



# The Gallivanter's Guide

## 100 CLUB

HONEST ADVICE FOR THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS

**M**adrid has been on our list for quite a while, as the last time we reviewed anything in this vibrant city was when

the quirky boutique property, Hotel Hospes Puerta de Alcalá, was the best option in town. Since then, Four Seasons open-

ed, closely followed by Mandarin Oriental's massive renovation of the old Ritz Hotel; both hugely relevant to the high-



*The Lobby,  
at Mandarin  
Oriental Ritz  
Madrid.*

## The marvels of Madrid.

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*Mandarin Oriental General Manager, Greg Liddell.*  
history, relevance and 21st Century comforts.

Do the right thing and book an ultra-comfortable Maybach transfer from Barajas airport, where your limo driver will greet you in the baggage area, and in less than 30 minutes, an army of amiable doormen and bellboys will be ready to welcome you to the hotel.

I love the location of this property, which is set in the midst of the leafy Art Triangle, formed by the Reina Sofia, Prado and Thyssen-Bornemisza museums and just a short stroll from the high-end shopping district of Salamanca.

What immediately struck me, as I entered the lobby through its 10-foot glassed doors, is how luminous and airy the hotel is. Lost for 80 years, the canopy that used

*The elegant approach to the revitalised Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*

end guest. In the pipeline and scheduled to open as I write is Rosewood Villa Magna; a takeover of what was a somewhat sterile, 154-room business-oriented hotel. Rosewood appear to be adding much-needed flair; the two terraced rooftop suites being particularly covetable. Sadly, we were not allowed to take a peek at this stage; but given Villa Magna's lack of historic and architectural interest, it will have to be very good to triumph over Madrid's new big names....

Spanish architect, Rafael de La-Hoz, and I could not be happier with the result, as the elegantly restored Ritz now gleams with

### **Mandarin Oriental Ritz, Madrid.**

Mandarin Oriental, which owns a 50% stake in the Ritz Madrid, made a sound choice in 2017, when the group decided to close this iconic hotel for a €100 million renovation. Frankly, the legendary Belle Epoque Grande Dame, which hosted countless celebrities and dignitaries over its 110 years of glorious history, had been resting on its laurels for way too long and was seriously past its prime.

This once dark and claustrophobic property was renovated superbly by designers, Gilles & Boissier, alongside the renowned



*At Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid, sitting room of one-bedroom Turret Suite, #508.*



*Filled with light, another view of the sitting room of Turret Suite, #508, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*



*At Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid, the bedroom of Turret Suite, #508.*

to cover the Palm Court at the heart of the hotel has now been restored to its former splendour, in keeping with César Ritz's original plans; the property once again flooded with natural light.

I barely had time to take a closer look at the lobby's gorgeous brass and nickel rotunda ceiling sculpture, inspired by the neighbouring Retiro Park, before I was whisked away to my suite by ex-Aman and veteran Mandarin Oriental General Manager, Greg Liddell, together with Claudia, the delightful head Butler.

You rarely meet a General Manager in hotels these days, so it was heart-warming to see Greg talking to guests in the lobby, corridors and in the various restaurants, on a regular basis. Not only does he seem to know every member of staff in the hotel (many of whom worked alongside him when he was managing Mandarin Oriental Barcelona), but he is also a very hands-on GM, so do not be surprised if you see him



*The elegant marbled bathroom of Turret Suite, #508, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*

lending a helping hand in the restaurants.

I stayed in a gorgeous one-bedroom Turret Suite, #508, which is, in my view, the nicest category. The French interior design team opted for a classical, yet contemporary style, with a palette of neutral colours, golden accents, oak parquet floors, plush carpets, and neoclassical mouldings.

A small entrance foyer leads directly to an inviting oval-shaped sitting room, which features three floor-to-ceiling French windows that open onto a narrow balcony (for safety reasons, windows do not fully open, but ask nicely and they will unlock them for you).

The light in this suite is particularly beautiful, especially at sunset when it is reflected in the natural mica ceiling, and bathes the sitting room in sublime golden hues. The suite also boasts white lacquered wooden panels, a striking carved chandelier, and is furnished with a custom-made semicircular sofa, a dining table seating four and a couple of round coffee tables. An extremely well-stocked minibar, with T&G teas, countless bottles of complimentary mineral water and a Nespresso machine, is hidden behind two leather-covered doors.

The spacious bathroom, with its Dolomite stone panelling, dark oak and Emperador marble floors, is a real wellbeing

sanctuary. It features a huge free-standing tub, large walk-in shower, twin vanities, separate loo, and a sliding door hiding a glass wall, which very cleverly separates the bedroom from the bathroom.

Toiletries are by Natura Bissé, and thoughtful touches include a leather beauty case containing a hairdryer and curling iron, as well as your choice of traditional bathrobes or stylish yukatas.

The airy bedroom boasts a plush king-



*Detail, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*

size, framed by a striking handmade Cordoba leather headboard, flanked by two contemporary balloon-shaped lamps. The attention to detail is second to none, with pillowcases emblazoned with my initials, plugs and USB ports in all the right places, and an umbrella and yoga mat.

The generous welcome amenity included a bottle of Ruinart on ice, a gigantic fruit basket, the hotel's delicious signature almond egg cake under a small dome made to look like one of the hotel's turrets, and sweets and chocolates presented like precious jewels. My only niggle is that I could, occasionally, hear the distant hum of traffic from nearby Paseo del Prado; but I am being really picky here.

In a smart move, the management reduced the room count slightly, from 167 to 153, which allowed them to enlarge the entry-level rooms and increase the number of suites, which now number 53. There is



*At Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid, delectable cuisine, under the direction of Chef, Quique Dacosta.*



*Sitting room of the Mandarin Suite, #605, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*

also a large number of connecting rooms, which is ideal when you are travelling with friends or 'en famille'.

Although there are some very good Junior Suites on the quiet patio side of the hotel, I much prefer the street side accommodations, which offer views of the surrounding gardens and Prado Museum.

A great option is the 786 sq.ft. Mandarin

Suite, #605, which is one of the two newly created suites on the top floors of the turrets. Slightly smaller than a regular Turret Suite, it has the advantage of having two small private balconies just off the circular elevated sitting area, which is reached via a couple of steps.

I also really liked the perfectly sized one-bedroom Park Suites, such as #102, which

overlook the quiet Lealtad Square and offer great value.

At the top end, we have the very residential 3rd floor two-bedroom Presidential Suite, #308, which is reached via a small, elegant reception area. The highlight of this meandering 2,013 sq.ft. suite is its striking oval bedroom, with its hand-painted mural representing an abstract series of free-flowing golden clouds. The dining room has a pantry hidden behind a stretch of golden doors, whilst the opulent marble bathroom features a particularly spacious free-standing tub, as well as a steam room.

Then there is the 2,454 sq.ft two-bedroom Royal Suite, #108, the hotel's largest suite, which retains its original location on the 1st floor, because back when the hotel was built, there were no elevators and it was deemed unseemly to require Royals to ascend to higher floors. I was less enamoured of the Philippe-Starck-meets-Vegas décor; its oval bedroom featuring a hand-painted ceiling inspired by Goya's paintings, and yellow tinted mirrors behind the headboard.

On the culinary front, there are an incredible five bars and restaurants to choose from, all under the direction of self-taught, star Chef, Quique Dacosta, who earned 3 Michelin stars at his eponymous restaurant in the small town of Dènia, between Valencia and Alicante. He is one of the leading figures in today's Spanish avant-garde gastronomy, so it is a real coup for Mandarin Oriental to have him at the helm of their Food & Beverage operation.

Deessa, the hotel's flagship dining room that overlooks the Ritz gardens, is set in the gilded Alfonso XIII room; a regal setting in



*Sitting room of the two-bedroom Presidential Suite, #308, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*



*The oval bedroom of the Royal Suite, #108, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*

which to savour the innovative delights of Head Chef, Ricardo Tobella. My gastronomic journey began even before I sat down, with a welcome edible rose; its petals made of refreshing apple slices. There is a choice of two tasting menus: the Quique Dacosta Classic menu, or the QDRitz Contemporary menu; both of which employ top notch traditional ingredients, such as oysters, caviar and turbot.

Highlights included smoked eel and chili soup, an ultra-fresh signature red prawn from Dènia, and roasted veal sweetbreads with mountain leaves. If you still have room for dessert, do not miss the Melba peach with gold leaf, which is an homage to Auguste Escoffier.

The impressive wine list has around 250 wines by the glass, so forget the traditional Riojas and Riberas del Duero and let yourself be guided by Gustavo, the Sommelier, who will entice you with lesser-known vintages, such as a near perfect full-bodied Santa Rosa 2018 from Alicante and a delicately fruity Branco de Santa Cruz 2018 from Galicia.

Service at Deessa was heartfelt, knowledgeable and unpretentious, which further enhanced this unique culinary experience.

In the warmer months, I cannot think of anything more pleasant than breakfast on the Deessa terrace, served table-side on beautiful afternoon tea stands. Try the dim sum selection, which is wonderful.

Under the hotel's central crystal canopy, the dazzling Palm Court is the hotel's all-day-dining venue, serving traditional hotel classics as well as light and inventive dishes, such as the superb King Crab éclair,



*Royal Suite, #108, bathroom, at Mandarin Oriental.. presented on exuberant Raynaud china, or a refreshing cherry tomato salad with sundried tomato sauce and iced tomato water.*

In a corner of the Palm Court lies the in-



*At Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid, the Palm Court is the hotel's all-day-dining restaurant.*



*Pictura; the hotel's glamorous cocktail bar, at Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid.*

intimate Champagne Bar, where you can pair light bites, caviar, truffles, or oysters with a glass or two of vintage Champagne.

One of my favourite dining venues is the very popular and relaxed El Jardín del Ritz, which has an eclectic menu that includes Quique Dacosta signature tapas dishes and some excellent fish dishes, such as the subtly flavoured Thai seabass ceviche and the supremely fresh fried baby monkfish. This is one of those places where you want to linger forever.

Pictura, the hotel's cocktail bar, oozes glamour. It is decorated with crystal chandeliers and something that looks like a giant mirrored ice cube, which I hear con-

ceals a VIP room. Behind the bar, there is a museum-inspired gallery of portraits representing a selection of contemporary Spanish artists, by photographer Paula Anta, who was inspired by the paintings of Velázquez.

I did not try any of the original concoctions created by the in-house mixologist, as I am not a cocktail person, but it is a great spot to start or finish an evening.

For the first time in its history, The Ritz features a Spa; cleverly created by excavating beneath the hotel. Mandarin Oriental teamed up with the Beauty Concept; a Spanish company specialising in Day Spas, and its brand-new facility features a heated swimming pool, a vitality pool, steam room, and

experience showers.

Currently, there is only one modest treatment room that takes you past the windowed Technogym-equipped fitness centre. There are plans for an additional 4 rooms; but because building permits in Madrid are hard to come by, this could



*Mandarin Oriental's Spa pool.*

take a while.

Fortunately, once you are ensconced, heaven ensues; particularly if you choose one of the wonderful chemical-free Moss of the Isles treatments, which I was the first to experience, as the initial batch of products had only just arrived.

Throughout the hotel, the staff, dressed in stylish Jorge Vazquez uniforms, are simply sensational and know exactly how to make you feel extra special; from the doormen who greet you by name, to the top-notch housekeeping team that leaves ultra-personalised turndown gifts.

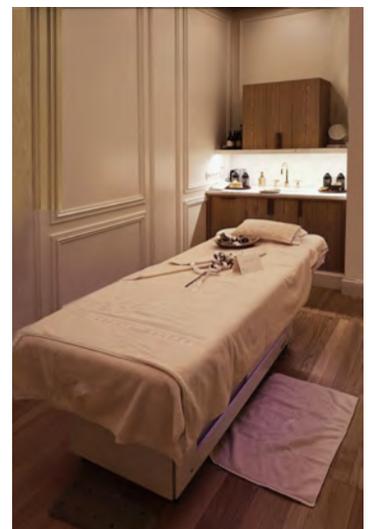
The Ritz is already a supremely accomplished hotel, and you would be hard-pressed to believe that it only opened last April, such is the level of care. Greg Liddell is a great host and a consummate professional who has transformed the Ritz into the best option in town. Do go!

[mandarinoriental.com](http://mandarinoriental.com)

**Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★**



*At Mandarin Oriental Ritz Madrid, the Spa reception and treatment room.*





*The grand exterior of Four Seasons Hotel Madrid; part of the massive Canalejas project.*

### **Four Seasons Hotel, Madrid.**

The BAMO designed Four Seasons Madrid is part of the Canalejas project; one of the most significant urban developments in Europe. Covering almost a full city block, it also includes 22 branded residences and a soon-to-open high-end shopping mall; a stone's throw from Puerta del Sol, which marks the geographical centre of Spain.

This massive development unites seven

historic buildings, including the former Bank of Spain and a protected Art Deco façade. Although the old interiors were demolished, around 3,700 original pieces were saved, restored to their former glory, and used in the design of Four Seasons' very first hotel in Spain.

Begun in 2012, the construction of Madrid's first new grand hotel in almost half a century was marred by numerous, lengthy delays; eventually opening its doors in September 2020. Was it worth the wait? Read on.

Upon arrival, I had the misfortune to check in at the same time as a large group, so I did not get the chance to soak up the majestic atmosphere of the lobby. Nobody was around to offer assistance, so I resorted to dragging my luggage to the front desk, which is oddly located at the opposite end of the main entrance, past the Concierge desk and a bank of elevators.

There was a queue; but it cleared quickly and after completing my check-in formalities, I was told to take a seat in the lobby, then almost immediately asked to return to the front desk as they had forgotten to pre-authorise my credit card. At that point, it was a good thing that I was wearing a mask, as my facial expression would have, without doubt, betrayed my intense frustration.

Hiccups do happen and, in all fairness, once the staff realised that something had gone amiss, they could not have been more apologetic. I must also add that, over the course of two days, the large corporate group never interfered with my enjoyment of the property; so staff is obviously doing something right when it comes to separating individual guests from corporate events.

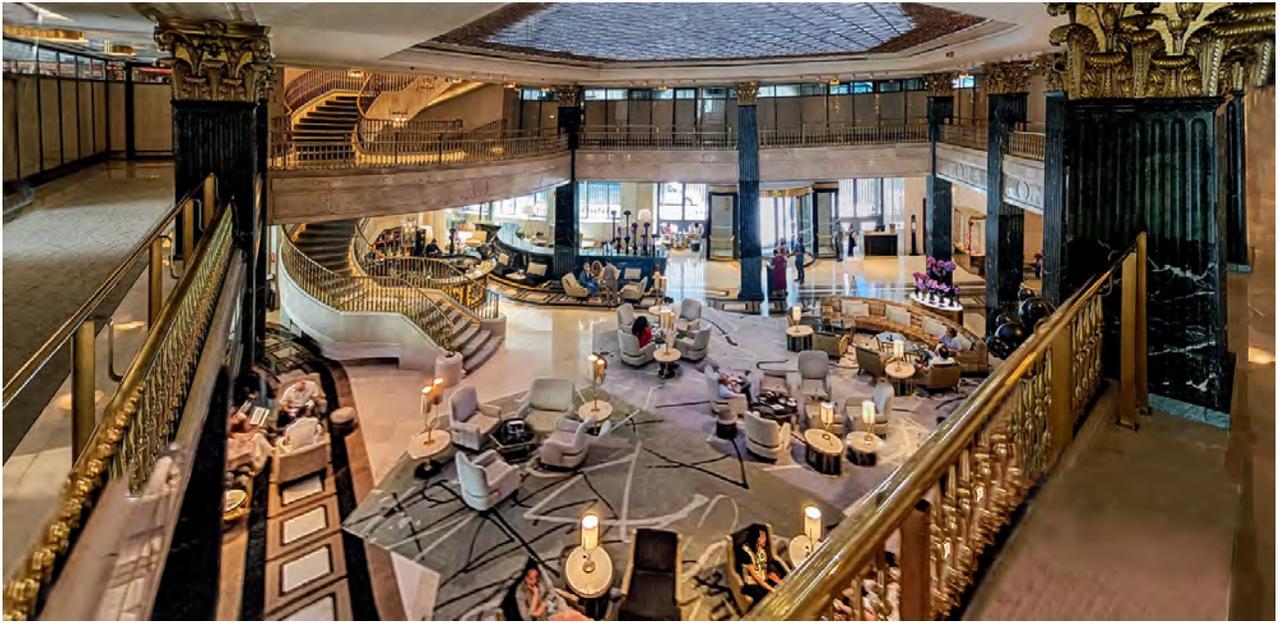
Eventually, I was escorted to my 4th floor one-bedroom Suite, #402, which, sadly, did not do much to lift my spirits.

The first thing I noticed as I exited the elevators was how vast the property was, with a labyrinth of endless corridors leading to the 200 rooms and suites. Despite the stunning collection of contemporary art adorning the walls, I wished that Four Seasons had opted for something on a much smaller scale.

Although exceptionally comfortable, in that unmistakably Four Seasons way, the muted earth tones of the décor verged upon the bland and lacked pizzazz; an artistically lit orchid and a nicely accessorised mini bar armoire saving this habitat from terminal dullness. The only touch of originality was found in the guest loo, with its striking black and white wallpaper.

The ultra classic beige marble bathroom featured twin vanities, a large soaking tub, a walk-in shower, a separate loo, and a generous stock of Hermès toiletries.

There were various user-friendly panels to control lighting, drapes and blinds; a tablet to request service, silent air-conditioning, a Lavazza espresso machine and Jing teas. Bizarrely, the safe was placed so low under the living area's working desk that I



*The striking atrium lobby, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*

had to go down on my knees every time I wanted to use it.

There is nothing quite like great cuisine to cheer me up, and that is exactly what I experienced at Dani, the hotel's rooftop Brasserie, where the excellence of the cuisine was only matched by the very accom-

plished service; many of the staff hailing from Four Seasons Dubai at Jumeirah Beach, and Four Seasons George V, Paris.

Dani is the latest venture by Dani Garcia, a Michelin-starred Andalusian Chef who operates several celebrated restaurants in Spain. The décor, by designer, Martin Brudnizki,

is a breath of fresh air and a complete departure from the rest of the hotel. Imagine leather and velvet banquettes, mirrored bars, warm colours in shades of red and green, dozens of tropical plants and striking contemporary paintings, recalling, somehow, the décor of a subtropical version of a Soho House property.

In the shadow of the building's bell tower, the restaurant's viewsome terrace, shaded by vibrant orange parasols, is the perfect spot to enjoy the superb cuisine of Executive Chef, Omar Mallen, whom I first met at Four Seasons Tunis a couple of years ago.

Signature dishes not to be missed include the nitro tomato and green pepper gazpacho with baby shrimp tartare, the wonderfully textured lobster salad with nitro olive oil popcorn, and the perfectly cooked clam rice from Ronda. Be sure to save room for the apple tart with almond and Amarula cream, or the refreshing and moreish citric baba with lemon liquor and confit iyokan ice cream.

First-rate breakfasts, served tableside, are a treat and include unusual options such as fluffy Shibuya pancakes, avocado hollandaise and Bircher muesli, beautifully presented in freshly cut papayas. The Viennoiseries are equally superb.

El Patio is the hotel's soaring lobby lounge located in the former bank's hall, with its green marble pillars, stained glass ceiling and tall black vases of purple orchids. Popular with the afternoon tea crowd, its comfortable modern chairs and sofas are better enjoyed in the evenings, when the lights



*El Patio; the hotel's soaring lobby lounge, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*



*Sitting room of one-bedroom Suite, #402, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*

are dimmed and the atmosphere is more sedate. The menu mixes classic tapas and Spanish or International favourites, such as Steak tartare and fries with Hollandaise, or gazpacho Andaluz.

Coming soon is Isa, an Asian gastrobar, which will feature modern Asian inspired tapas, a sushi bar and hand-crafted cocktails to the sound of a DJ. This seductive venue resembles a chic Shanghai supper club, with a series of low-ceilinged rooms located on the lobby's mezzanine level.

In terms of accommodation, it is difficult to recommend a specific room over another, as there are 118 different room types and configurations. The hotel was also rather busy during my stay, so I did not manage to view many categories.

An entry-level, such as #573, is unusually large and has a pleasant blue and white colour scheme. However, there is no view to speak of, as all the rooms overlook a central courtyard. Conversely, a Premier Terrace, such as #550, offers a large sun-drenched furnished terrace overlooking the red rooftops of Madrid.

Further up the scale, I like the huge triangular-shaped, two-bedroom, 3,229 sq.ft. Presidential Suite, #500, which has a more

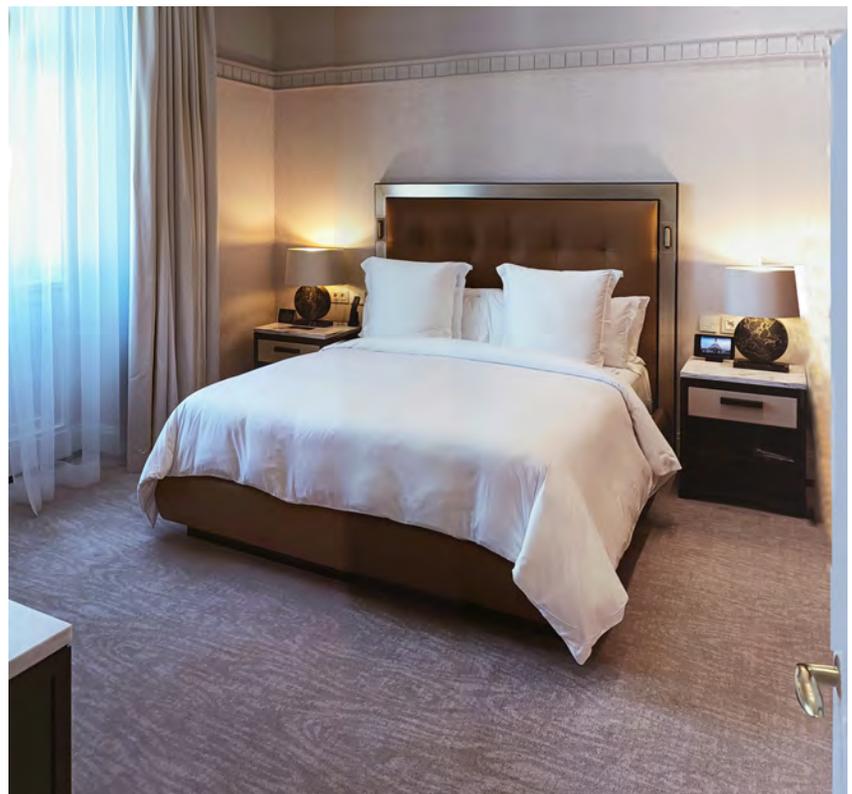
vibrant and youthful look and successfully combines modern and antique furniture as well as striking contemporary art. Its mas-



*Bathroom of #402, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*

ter bedroom features a metal canopy bed, whilst the bathroom is clad in grey onyx and gold marble. You can choose from three distinct sitting areas, and the dining table seats eight.

The palatial two-bedroom Royal Suite, #200, which used to be the private office of the bank's President in the early 1900s, boasts a double height ceiling, gorgeous Art-Deco bedroom, a study, exercise room, and



*Bedroom of Suite, #402, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*



*Sitting room of the two-bedroom Presidential Suite, #500, with its striking contemporary artworks.*

a sitting room that combines original hardwood floors and baroque ceiling mouldings with contemporary art and furniture. However, at more than 4,000 sq.ft, this suite probably works best as a venue for glamorous private events, as it is not particularly intimate or guest friendly.

My eyes usually start rolling when an hotel boasts about the size of its Spa; but at 15,000 sq.ft, the Four Seasons Spa is certainly allowed to boast, as on this rare occasion, bigger truly means better.

The four-level facility is extremely well designed and flows wonderfully, from the bright two-storey-high reception, with its striking light fixtures, to the stunning couple's treatment room and Zen-like relaxation area. It was, therefore, a real disappointment that none of its spa brands appeared to be remotely natural.

The main line employed here is 111SKIN, which is, apparently, based upon surgical knowledge, using medically inspired deliv-



*Bedroom of Premier Terrace, #550, at Four Seasons.*

ery methods. Ho hum.

Equally, I found some of the treatments to be positively gimmicky. Anyone fancy a Frotex or a Wellness Tapas?

There is also a well-equipped gym; but the Spa's crowning glory is its 46-foot indoor rooftop swimming pool, which opens onto a large outdoor sundeck, replete with chairs and loungers.

Service, under General Manager, Adrian Messerli and Hotel Manager, Monica Eisen, was generally good, but do not expect it to be overly personalised, with room numbers used more often than names.

Housekeeping was thorough, although evening turndown starts very early, so best make sure you specify your desired time, as on day one, my room was serviced before 6pm.

Equally, I found a certain lack of generosity here, with a beautifully presented but rather meagre welcome suite amenity, consisting of four chocolate truffles, and a room delivery fee for ice, which was something



*Bathroom of the two-bedroom Presidential Suite, #500, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*



*Dani is the latest venture by Michelin-starred Andalusian Chef, Dani Garcia, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid.*



that I did not expect from Four Seasons.

Save for its mostly characterless accommodation, there are lots of good things about this grand, luxurious property. However, Four Seasons Madrid is not as exciting as I

expected and, frankly, it pales somewhat in comparison with the brilliance of my experience at Mandarin Oriental Ritz.

[fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)

***Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓***



*The couple's treatment room, at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid's four-level Spa.*



*The 46-foot rooftop swimming pool at Four Seasons Hotel Madrid, opens onto a large outdoor sundeck.*



Gallivanter's

# Gossip

**SOME OF YOU WILL HAVE NOTICED** that we did not send you a **Gallivanter's Awards** voting form last month. This is because, although many of you have continued to travel worldwide, there are a number who have only managed to do staycations. We decided, therefore, to amass your views from the various emails we have received over the past 12 months that highlight your most outstanding experiences. The results will appear, as usual, in our January Awards for Excellence issue. If you have not emailed me already with your feedback on the top hotels you have stayed at recently, then please do so before December 1st, 2021. Many thanks!

**IN THE PHILIPPINES** you tend, very sensibly, to stay at the much-lauded **Amanpulo**, and more recently, at the excellent **Banwa Private Island**, Palawan. These are both hard acts to follow, but new brand, Explorar Hotels & Resorts, plans on tempting you with a new eco resort, **Explorar Treehouses, El Nido**, on Palawan island, which is scheduled to open in 2024, with 65 treehouse pool villas (see right). The treehouses are set on a lush mountain, with 360° views of the sea. [explorarhotels.com](http://explorarhotels.com)



**GOOD NEWS FOR THOSE OF YOU** who are fans of **Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London**. With the departure of GM, Amanda Hyndman for Hong Kong, long-time Mandarin GM, Torsten Van Dullemen, is taking over. Also in London, ex-Mandarin Oriental New York, Susanne Hatje (Robert Lowe takes over from her in New York), will open the 50-room **Mandarin Oriental Mayfair**, on Hanover Square, London, which was originally scheduled to open this year, but is more likely to be 2022.

**A MEMBER TELLS ME THAT CONSTRUCTION HAS FINALLY BEGUN** at **Amanjena**, to create new Residences and a proper Spa & Wellness Centre. Happily, designer, Jean-Michel Gathy is working alongside a former member of the late Ed Tuttle's team, who conceived the resort originally.

**GREAT HOTEL EXPERIENCES ARE ALL ABOUT PEOPLE** so I was delighted to hear that ex-Crillon Paris, **Jean-Pierre Trevisan**, who was in charge of operations and development at Hôtel de Crillon, is now the new GM at Lutetia, on the left bank of Paris. Expect improvements...

**TALKING OF MADRID;** just reopened is the city's oldest hotel, **Gran Hotel Inglés**, which dates back to 1886. After a major restoration, this family-owned property has just 48 rooms and suites, in Art Deco style, and is set within the historic area of Barrio de las Letras. [granhotelingles.com](http://granhotelingles.com)

**THE LATEST CARIBBEAN HIDEAWAY** is **Soho Beach House**, on the mini-island of **Canouan**, in St Vincent & The Grenadines, where the only serious competition is Mandarin Oriental. It is a far cry from the original Soho House, which opened in London's Soho back in the 1990s, although, despite its rusticity, it does offer all the usual Soho House comforts, including great beds, good linens and unusually efficient Wifi. Much loved by its media members, Soho House, which was created by Nick Jones, recently went public. [sohohouse.com](http://sohohouse.com)

**DEFINITELY ONE FOR YOUR LIST!** Opening April/May 2022 on the Italian island of **Capri** is Oetker's gorgeous renovation of the 1822 **Hotel La Palma**, with just 50 rooms and suites. [oetkercollection.com](http://oetkercollection.com)

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