



# Gallivanter's Guide<sup>®</sup>

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IDYLIC PLACES FOR DEDICATED TRAVELLERS

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## Fighting falling standards.

**E**very so often, a new company or product comes along that promises to treat me like an individual. They 'know the pressures I am under'. They 'understand my greater needs'. They realise that 'time is of the essence'. So, whether it is a charge card or an airline, I invariably feel pleased at the recognition bestowed upon me, and I try it.

When Virgin Atlantic Airways first introduced Upper Class - a first class service at business class prices - I could not wait to fly with them, and I was not disappointed. The seats were vast, comfortable and first class; the leg room was extraordinary and the staff were genuinely friendly, even to women travellers! Individual Sony Watchmans meant that one could choose from a good list of current movies and view them when one wished. A complimentary limo ferried one to and from each airport. Vegetarian meals were always on the menu. They even served cornflakes at breakfast!

This, we were told, was how owner, Richard Branson, always wanted to fly, and we, poor frequent flyers that we are, stood up and applauded, for who can resist a service that puts its customers first?

A decade on, David and I tried Virgin's new service to Hong Kong and were appalled. The cramped Airbus A340 took 14 hours to reach its destination, some two hours more than other airlines. Why? Because the Airbus flies slower, uses less fuel and is therefore more profitable to operate. Now who cares about its passengers?

In Hong Kong, the surly check-in staff appeared to be from another planet, and even in the air, the service was perfunctory

and the much-hyped entertainment system seemed to be geared more to the masses than to the discerning individual.

The problem, of course, is growth. Few companies manage to retain the quality of their original service when they expand, and inevitably, profit takes over from people power.

The same thing has happened to the American Express Platinum Card service, of which I have been a member since its inception. Over the years, this once excellent service, which provided each member with a personal account manager, has gradually diminished under the pressure of increased membership. Yet, despite the fact that the quality has declined, Amex are about to increase their membership fees.

You, dear readers, are the business and leisure decision makers of this world. Only by voicing your concerns will companies like Virgin and Amex think twice about putting growth above service.

Meanwhile, at The Gallivanter's Guide, we limit the number of our worldwide subscribers so that we may continue to offer a truly personal service. In between trips, we still answer all your letters personally and take your views and criticisms very seriously, frequently passing them on to the hotels in question.

I trust that if our standards ever fall, you will be the first to tell us.

**Editor/Publisher**

# TAIPAN TERRITORY

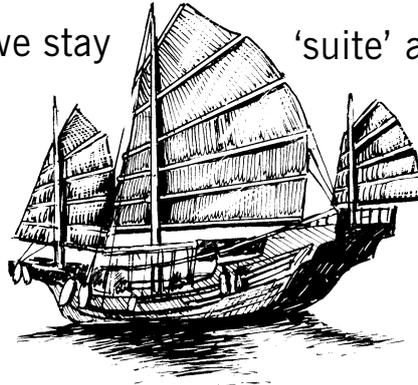
From Kowloon to Central, we stay 'suite' at Hong Kong's top addresses

**I**n Hong Kong, the only acceptable way to arrive from the airport is by hotel limousine. Battling for cabs or taking shuttles is simply not done. An hotel limo will ensure a courteous welcome as you arrive at the property and a seamless check-in; in many cases, in your own room rather than at reception.

Years ago, the limos used to queue up outside Kai Tak airport. Now, however, due to recent airport authority bureaucracy, they all have to be summoned down from a carpark; and since the re-siting of the airport taxi rank, jams are endemic, which means you could end up waiting a blisteringly hot 20 minutes for your car.

In the next 12 months, the airport authority plans to create an airconditioned lounge for limo passengers, but until then, just follow the sign for 'Hotel Transport' and keep your fingers crossed that the traffic is not too bad.

The top hotels also provide a departure service if you return to Kai Tak by limo, and this is really helpful, as one of the hotel staff will take care of everything, from baggage to departure tax.



Over the past few years, the Hong Kong five-star scene has undergone a complete metamorphosis. New contenders, such as the Island Shangri-La, the Conrad and The Ritz-Carlton have ensconced themselves on the Island in direct competition with The Mandarin Oriental for the traditional banking and business trade.

On Kowloon, the preferred location for fashion trade and leisure travellers, the refurbishment race has moved to rarefied heights, with The Peninsula virtually re-inventing itself with a spectacular US\$200 million tower extension, whose panoramic views now cock a snoot at the relatively low-rise Regent.

## The Peninsula (Kowloon)

Before I stayed here, I had severe

doubts about The Pen's new thirty storey extension, which added 132 rooms and suites and included all sorts of new attractions. How wrong I was.

The new wing rises up from within the site of this landmark 1928 hotel like a mountainous backdrop, and the transition from the original, gorgeous lobby to the new extension is utterly seamless. Indeed, so firmly anchored is the new wing, that I found it impossible to remember where the original had begun and ended!

We were collected from the airport by one of The Pen's traditional Rolls Royces, pleasantly airconditioned against the steamy Hong Kong climate, and thoughtfully equipped with ice-cold towels. As the cars are in radio contact with the hotel, they know exactly when you are going to arrive, so check-in, conducted in the calm of one's room or suite, is utterly painless. Complimentary Chinese tea arrives as swiftly as one's baggage, and it is only then that one begins to take in the sheer accomplishment of the new extension.

'We take off where The Regent leaves off' was the comment as I gazed down at



*Our suite at The Peninsula was wreathed in spectacular views, even from the jacuzzi, which also offered a built-in colour television.*

the extraordinary vistas of the Harbour and the islands beyond. I then realised what they meant, for The Pen's 16 extra floors offer one a real bird's eye view of the territory, from every angle.

Over its lifetime, The Pen has redefined the benchmark for Hong Kong hotels four times. The latest face-lift has, once again, put it firmly in the lead. Before agreeing on the final plans for the new rooms and suites, no less than 12 room configurations were personally tested by the management, staff and owners. The cost of such dedication was huge. The results, however, speak for themselves. Our corner suite, #1915, was, in every sense, ergonomically telepathic. There was always a light where you wanted one. There was always the right chair to capture the right view. The desk was discretely equipped with every data point known to man, at hand-height, naturally. Carefully designed and subtly positioned electronic soft-touch buttons

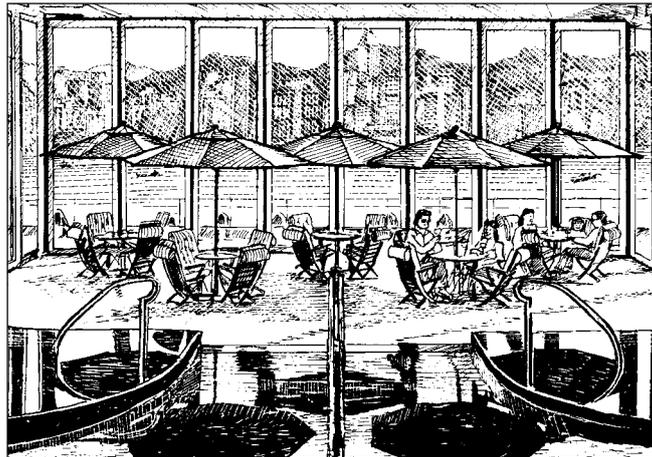
controlled everything from dimmer switches and nightlights in the bathroom to the blinds, drapes, valet service, airconditioning and do-not-disturb notices. Even the fax machine was discretely contained within the custom-made desk, and every single piece of exquisitely designed furniture, carved from rare woods, inlaid with refined boiserie and topped with a homely array of porcelain Chinoiserie, was a delight to behold.

Fireplaces, Chinese rugs and deep, cushy sofas created the perfect balance between comfortable Colonial and exotic Chinese. The perfect kingsize, topped with the lightest of duvets, centrepiece a spacious junior-suite-size bedroom with sofa, elegant armoire and lovely rattan loungers that flanked the huge panoramic windows, whose rightangled position managed to encompass both the Harbour and the city and mountains behind.

The Pen's new deluxe marble bathrooms have surpassed even those of The Regent for style, views and *savoir-faire*. Ours had a huge corner jacuzzi set within perpendicular vista-laden windows and replete with a recessed colour television so that one could soak up the news as well as the

views. A vast step-in shower with a raft of options, including body-height massage nozzles, hand-shower, marble seat and shelves competed for attention, together with a delightful selection of toiletries and amenities, including 'His & Hers' Hermes soaps and dual vanities, each with shaving/makeup mirrors.

I really appreciated the fact that the design and amenities considered both sexes, especially the two types of hairdryer; one for 'Him' in the bathroom, and a professional styling dryer in the



*The Peninsula's new pool and sun deck offer even more spectacular views.*

bedroom for 'Her', complete with mirror, of course! This 'yin yang' balance between thoughtfulness, homeliness and 21st century wizardry made for a suite which was both aesthetically pleasing and immensely practical.

As the entire hotel has either been refurbished or newly created, *all* the rooms and suites are of an impeccable standard, each possessing at least four 'phones, bathroom-TV, safes and personalised fax machines; although, personally, I am now a devotee of the accommodation in the new wing. The one exception is the famous Marco Polo Suite, which I still prefer to the rather more *nouveau Hong Kong* Peninsula Suite in the new wing.

Service, is, despite the increase to 300 rooms, as sublime as ever, from the piping hot leaf tea served from custom-designed Tiffany china in one's room, to the wonderful laundry service, which returns one's clothes in better condition than when one purchased them.

The string quartet still serenades one in the carefully restored lobby lounge; the famous Gaddi's French restaurant is perhaps even more elegant than before;

The Verandah on the first floor is still *the* place for a light lunch (try the pasta); the Spring Moon remains *the* venue for lunchtime Dim Sum, and the ritzy shops are some of the best around for style and service. So if you want to experience The Pen as you always knew it, then you still can; but if you want more, then this Grande Dame has literally thought of everything.

At the new Clarins Spa, elegantly decorated in signature red and light polished wood, we had the most relaxing of massages. We then visited the new, dark blue Roman-style swimming pool, which opens out onto a vista-wrapped sun terrace, where one may savour a little light repast.

Later that day, we headed for the roof in a separate lift to explore The China Clipper, a museum-like aerie full of aircraft memorabilia, which is actually a passenger lounge for the twin helipads on the roof, which serve various destinations in the territory.

Eventually, the hotel will be able to ferry guests here from the new international air terminal.

We enjoyed the best Japanese meal in Hong Kong at the new Imasa restaurant, a modern minimalist-style venue with exquisite customised place settings and china, and superlative service. However, the *pièce de résistance* has to be the much-discussed 'Felix' on the 28th floor, a thoroughly modern Philippe Starck-designed nightspot featuring wraparound Hong Hong views that just about manage to compete with the bravura interior decor, which encompasses a California-style restaurant, Wine Bar, American Bar and the 'Crazy Box' discotheque. Frankly, I loved it; and judging by the difficulty in securing a table, so does the rest of Hong Kong!

The Peninsula is, in essence, still the venerable Grande Dame that we have all grown to love. She is just looking a little younger and fitter these days. Personally, I would give her six stars, at least.

### **The Regent (Kowloon)**

When The Regent opened in 1980, it

became the new rich kid in Kowloon, and discerning travellers were heard to swoon over the vast floor to ceiling panoramic views and the superlatively hedonistic marble bathrooms. I, like many of my contemporaries, changed allegiance overnight, and this coolly modern bastion of style and service, set right on the very edge of the Harbour, purred with the pleasure of optimum occupancy.

However, The Regent did not rest upon its laurels, and with the other five-stars panting at its heels, it continued to refurbish and re-invent itself, most especially of late, when its elder neighbour, The Peninsula, managed to take the wind from everyone's sails.

By the time you read this, the popular, though rather ordinary mezzanine lounge, which literally jumps with energy every evening, will have been transformed into the Shanghai Lounge, a rather more elegant nightspot, themed around the heady days of Shanghai in the 1920's and 1930's, and offering Dim sum and snacks. Soundproofed and glassed in from the Lobby and lower Harbourside restaurant, an acoustic engineer has been hired to ensure that the music does not intrude on The Regent's more subdued guests, although I gather that the occasional 'sound spill' will be engineered to tempt one into indulging in a little late night revelry.

The old Regent chocolate shop is scheduled for a face-lift, too, and will incorporate a new fashion and gift venue.

By the end of this year, the hotel will also

have upgraded and extended its business centre, refurbished its Steakhouse restaurant to a more 'Ralph Lauren' feel, and upgraded its Deluxe Suites, bringing a touch of Oriental style to the current rather dated minimalist decor.

The refurbished Harbour Junior Suites,

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## The Regent has continued to refurbish and re-invent itself

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with their splendid floor to ceiling views, soft celadon walls and oversize Oriental prints are particularly pleasing, and one trusts that the bravura Deluxe Suites will benefit from this same softening of style.

After arriving here in one of The Regent's 23 Daimlers, we checked into an un-refurbished Deluxe Suite, #1200, known as one of the 'hundreds' by hotel aficionados, and possessing extraordinary 'drop dead' corner-sited vistas from every room and angle, even the bathroom.

As our suite was on the second floor, the Harbour seemed, literally, to be part of each room; the ever-changing water traffic providing a fascinating wall of movement, metamorphosing from misty, cloud-topped

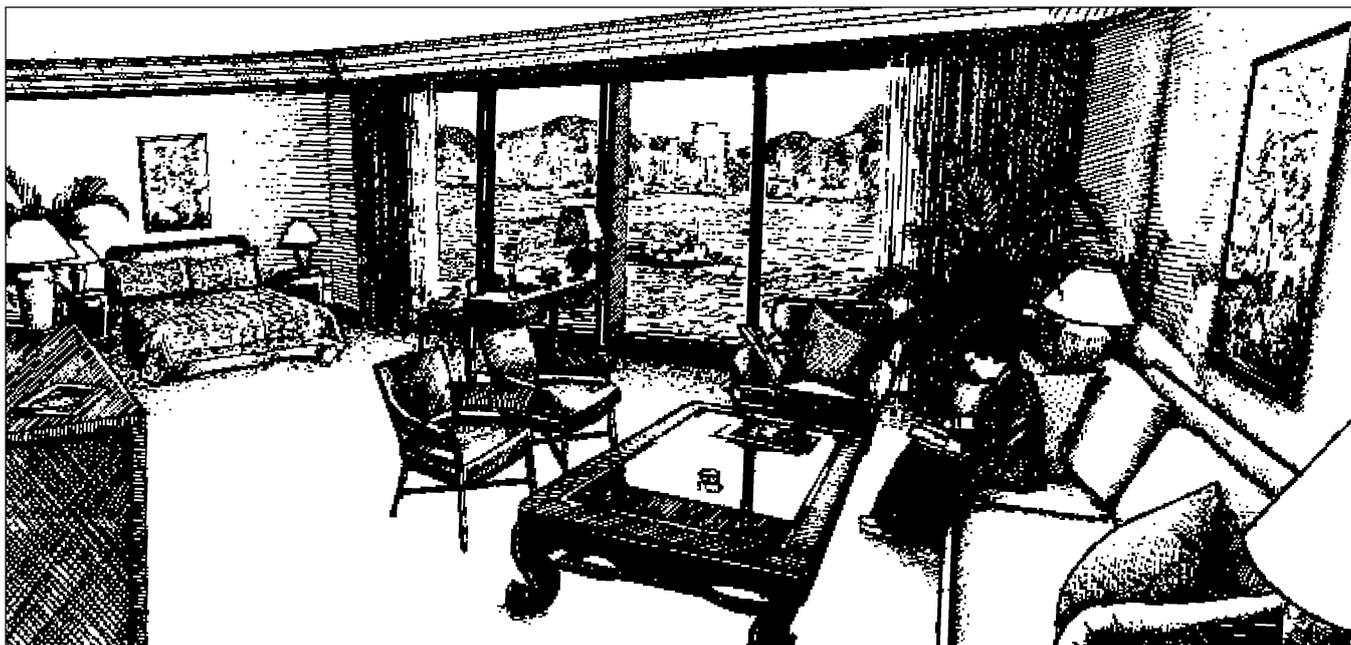
views of The Peak to a night time panorama of neon-lit 'Bladerunner' proportions. Whereas The Pen overlooks the scene, The Regent is at the very heart of it, and when it comes to the best views in Hong Kong, then these two Kowloon Grandes Dames cannot be beaten.

Although one can stay at The Regent without the benefit of Harbour views, it would be a sin to miss the spectacle. However, I would avoid the Superior Harbour rooms, as these are very small and uninspiring. The minimum option has to be a Deluxe Harbour Double.

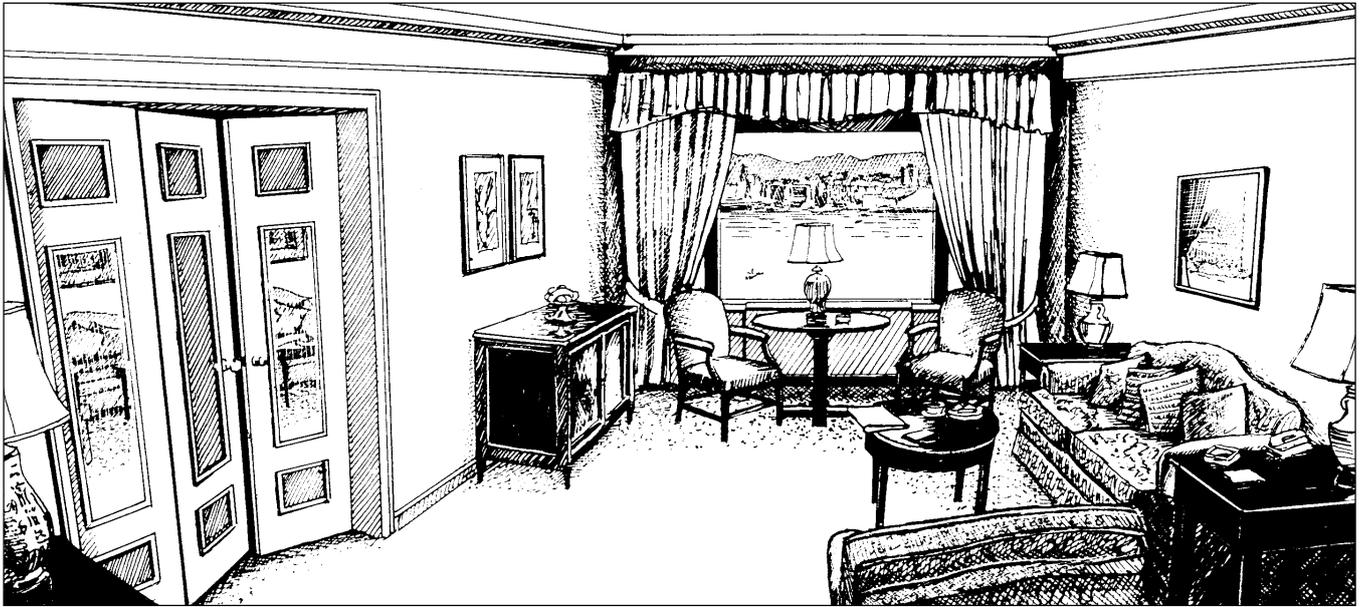
Dining at The Regent is always a splendid experience and we were very excited to discover a relatively new venue, in the form of 'Yü', a unique speciality seafood restaurant, created on the upper floor of the formerly split-level Plume restaurant, where one may literally create one's perfect menu from the raft of fresh fish and seafood held in exotically lit, cascading water walls.

Taking its inspiration from traditional Chinese seafood kitchens, Yü is a true 21st century concept; carefully themed with light polished wood, dramatic lighting and an aquatic accent on everything from matchboxes to staff ties and watches.

Vast seafood baskets piled with ice, oysters, giant prawns, or whatever takes one's fancy, are served with a moreish choice of six sauces. The fish, held in a variety of totally pure waters reflecting their natural habitat, are the freshest possible, and can be served in European or Asian



*Although we stayed in one of the deluxe 'hundreds' suites at The Regent, we loved the newly refurbished Harbour View Junior Suites, such as this.*



Our suite at The Ritz-Carlton, where the views were wholly distanced from the European-style interiors.

style, in any combination or portion size; whatever one desires.

Yü's Manager, Josef Schmid Jr., guided us through one of the most delicious seafood meals David and I have ever experienced, and, coupled with a superb wine and champagne list, which happily included my favourite *Domaine Ott Rosé*, we gazed out at the magical Harbour views and applauded The Regent once again for both surprising and delighting us with their innovative approach.

Lunch at The Harbourside Restaurant was equally good, if a little perfunctory on the service side, and we were once again entranced by Lai Ching Heen, The Regent's famed Harbour-edge Cantonese restaurant, with its elegant solid jade place settings and mouthwatering 'lunar month' menu, under the direction of Chef, Cheung Kam Chuen.

Further dining options include, of course, Plume, with its famed wine cellar of some 10,000 bottles, innovative European cuisine and, of course, its magical Harbour-side views.

A good exercise studio and Spa, with large, dramatic granite-lined individual treatment 'suites', replete with sunken tubs and step-in showers, add to the sense of hedonism here, together with a super-sized outdoor pool, surrounded by lush trees and greenery and an trio of edge-of-Harbour jacuzzis.

Of course, if outdoor spa pools, sweeping terraced views and romantic dining are your key to heaven, then opt for one of the top suites, which offer all this and more.

### The Ritz-Carlton (Hong Kong Island)

This property was built by its original owners to house a three-star hotel. So when the new owners called in Ritz-Carlton, a five-star management group, there were bound to be problems, and try as they may, Ritz-Carlton can never, in my view, reconcile the disparity between their own high standards and those of the property itself.

In Chinese terms, this place has bad Feng Shui. It just doesn't feel right, and perhaps the one thing that Ritz-Carlton have to learn is that great hotels all have a sense of place.

You simply cannot have an hotel in Hong Kong that denies that it is in China. The occasional Chinese artifact, no matter how well-intentioned, does nothing to appease the anachronism.

Senior management, now under the direction of General Manager, Des Pugson, recognise that this is an up-hill struggle, and are dedicated to putting things right. Indeed, certain aspects of the hotel are very successful. The Club Floor, as ever in Ritz-Carlton establishments, is superbly staffed and offers a safe, home-from-home retreat for single travellers. The rooms and suites, however, are uniformly small and distinctly lacking in Chinese *savoir-faire*, and bathrooms, a key decider in Hong Kong five-stars, are decidedly short on Chinese chutzpah; the twee white

broderie anglaise shower curtain like a white flag of surrender on the bathroom battlefield.

When gazing out from our 15th floor suite, #1505, the view of the Harbour, with the planes silently circling over Kowloon, seemed about as real as watching a soap on TV with the sound turned off. Indeed, the only clue as to our true location came in the form of orchid-strewn finger bowls and the jasmine tea that is served upon arrival. Otherwise, this is Ritz-Carltonland; from the dark conservative furniture to the same crystal-based lamps and ceiling roses that are to be found from Atlanta to Sydney.

Like a ghetto, dedicated to the Western way of life, menus sighed with hamburgers and pastrami; an occasional ethnic gesture Europeanised so as not to offend the Western palate.

Upon check-in, they asked us what time we would like our room serviced. The problem was, they didn't tell the staff. We asked for an 8pm turndown and house-keeping arrived at 5.50pm.

Now, I know for a fact that Des Pugson has already put many improvements in hand, but equally, I also know that, ultimately, the only solution to this hotel's problems is either to downgrade it to a four-star or to pull it down and start again.

The Italian restaurant, *Tuscano*, seemed promising at first, with its Italian *Maître D'* and Executive Chef. Sadly, this was one place where delegation appeared not to work, for the pasta was certainly not Italian in look or flavour, and owed more

to China than Tuscany; and apart from a promising amuse gueule and antipasto, quantity seemed to be the prime requisite.

Two of the hotel's restaurants, a traditional Japanese venue and the Chinese, Lai Kar Heen, are managed by the hotel's owners, rather than Ritz-Carlton, resulting in a bewildering discrepancy in style and service and the sort of culinary schizophrenia that can only serve to harm the Ritz-Carlton name.

The small outdoor pool was rather nice, as was the comfortable Chater Lounge, where one may enjoy a buffet breakfast, lunch and traditional Ritz-Carlton afternoon tea. The Café, which overlooks the Harbour, was well-meaning, but decidedly amateurish, and frankly, on the food and beverage side, I would re-think the whole operation if Ritz-Carlton are intent on poaching the five-star trade.

When I look at this hotel's brochure, I get the feeling that it was written with an excess of optimism before the hotel was finished, and that nobody back in Atlanta had actually checked out the competition; for, although the hotel certainly 'offers (one of) the warmest of welcomes', it certainly does not 'blend the East and the West to perfection', and although it is selling itself on 'personal service', it has a long, long way to go before it reaches the level of The Mandarin Oriental, The Peninsula and The Regent.

### **The Mandarin Oriental (Hong Kong Island)**

The hotel gossips in Hong Kong whisper that The Mandarin is not what it

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## **The Mandarin Oriental is still queen of Hong Kong Island**

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was; and indeed, the building itself, dating from 1963, is certainly looking a little dated these days when set against the constantly evolving state-of-the-art architecture of Central.

Ah but.....a great hotel, like a good home, is more than mere aesthetics. It is a place of comfort, welcome and sustenance, and in this respect, The Mandarin Oriental is still the queen of Hong Kong Island, if not Kowloon.

Business travellers and ex-pats alike return to The Mandarin time upon time, because, quite simply, it is their home-from-home in Hong Kong; and when one cannot get a table in the ever popular Café, which serves possibly the best English fish and chips in the world, then one is happy to stand in line, for one knows that once inside, service will be friendly, swift and sublime, and the food will be utterly wonderful, despite the ageing decor.

We were met by a shiny dark blue Mercedes 500SE which sped us across to Central, where we were greeted on the steps of the hotel and whisked to our

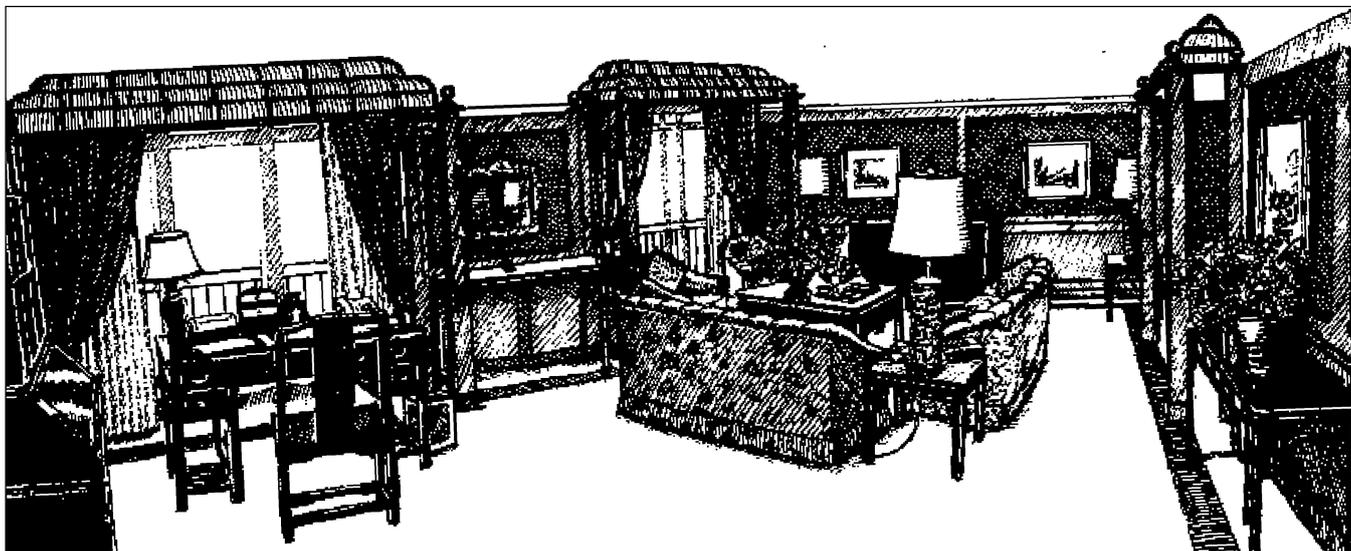
suite to check in.

The Mandarin is the only hotel in Hong Kong that offers theme suites, and ours, The Pine Suite, was a little like living aboard a Taipan's luxury Chinese Junk, what with its low ceilings, richly waxed pine panelled walls and Oriental carved pine canopies that framed each door and window.

Here, one could feel utterly at home. In the living room, a cabinet of Oriental carvings vied for attention with the richly upholstered, deep cushy sofas, the extravagant fruit bowl and deep toe-curling carpets. A guest bathroom and a small kitchen led off the hallway; the fridge containing two perfectly chilled glasses and small bottles of Petrossian vodka.

The pine four poster in the bedroom was equally hedonistic, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that one could have the bed made up in any style one fancied, from linen sheets to duvets; so, calling housekeeping, we ordered a duvet, which was swiftly fetched, clad in crisp, pure linen to match the sheet and pillow cases.

After a truly perfect dinner at the renowned Mandarin Grill, which, despite its name, serves a host of light and innovative culinary delights, accompanied by a brilliantly varied wine list, we retired to our suite, having asked housekeeping to turn on the sauna in one of the two small but bijou bathrooms; one with a deep jacuzzi tub, and the other with a powerful step-in shower. Here, all one's aches and jet-lag disappear within minutes, and afterwards, there are a raft of Floris toiletries to pamper one further.



*The living room of The Pine Suite at The Mandarin Oriental, with canopied windows leading to twin balconies which overlook the Harbour.*

Of course, one need not splash out on a theme suite to enjoy The Mandarin's legendary service, for service is what this hotel is built on, and whether one opts for a newly refurbished Deluxe Double overlooking the Harbour, or one of their lovely Colonial Chinese-style Suites, service will be so warm and willing that one will find it hard to depart.

As a writer, I am plagued by back and shoulder problems and thus, after several long and tiring flights on this trip, I had begun to resemble Quasimodo. Could The Mandarin Oriental Spa do anything to help?

"I recommend Chinese Accupressure", said the pleasant lady on the 'phone; and she was right. After a knowledgeable 45 minute session, my back was as straight as a die and my posture had reverted to that of a pre-pubescent schoolgirl.

Another way to keep fit is in The Mandarin's beautiful Roman indoor pool, with its padded marble seats, or in the gym, if one is so inclined; and frankly, the cuisine is so good here, that a little exercise is mandatory.

Pierrot, with its gourmet French cuisine is *the* place for a power lunch; or if one is feeling a little delicate, then one may sit at the Pierrot's caviar bar and indulge in a variety of Petrossian caviars and fine champagnes.

The quietly elegant Man Wah Chinese restaurant has always been a favourite of mine, for the cuisine is so light and *nouvelle* compared to traditional Chinese fare. Equally, The Clipper Lounge and Chinnery Bar are both very popular with the local business fraternity, and deservedly so; each offering quite a different ambiance.

A relatively new addition to the hotel is a special Cigar Room for connoisseurs. Here, one may keep one's precious Havanas in one's own humididor and sit in a fog of blue smoke without any fear of reprisals.

Shops galore, in The Mandarin Oriental's own arcade, tempt the reckless, and when it is time to leave, a dark blue Mercedes will accommodate all one's purchases and keep one cool until Kai Tak.

Three words sum up The Mandarin Oriental. Service, service, service.

### **The Island Shangri-La (Hong Kong Island)**

Encased in shopping malls, this ultra modern hotel is hugely popular and service and cuisine are very good indeed. However, I simply could not cope with the garish decor.

The suites, although fitted with top quality furnishings, are so 'loud' as to be impossibly at odds with Western sensibilities, and generally I found the hotel to be rather too rowdy for my taste.

### **The Grand Hyatt (Hong Kong Island)**

This is Hyatt International's flagship hotel, and one has only to step into the lobby to appreciate the millions of dollars outlaid.

However, although The Hyatt offers some splendid views from many of its rooms, and from its glass lifts, I found the accommodation to be very small.

The marble bathrooms, which are described as 'large' in their brochure, are no such thing, and one must resort to The Presidential Suite to obtain what I would call a good-sized bathroom.

Decor is light and modern, with the occasional touch of Chinoiserie, and much pale walnut veneer on doors and in corridors. However, the grand statements are reserved for the public areas, where locals flock to sip cocktails and dine out in the plush Italian Grissini restaurant and exotic split-level Cantonese venue, eponymously named One Harbour Road.

The lighting and design here are spectacular, and one feels as though one is on a stage, such is the theatrical quality of everything.

Service is good and willing, and our meal at the Japanese Kaetsu restaurant was highly enjoyable, although, I must say, not in the same league as the Imasa restaurant at The Peninsula.

The most shocking fact about this hotel concerns its much-hyped Harbour-edge freeform swimming pool, which is the largest in Hong Kong. What they refrain from telling you, is that the pool is shared by the 862-room New World Harbour View Hotel next door!

By all means drink and dine here, for everything, from the lavish Champagne Bar to the popular nightspot, JJ's, is simply buzzing with Hong Kong bravura. However, if you want the best in Central,

## **AT A GLANCE**

### **THE PENINSULA HONG KONG.**

**Address:** Salisbury Road, Kowloon, HK. **Tel:** (852) 2366 6251. **Fax:** (852) 2722 4170. **Affiliation:** Leading Hotels of the World, Preferred Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 300. **Approx Rates:** *Deluxe Doubles:* £238-£306. *Junior Suites:* £400. *Suites:* £578-£2,978, plus 10% service & 5% tax.

### **THE REGENT, HONG KONG.**

**Address:** 18 Salisbury Road, Kowloon, HK. **Tel:** (852) 2721 1211. **Fax:** (852) 2739 4546. **Affiliation:** Four Seasons Regent Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 602. **Approx Rates:** *Deluxe Harbour Doubles:* £263. *Junior Suites:* £306-£425. *Suites:* from £442, plus 10% service & 5% tax.

### **THE RITZ-CARLTON HONG KONG.**

**Address:** 3 Connaught Road, Central, HK. **Tel:** (852) 2877 6666. **Fax:** (852) 2877 6778. **Affiliation:** The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company & Leading Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 216. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* £212-£314, plus 10% service & 5% tax.

### **THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL.**

**Address:** 5 Connaught Road, Central, HK. **Tel:** (852) 2522 0111. **Fax:** (852) 2810 6190. **Affiliation:** Mandarin Oriental & Leading Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 538. **Approx Rates:** *Deluxe/Superior Harbour Doubles:* £272-£306 *Suites:* £442-£612. *Theme Suites:* £723-£1,148. *Mandarin Suite:* £1,872, plus 10% service & 5% tax.

### **THE ISLAND SHANGRI-LA HONG KONG**

**Address:** Pacific Place, Supreme Court Road, Central, HK. **Tel:** (852) 2877 3838. **Fax:** (852) 2521 8742. **Affiliation:** Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 565. **Approx Rates:** *Deluxe Peak & Harbour Doubles:* £229-£268. *Suites:* £451-£2,127, plus 10% service & 5% tax.

### **THE GRAND HYATT HONG KONG**

**Address:** 1, Harbour Road, HK. **Tel:** (852) 2588 1234. **Fax:** (852) 2802 0677. **Affiliation:** Hyatt Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 572. **Approx Rates:** *Deluxe, Grand & Regency Club Harbour Doubles:* £276-£327. *Suites:* £434-£2,127, plus 10% service & 5% tax.

# GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



**T**HE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL HAS BEEN CLOSED FOR RENOVATION for so long that some of us wondered whether it would ever open, or if anyone would go back there, given the plethora of excellent Beverly Hills properties. Well, the advice is, don't move from your current favourite, for the much-hyped **Beverly Hills Hotel**, although beautifully refurbished is decidedly lacking in hotel skills, and unless you are a major star, the untutored staff will treat you like unwanted flotsam. What a pity that the Sultan of Brunei, who owns this and London's Dorchester, has so little regard for service. As many Grandes Dames have discovered, guests require rather more than legends for sustenance.

**T**HERE IS NOW A VERY GOOD REASON TO HEAD SOUTH OF THE RIVER to dine out in London. **Chez Bruce**, which has taken over from the previous occupiers, Harveys, is a delightfully airy restaurant overlooking rural Wandsworth Common, offering superb modern European cuisine and a short, but well-chosen carte featuring both European and New World wines. The Cream of mussel and saffron soup, Spiced aubergine salad, and Seared mackerel with mushroom, bacon and potato salad were starters to die for; and main courses were equally good, including Herb crusted cod with a vinaigrette of leeks, and Roast guinea fowl with apples, calvados and cream. A moreish Raspberry jelly with crème chantilly and Viennese biscuits made for dessert perfection. Bruce hails from Richmond originally, and has a notable pedigree, which includes Le Gavroche. Staff are friendly and refreshingly knowledgeable. Book well in advance. Chez Bruce, 2 Bellevue Rd, London SW17 7EG. Tel: (0181) 672-0114.

**U**NTIL RELATIVELY RECENTLY, HONG KONG'S HOTELS were the only places where one could lunch or dine in style. Now, however, the Lan Kwai Fong district on the Island sports a veritable Soho-style raft of fashionable eateries. We particularly enjoyed **Tutto Meglio**, a coolly elegant Italian restaurant with a small but splendid wine list and excellent, authentic cuisine, including perfect pasta. Tutto Meglio, 33 D'aguilar Street, Lan Kwai Fong, HK. Tel: 2869-7833. Fax: 2596-0283.

**A**S YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD, THE REGENT LONDON has just announced its new owners and is now known as **The Landmark London**. Happily, though, everyone, from the General Manager downwards is staying, so we trust that standards will rise rather than fall. Before the changeover, The Dining Room acquired a new chef, in the form of Roger Peters, lately of The Waterside Inn, who replaces Paolo Simioni. Roger has a lot to live up to, as Paolo's pasta was possibly the best in London.

**F**INALLY, SEPTEMBER SEES THE LAUNCH OF OUR BOOK, **The Ultimate Hotel Guide**, which will be available in Harrods and quality UK bookshops later this month and through a select number of hotels worldwide; or direct from 'The Ultimate Hotel Guide', 14-16 Brewer Street, London W1R 3FS. Priced at £12.99 plus p & p, the book contains 183 reviews of the world's best hotels, in 45 countries, with 112 of David Maslin's original drawings.

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