



The Gallivanter's Guide

100 CLUB

HONEST ADVICE FOR THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS

I remember when hotels provided a rather luxurious step-up from one's home; but it seems that those days are fading fast, with service standards plunging across the world and designers running amok with rooms and restaurants that photograph beautifully, but fail to consider guests' needs. It is salutary to note that Istanbul's new airport has the largest terminal in the world and is filled with carefully designed retail and culinary delights. However, there is only one airport security area for domestic flights and just one

for International, and because there is no internal transit system, such as shuttles or trains, missing your flight has become a real possibility. Form over function has become the rather inconvenient norm and, sadly, this appears to be the case with hotels, too. I do not believe that we can blame this entirely upon the events of the past couple of years, but more on a shift in values. Hospitality is a people business, yet it seems that technology has now overtaken this and is considered more important than human interaction. Consequent-

ly, the friendly voice on the phone that used to take your room service order, is now relegated to an iPad, and QR codes are replacing the arduous task of turning on the TV, or closing the drapes. Young people who enter the hospitality business have to be taught how to interact face-to-face rather than via texting, so is it any wonder that service standards are falling? I would love to be able to say that this month's issue brings some hope for the future of the hotel business; but it appears that those luminaries and visionaries

Istanbul Now



On the edge of the water, the 100-room Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus is one of Istanbul's newest high-end options.

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An outdoor seating area, overlooking the Bosphorus, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.

who once brought wonderment, personal service and joy to high-end hotelkeeping are, like room service menus, a thing of the past.

Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.

Quite honestly, Mandarin Oriental's location on the northern edge of the city is not ideal if you are an Istanbul first-timer, eager to experience the major sights of this wonderfully exotic metropolis. However, its picturesque waterside setting and fantastic state-of-the-art facilities make this urban resort a rather good option if you are using Istanbul as a hub and need a relaxing stop-over; or you are ready to discover yet another side to this extraordinary city.

Designed by Adam Tihany, the 100-room property literally hugs the waterfront from its scenic setting on a narrow strip of land in the affluent Kuruçesme district, which lies between the Naile Sultan pine grove and the Bosphorus strait. The views of the verdant Asian shore with its soaring domes and minarets are mesmerising.

The understated architecture of this low-rise hotel, with its Ottoman-style slate roofs and marble clad façade, successfully pays homage to the city's bygone palaces and mansions. Inside, a coolly elegant lobby sparkles with lashings of cream and black marble, whilst a glittering contemporary chandelier cascades from the soaring ceiling; an elongated marble basin displaying Cesm-i-bulbul (eye of Nightingale) glass-

ware, which symbolises the Bosphorus.

Check-in is a very civilised affair indeed. You are invited to take a seat in an intimate reception lounge, which is partially enclosed by glass and metal screens inspired by Turkey's weaving traditions. This connects to a small outdoor patio overlooking one of the hotel's attractive courtyards; and yes, you are offered a drink whilst you wait.

The beautifully appointed accommodation shares one outstanding feature; an outdoor furnished terrace, which is perfect to catch the sea breeze and watch the sun's rays play on the water. There is one big caveat though. The E-shaped layout of the building means that, unless you opt for a full waterfront suite on the second or third floor, you will be overlooked by your next-door neighbours; or by guests using the hotel's Bosphorus terrace. This is why it is so important to select your accommodation carefully. You should also avoid those rooms that do not face the Bosphorus, as they either look onto the cobbled sunken arrival courtyard, or the internal Spa courtyard.

Another point to consider is that Istanbul's hotels tend to act as social hubs for well-heeled locals, who patronise the outdoor bars and restaurants late at night, throw private parties and organise lavish weddings. Consequently, noise levels, can, at times, be very high, particularly if your room is in the central and south wings, which overlook the hotel's two restaurant terraces.



The arrival courtyard, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.



View from the terrace of one-bedroom Bosphorus Suite, #212, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.

On one occasion, I was kept awake until 1 am by excessively loud music from the terrace of the Novikov restaurant, and unfortunately, I cannot see this situation improving, as the hotel now sells day passes for the popular Novikov outdoor pool. Let us hope that management realises that this could alienate the high-end guests that contribute so much to this property's bottom line.

At the time of writing, the only accommodations not overlooking an outdoor Food & Beverage outlet were those located in the North wing; although this will change soon, as a third restaurant is scheduled to open in that location.

From a design point of view, the rooms are sleek, uncluttered and streamlined, featuring floor to ceiling windows, polished wood walls, contemporary curved sofas, and

daybeds. Subtle references to Turkey's vibrant heritage exist in the form of striking area rugs and elegant bedside lighting that echoes the recurrent screen patterns found in the Lobby and bathrooms. Other touches include gorgeous minibar cabinets lined with delicate Ottoman inspired textiles, espresso machines with Julius Meinl coffee, Melez teas, plus decadent welcome suite amenities, which include irresistible sweet



The viewsome bedroom of one-bedroom Bosphorus Suite, #212, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.



Suite amenities, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.

and savoury Turkish treats and Champagne on ice.

I stayed in a superbly configured and extremely comfortable 1,130 sq ft One-Bedroom Bosphorus Suite, #212, with priceless water views that make you feel as if you are on a luxurious cruise liner.

Enlivened by small rose bouquets, the sparkle white marble bathrooms in this category feature egg shaped tubs and spacious rain-forest showers, stocked with lightly scented Diptyque amenities. On the technology front, everything, from Spa treatments to the room service menu, is accessed via the now ubiquitous QR codes. Smartphones connect easily to Chromecast on the two large TV screens and there are several easy-to-use control panels to operate the blackout

drapes, mood lighting and the oh-so-silent air-conditioning. The walk-in dressing room is large enough for a cocktail party, and there is a full-size safe for your laptop, an iron and ironing board and a yoga mat. If you are travelling en famille, then this suite can connect.

As the hotel was almost at capacity after the Eid holiday, I only managed to see a couple of suites, so it is difficult for me to recommend a particular category other than the excellent one- or two-bedroom Bosphorus Suites. Personally, I would request suites, #218 or #219, which should be quieter, as they overlook the less boisterous Bosphorus Lounge terrace. Otherwise, opt at least for one of the four, very private Junior Suites, such as #302 or #308, which

offer full-on views of the Bosphorus from their very private top floor location.

The largest accommodation comprises the second floor, 5,100 sq ft Royal Bosphorus Suite, #224, which is located on the quieter end of the building and features a marble-topped bar, winter garden, kitchen and two balconies.

Generally speaking, I felt that the largest suites lacked a sense of the residential, which is a pity, as a sprawling top floor Presidential Suite, such as #301, with its intricate wooden doorways and three expansive terraces, has the potential to become a very attractive option. The other top-end suite I saw was the Naile Sultan Bosphorus Suite, #107, which is also known as the Bridal Suite. With a 98 ft façade, it is located right



above the hotel's wedding hall, and, in my view, only works if you are looking to im-



Novikov restaurant, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.



The open kitchen of the independently managed, Novikov, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.

press guests on your wedding day.

There were two restaurants open during my stay; the independently managed Novikov Restaurant, Lounge & Bar, and the Bosphorus Lounge, which, by the time you read this, will be redesigned and renamed Olea & The Bar; a sensible move, as I found its original incarnation cold and impersonal. The menu, under the excellent Executive Chef, Fabio Brambilla, will move away from its International all-day-dining concept and focus instead on Italian fine dining in a casual setting, which will, apparently, fill a gap in the market in Istanbul. Overall, I was quite impressed with the quality of the

cuisine, from the restaurant itself, to in-room dining, where I had one of the best Club Sandwiches in recent memory.

Designed to mimic an open-air food market, the independently managed Novikov Restaurant comes across as an Instagrammer's dream; its cavernous dining room featuring structural columns reimagined as tree trunks, and set beneath a stunning wood coffered ceiling. Add to this some olive trees, an exhibition kitchen and a glass wall that opens onto a winter garden and outdoor terrace, replete with magical Bosphorus views, and you have the perfect backdrop for a selfie.

Novikov's concept combines Italian and Pan-Asian food in a somewhat perplexing manner. Cynicism aside, I wonder why anyone would choose to dine in a Russian-named restaurant where you are encouraged to mix and match sashimi with spaghetti.

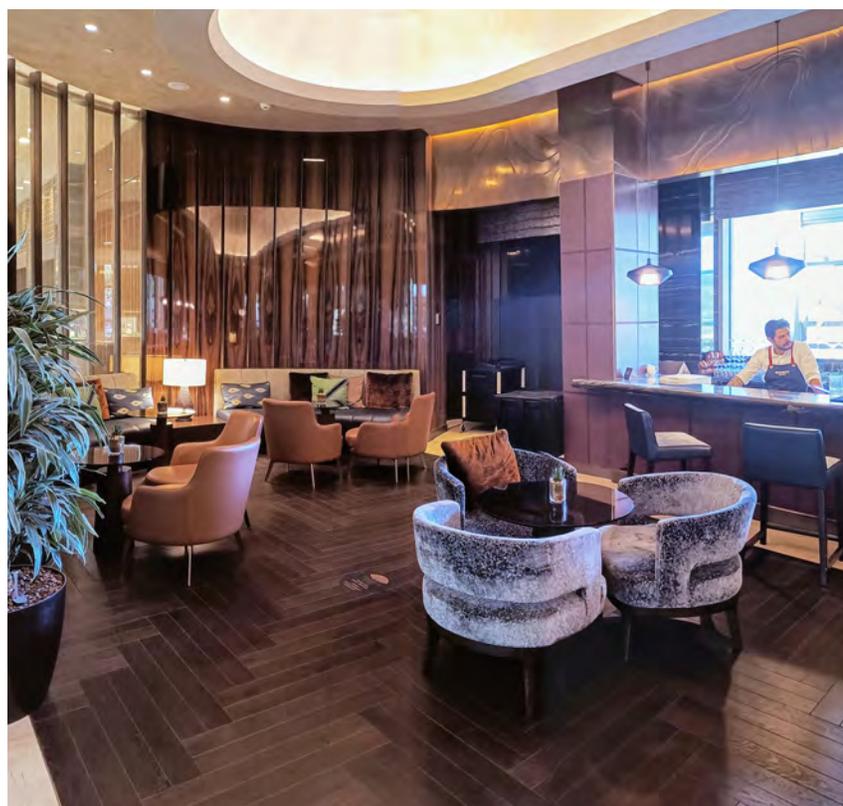
I opted for the Asian menu, and in all fairness, despite my initial reservations, I thoroughly enjoyed my dinner, which was complemented nicely by attentive service from the young staff.

Mornings also start at Novikov, with an expansive buffet breakfast, cooking stations and a good selection of salads, cold meats and fresh-baked breads and pastries.

Coming soon to the northern end of the Bosphorus terrace is Hakkasan; a modern Chinese restaurant concept, which you may have sampled at Mandarin Oriental Bodrum or Marrakech.

Although I am decidedly not a fan of Aromatherapy Associates and Biologique Recherche, the Spa at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus made my jaw drop. Set around a serene Zen-like garden, it is one of the most beautifully designed Spas that I have ever experienced. The elegant circular reception area opens onto a calming meditative garden, which bathes the whole facility in natural light. A curved corridor, with glass panels inspired by Gingko leaves, leads to 11 Corteccia-marble treatment rooms, including a VIP room with its own garden and private jacuzzi.

There are two hammams and a Gharieni Triple Detox Therapy MLX i3 Dome, that combines infrared technology with plasma and light therapies. The sprawling gym is smartly located well away from the Spa entrance, and comes equipped with Tech-



The Novikov Bar, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.



Spa Suite, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.

nogym. Then there is the gorgeous indoor swimming pool, which features a backlit ceiling cove and remarkably plump and comfortable loungers. Throughout my stay faultless staff was always on hand to bring me fresh towels and cold drinks, whilst the quality of my massage, by a Balinese therapist, was superb.

Back on the terrace, you will discover a second outdoor heated pool, which is at the opposite end to the Novikov pool and is rather more peaceful.

Service, under General Manager, Harun Dursun, was generally excellent; although, at times, it was somewhat untutored in the restaurants, which, sadly, seems to be the norm these days in Istanbul.

Opened in September 2021, Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus is, quite understandably, still finding its feet. That said, this contemporary classic certainly has the potential to be a truly wonderful property. Just make sure you choose your room carefully.

mandarinoriental.com

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

Soho House Istanbul.

I have always enjoyed Soho House's brand of laid-back hospitality, where the stuffiness of traditional hotels is entirely missing, and from previous experience, never at the expense of professionalism. Until now that is.

Regrettably, in the case of their Istanbul outpost, professionalism appeared to be an afterthought.

As I stepped out of my taxi, I did not expect an army of hatted doormen to escort me to reception; but a modicum of courtesy, from the seemingly mute security guard, would have been appreciated.

After being pointed towards the hotel's discreet entrance, at the rear of a leafy courtyard, I approached the two receptionists standing behind a Plexiglas shield. I was faced with the stark choice of engaging with a dour-faced girl who was actively avoiding eye contact, or try my luck with a somewhat disinterested young man. Only three words were uttered: 'passport' and 'credit card'. It is not what I would call a great initial experience. As it was only lunchtime, I was informed that my room was not ready and that I would be called on my cellphone as soon as possible.

The Soho House complex is a world unto itself. Comprising four buildings, it is sandwiched between a heavily trafficked ring-road and a smaller, yet equally busy street, that leads to the famous 674-year-old Galata tower.

A modern glass annex houses 59 of the 87 rooms and suites, together with The Allis; an all-day lounge-cum-coffee-shop that resembles a trendy Starbucks, staffed by disinterested employees.

The basement houses a Spa, gym, and a signature 49-seat screening room, whilst the rooftop boasts a splash pool that, strange-



The indoor swimming pool, at Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus.



The exterior of Soho House Istanbul.

ly, seems to be permanently closed.

Further rooms are sited in an older annex, whilst in the grand 19th Century Palazzo

Corpi, you will discover the Clubhouse, which is only accessible to members and hotel guests. Finally, a neighbouring build-

ing houses Cecconi's; a signature Soho House restaurant brand that specialises in no-fuss Italian cuisine.

Attempting to enter the palatial Palazzo Corpi proved to be another frustrating experience, as I was still waiting for a room key. A receptionist eventually allowed me in after a couple of phone calls. Sumptuously restored in Soho House's signature shabby-chic style, the Palazzo certainly makes an impression, with its striking frescoes, Piemonte rosewood doors and 16 foot high ceilings.

There is a maze of seating and dining areas spread over three floors, with an intimate ground floor, and a rooftop bar dressed with huge cushy loungers. Sadly, lunch did not improve my spirits, with apathetic staff and an utterly forgettable and seriously overpriced tuna poke bowl.

Eventually, I was called and shown to my Medium Plus Room, located in the glass building, where the décor was the usual custom-made designs from the Soho House team, interspersed with local influences in the form of faded Turkish carpets, ethnic textiles and eye-catching hand-painted ceramics inspired by 16th Century Ottoman design.

First impressions were quite positive, until I opened the sheer drapes, which revealed close-up views of the ring road and annex building. I then realised that the ultra-noisy air-conditioning could not be switched off. Subsequently, after it was repaired and the



Large Mezzanine, #75, at Soho House Istanbul.



A Medium Plus Room, #84, at Sobo House Istanbul.

sound was reduced, I became conscious of the ambient noise from the road; so loud as to make it impossible to spend the night there. Attempting a move to another room was no easy feat. Apparently, nobody had ever complained about poor sound insula-

tion before, and I was told that I would have to wait at least another hour for a new room to be ready.

I was assured that my new room in the old annex would be quiet, which was not entirely true, as poor sound insulation ap-

pears to be the norm in this hotel, no matter where you stay.

The problems did not stop there. The skylight did not fully block the light; the cheap-looking minibar was faulty; the shower taps kept falling on the bathroom floor; the bed was unusually hard, and the usual full-sized Cowshed toiletries were missing. Indeed, all in all, the look was definitely shabbier than chic, and the only enjoyable touch was the drinks trolley that made the rounds to each room every evening; by which time, a glass of wine was desperately needed.

If you must stay, book nothing less than one of the Large Mezzanine Rooms, such as #74, which work quite well. The Playroom, with its extravagant bathroom, set in what resembles a giant mirrored cube, is very attractive, whilst the vast 3,035 sq ft Apartment, which boasts a piano, fully integrated kitchen, and a terrace with jacuzzi and BBQ, may compensate somewhat for the disinterested service.

As with every Soho House, there is a low-lit farmhouse-style Cowshed Spa, which features five panelled treatment rooms, two Turkish Hammams, a Neville barber shop, and staff who tried desperately to sign me up for a treatment. There is also a very expensive and superbly equipped gym, featuring a boxing ring. However, the absence of natural light is barely conducive to exercise.



Large Mezzanine, #74, at Sobo House Istanbul.



Cecconi's restaurant, at Sobo House Istanbul, for inspired Italian cuisine.

I had dinner at Cecconi's. You can sit indoors under a glass canopy by the open kitchen, or choose the pretty, shaded outdoor pergola. The restaurant serves inspired Italian dishes, from carpaccios to pasta, together with some very good pizzas from the wood-fired oven, and excellent Turkish wines by the glass.

Service was noticeably better here than in the hotel, until I was sternly reminded that a service charge was not included in my bill.

I checked out at the same time as an achingly trendy guest who was waxing lyrical about his stay; telling staff at the front desk that he would be raving about it on Instagram; which says a lot about the hotel's clientele. I, on the other hand, skipped breakfast, packed my bags, and left early. There is no way I can recommend this hotel to anyone.

sohohouse.com

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓

Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.

Gone are the days when you could beat Istanbul's notorious traffic and hop on the stylish Four Seasons boat for a 30-minute transfer from the old Atatürk airport to the hotel's private dock.

The city's impressive new airport, one of the largest in the world, is only accessible



by car, and it will take around 45 minutes to 1 hour to reach Four Seasons' second Istanbul property. The location of this hotel, close to the splendid Dolmabahçe Palace, is not exactly central; but its wonderfully picturesque setting on the edge of the busiest maritime route in the world largely makes up for it.

I was captivated by this world-class urban resort when I first stayed in 2009, a mere few months after its official opening. Today, the classically elegant lobby continues to impress and the immaculate corridors still showcase an impressive rotating collection of art and dexterously lit paintings and artifacts.

However, I was disappointed to find that

the room décor had not changed one iota since my last stay; an update urgently required. From what I heard from management, the hotel seems to be gearing up for a renovation, but I am not holding my breath, as nothing has been decided yet.

If you value authenticity, then the original 19th Century Ottoman Palace wing, with its lofty hand painted ceilings, is where you should stay, with the best of the hotel's breathtaking Bosphorus views.

I stayed in a Palace Bosphorus Room, #1203, located on the second floor. The



views of the waterfront skyline from the three arched windows were spell-binding; but it was difficult to ignore the dated look of the room, particularly the fitted carpets, chairs and sofas, which had seen better days.

On the positive side, the spotless marble bathroom, with its twin vanities,



walk-in shower and separate loo, was exceedingly well-maintained and still looked quite relevant. It was stocked with Maison Francis Kurkdjian toiletries, with the option of requesting more natural Turkish products, which I thought was a thoughtful touch. There was a well-stocked mini bar, filtered house water, a Nespresso machine, and an alarm clock with an Ipod dock, which betrayed the room's age.



The imposing exterior of Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.

For something larger, a One Bedroom Bosphorus Palace Suite, such as #1202, with its handsome polished wood floors and beautiful Turkish rugs, is a much better option.

Then there is the very spacious Atik Pasha Suite, #1210, also in the Palace wing; or, if you crave outdoor space and 180° views of the Bosphorus, one of the four very private Palace Roof Suites.

If you cannot secure one of the 34 rooms and suites in the Palace wing, a good compromise is a One-Bedroom Bosphorus Suite in one of the two slightly less attractive modern annexes. Another choice would be a pleasantly configured Four Seasons Junior Suite, such as #2403, which boasts side views of the Bosphorus from its attractive window seat.

On the culinary front, it is easy to lose

count of the number of eateries, especially in the summer months, when a couple of al fresco pop-up restaurants appear on the hotel's expansive marbled terrace. Aqua, the crowd-pleasing fine dining fish & seafood restaurant, moves to the Bosphorus terrace in summer, as apparently nobody wants to eat indoors in Istanbul.

Aqua is also the venue where you start the day with a seemingly endless buffet dis-



The Lobby, at Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.



One-bedroom Bosphorus Palace Suite, #1202, at Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.

play, including a large bakery selection, a huge variety of olives, hot Turkish dishes and cooked-to-order eggs. Sadly, unless you go for Turkish, it was nigh impossible to get a decent coffee; perhaps because they are using an industrial size Nespresso machine.

For lunch and dinner, Executive Chef, Görkem Ozkan's cuisine is excellent; but the whole experience was let down by chaotic and substandard service. Although every

staff member had the right attitude and was unfailingly friendly, training and proficiency were sorely lacking; something that is quite puzzling, considering that the hotel's F&B outlets remained open during the pandemic.

Over the course of a couple of days, not a single meal went smoothly. Wrong menus were presented, wrong drinks were served on more than one occasion, cutlery was not

replaced, and so it went on.

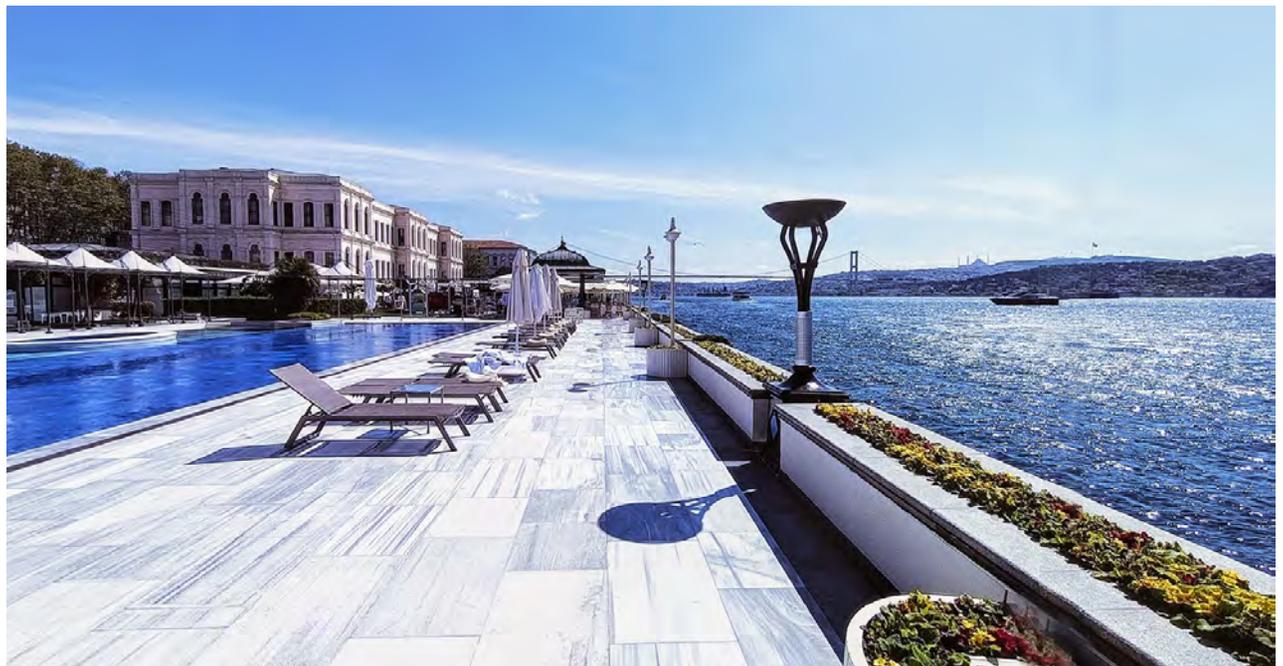
Sadly, this litany of mistakes was not limited to Aqua. I experienced the same shortcomings whilst dining at the otherwise excellent Yaly Lounge & Bar, the hotel's all-day-dining eatery, where I was offered tea



The Hammam, at Four Seasons Bosphorus.

or coffee after signing my bill; a real pity, as the Turkish cuisine is splendid.

A relatively new addition is Yasemin, opposite Yaly Lounge & Bar, which serves a family breakfast in the morning, Turkish



The seemingly endless Bosphorus terrace, at Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.



Breakfast buffet at Aqua, at Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.

cuisine for lunch and dinner and a women-only afternoon tea on its charming terrace; a concept most likely created for the local market. Closer to the outdoor pool, there is Ocakbasi, a pop-up restaurant, which specialises in kebabs and mezzes. I was tempted to try it; but despite the heaters, the weather was a tad too cold for comfort.

One of the best features of this property is its scenic outdoor pool, which is located, very sensibly, away from the main building and is surrounded by cushy loungers. Then there is the extensive and very beautiful Spa, with its steam rooms, saunas, men's and

women's Marmara marble hammams, and a breathtaking skylit indoor pool. Annoyingly, you must walk past the very well-equipped glass-windowed gym and Hair Salon to reach the reception area, and if you are staying in the Palace wing, you have

no option but to walk the length of the lobby to get to the Spa elevators.

Thankfully, everything is forgiven once you are ensconced in one of the 10 treatment rooms, as in their infinite wisdom, the skincare products used are by the sublime, chemical-free, Sodashi.

Outside of the restaurants, service, under



The skylit Spa pool, at Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at The Bosphorus.

veteran General Manager, Tarek Mourad, was marginally better. Housekeeping was good, if not particularly thoughtful, and the indoor pool area was littered with used towels and water cups.

Save for the peerless views and very good cuisine, there was, unfortunately, nothing exceptional about my stay at this once spectacular hotel which, in my opinion, has been resting on its laurels for rather too long. Now, all eyes are on the newly revitalised Four Seasons Istanbul at Sultanahmet, which just reopened after a lengthy closure and will, hopefully, tempt me back to Istanbul.

fourseasons.com

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓



Gallivanter's

Gossip

I ALWAYS FELT THAT HOTELS IN VIENNA required a degree of compromise, so I am hoping that the new **Rosewood Vienna**, which opens this month, will invigorate this marvellous city. With just 99 very spacious rooms and suites, the hotel is set within an immaculately restored 19th Century pile in the Old Town (see right), which is the perfect location for history buffs, retail addicts and foodies.

RUMOURED TO BE OPENING IN OCTOBER is the 29-room **Shinta Mani Mustang Resort**, which is a happy cooperation between one of Nepal's high-profile Sherpa families and designer and hotelier, Bill Bensley. Formerly, the Mustang Resort in Jomsom, **Nepal**, Bensley will add his inimitable style to this less-travelled corner of the world, opening up the Hidden Kingdom to the high-end guest, with daily all-inclusive rates. No website as yet.

BILL HEINECKE'S MINOR HOTELS takes on **Australia** with its design-led Avani brand. **Avani Mooloolaba Beach** is set to open in 2025 on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, a stroll away from the beach. It is a new and somewhat bizarre build (see right), but could become a local hotspot, given its location on the corner of Brisbane Road and First Avenue. With 180 rooms and four restaurants, the hotel is designed to appeal to everyone, from singles to families.

UNTIL NOW, THE PLACE TO STAY IN MUSCAT, OMAN was The Chedi Muscat, with its 160 Omani-style rooms and suites. I always thought the resort was a tad too large; but perhaps not, as the newly opened **Jumeirah Muscat Bay** has 206. Despite its size, this resort looks rather wonderful (see right), with all accommodation facing the ocean. Top tip, though, is to take one of the five two- or four-bedroom Summerhouses; each with a private pool, butler service and direct access to a private beach.

I HAVE RECEIVED A NUMBER OF MEMBER ENQUIRIES about hotels in the **Dolomites**, so I was interested to hear that **Mandarin Oriental Cortina** was set to open in 2025. This Italian Alpine resort is a re-brand of the 1901 Art Nouveau Hotel Cristallo, which was previously operated by Marriott's Luxury Collection. Mandarin will close the resort in 2023 for a massive renovation and extension, by architects Herzog & de Meuron; so I doubt if we will recognise the new interiors. With 83 rooms and suites, Spa and indoor-outdoor pool, this could be a serious Alpine contender.

GENERAL MANAGERS TO FOLLOW include ex-Four Seasons, **Michael Purtill**, who now heads up Dukes in London. The Imperial New Delhi should improve under **Louis Sailer**, who is now Senior Vice President there. Ex spa guru and hotelier, **Clive McNish** is the new General Manager of Hampshire's Chewton Glen; and ex-Aman Asia MD of Ops, **Marco Franck** becomes Global Head of Hotels for Habitas; a group well worth watching.



Published monthly since 1991 by The Gallivanter's Guide, Hill Crest, Malmesbury Road, Minety, Malmesbury, Wiltshire SN16 9QX, UK.

Email: mail@gallivanterguide.com Website: www.gallivanterguide.com

FOUNDER/EDITOR: LYN MIDDLEHURST. **FOUNDER/ART:** DAVID MASLIN. **HOTEL CRITIC:** PHILIPPE SERVAIS.

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