge), and had recently been renovated. The en suite bath was small, with a tub and shower. All bedrooms have WiFi access.

BED ROOM RATES

The rates for reciprocals for a standard room en suite (queen or two twin beds) are \$300 in June, \$225 for July/August, and \$335 for the fall and rest of the year. These rates do not include about 16% in taxes, and do not include breakfast (except for a continental breakfast on the weekends). The respective seasonal rates for a queen deluxe room are: \$315, \$240 and \$350. The respective seasonal rates for a king bed room are: \$325, \$250, and \$360. These rates appear to us to be reasonably low for July/August, but on the high side for the rest of the year. (These Penn rest-of-year rates appear higher than comparable rooms at the Union League, NYAC, Cornell, Yale and Harvard clubs, in that order, with the cheapest first.) Larger rooms and suites are available for \$345 to \$455. Room rates for actual Penn Club members are generally \$100 cheaper than all the reciprocal rates listed above, except in July/August, when they are about the same.

FOOD

My dinner at the Club's basement Grill Room consisted of a club/chicken sandwich, rather dry, which I gave a B; cost of \$11.70. My wife had a Caesar salad, which she gave an A; cost of \$7. We shared a crème brulee, a B+, for \$7. Overall impression of the food was fairly good and reasonably priced.

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