



Gallivanter's Guide

MAY 1999 VOL.8 No.5

IDYLIC PLACES FOR DEDICATED TRAVELLERS

Published monthly by
'The Gallivanter's Guide',
Hill Crest, Malmesbury Rd,
Minety, Malmesbury,
Wiltshire SN16 9QX, UK.
Fax: +44 (0)1666 860063.
E-mail:
gallivanter.sguide@virgin.net

EDITOR/PUBLISHER
LYN MIDDLEHURST

MANAGING DIRECTOR
DAVID MASLIN

IN THIS ISSUE

	Page
The horrors of hand luggage.	1
L.A. Story, Suite Success.	
Four Seasons Hotel at Beverly Hills.	2
The Peninsula, Beverly Hills.	3
Beverly Hills Hotel.	3
Hotel Bel-Air.	4
L'Ermitage, Beverly Hills.	5
Shutters on the Beach.	6
Gallivanter's Gossip.	8
Gallivanter's Ratings.	
✓✓✓✓ Extraordinary	
✓✓✓✓ Highly recommended	
✓✓✓ Well worth a visit	
✓✓ Good in parts	
✓ Go if you must	

The horrors of hand luggage.

Have you noticed how bureaucratic many airlines have become about hand luggage? When you check in, they ask you if you have stowed any electrical items in your baggage and you say "No, it's all in my hand luggage", because you know that the airline's security systems quite sensibly demand this. The ground staff nod approvingly, until that is, they catch sight of your little carry-on with wheels.

Like many business travellers today, by necessity, we have to travel with one of those small cases on wheels. It holds all our electrical gear, together with the sort of valuables and business papers that you would be loathe to check through. Of late, however, these invaluable bags have been at the receiving end of airline wrath and upon several occasions, we have been forced to check ours through, which is a worrying trend.

Having just experienced such an incident on our trip to California, I received a letter from a reader which summed up all our frustration and, I suspect, yours, too.

This reader, who lives in Portugal, was boarding a flight to London, then on to New York. It was a BA flight with TAP staff.

"We have to weigh your carry-on, sir."

Between himself and his partner, they had one small bag.

"I'm sorry, sir, but this weighs 12 kilos and you are only allowed 6 kilos each."

Our reader explained that the small bag represented their joint hand luggage.

"No, sir, it doesn't work that way. You have to carry only 6 kilos each."

Taking a deep breath, our frustrated

passenger pointed out that his partner was carrying nothing and only weighed around 84 lbs herself.

"Sorry sir, this bag must go on as a suitcase in the hold."

"Just a moment," replies our reader and proceeds to fill up his pockets from the bag like a shoplifter; giving his partner a carrier bag so that she may do the same.

The carry-on was weighed again, this time at 8 kilos; so his partner filled up her coat pockets until eventually they were allowed on board, where, quite naturally, they re-filled their carry-on. They had just settled into their seats when a young man, weighing around 280 lbs and carrying a giant rucksack, duffel bag, sports bag and duty free carrier sat down next to them.

"Who makes these rules up?" asks our reader.

Interestingly, this type of carry-on bag was supposedly designed specifically for airline use. Indeed, few business travellers do not possess one. Now, it seems that many airlines have changed, or at least tightened the rules, applying the weight limit not to every passenger, but merely to a random few.

Could this mean that the hottest accessory for 21st century business travellers will be the bijou airline rucksack; or will fashion houses begin designing coats with larger pockets?

Editor/Publisher

L.A. STORY

Suite Success

One of my favourite films is *L.A. Story*; a splendid pastiche of the “Have a nice Day” culture. Well, L.A. has since abandoned that phrase, much to my nostalgic regret, but glitz and glamour are still very much *de rigueur* in the City of Angels. We set out to discover whether you had to be a ‘name’ in order to get the ‘six star treatment’ or if L.A.’s ritziest hotels still remembered the old fashioned art of ‘suite’ hospitality, whatever your social status. There were a few surprises in store.

Four Seasons Hotel at Beverly Hills.

We first met British GM, William Mackay, when he was running the Four Seasons Palm Beach and we were instantly taken with his ability to instill this sizeable property with a real sense of intimacy. We were, therefore, intrigued to see what William had achieved since transferring to Beverly Hills.

As our limo pulled up at the leafy *porte cochère*, Michael J. Sharlet, the Front Office Manager, was quick to show us up to *The Governor’s Suite*, whilst enthusing about the major refurbishment that this lovely residential-style hotel had just completed. The results were immediately apparent. The hallways were freshly carpeted; the walls softly coloured in coral, and the suite, which before was comfortable if a little colourless, had a new warmth and decorative panache that epitomised style and quality.

I was amazed to find masses of Bulgari Green Tea toiletries in the bathrooms instead of the usual rather mundane Four Seasons variety; a most appropriate detail for fashion-conscious Beverly Hills.

Our iron-clad four poster kingsize was heavenly; gorgeously attired in silky cream self-striped Frette embroidered with cinnamon borders; a Sealy bed, of course, with the softest duvet imaginable, and beautiful

Fortuny pleated buttermilk silk offsetting gold taffeta drapes and ochre carpet, silk-draped tables, gilded consoles and lots of serious furniture. Dimmer-controlled lighting, collectible art, huge potted bamboos and the famous Four Seasons Beverly Hills flower arrangements, that are works of art in themselves, underlined our feeling that, yes, things had definitely improved here.

Our sitting room was large and homely, with a full-sized 6-seater dining table, Murano chandelier, marbled fireplace and small balconies with big 16th floor vistas of LA. A wet bar and butler’s pantry led off this and we were delighted to find that the fridge was stocked with lots of mineral water and three big pitchers of freshly squeezed juice, from Orange to Cranberry. A marble-floored lobby led to a guest loo, replete with shower, and from the bedroom, a large dressing area took one into a sectioned bathroom, with marbled double vanity. The tub and shower area was the only slightly dated part of the suite; but that said, everything worked well; the towels were big and soft and two types of robes, from white waffle to corded towelling, were of the finest quality.

Service was so warm and welcoming, so

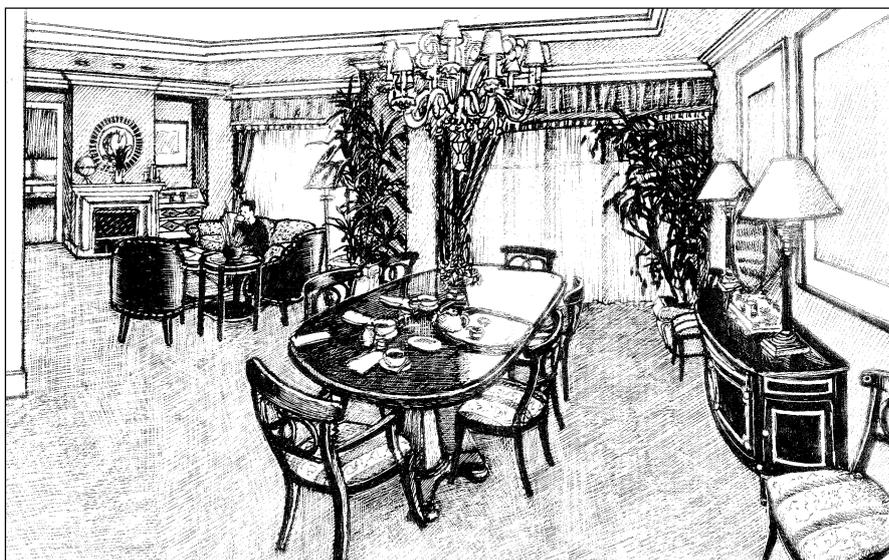
enthused and utterly Californian, that we knew we would ‘have a nice stay’. “Welcome back to the Four Seasons” everybody chorused; and from the front desk to room service waiters, all addressed us by name.

Of course, it helps when you know the GM and you are staying in *The Governor’s Suite*, but then, guests here *do* tend to know William Mackay because he is exceptionally accessible. Personal service is this hotel’s forte and after one or two visits, the staff will know your preferences even better than you do.

What really amazed us this time was our turndown. After a rather good dinner in the gorgeously renovated Gardens Restaurant (all Florentine drapes and deep jewelled colours), we readied ourselves for bed and found that the pillows had been embroidered with our initials, in cinnamon silk thread. Not only that, but they knew which side of the bed we slept on!

Immaculate service is the norm here and our complex and idiosyncratic breakfast order did not faze room service for one moment. Whatever you desire, from three types of croissant (try the Almond) to a full Japanese breakfast, all is possible.

This property has one of the best pools



The sitting room of The Governor’s Suite at the ultra-residential Four Seasons Beverly Hills.

in the area. Large, lushly planted and with great rooftop views, the addition of tented cabanas has rendered it heavenly. A really good Mediterranean-style outdoor café serves excellent lunches and for the work-out crowd, the newly renovated gym has an open tented area looking straight onto the pool. The next stage, we hear, is to create a proper Spa from some of the 6th floor rooms; something rather special one suspects, for this hotel does nothing by halves.

The refurbishment has, in effect, gilded the lily; made perfection even more perfect through the finessing of a thousand or more details. This is, of course, what good hotelkeeping is all about.

All the rooms and suites have shed their 'beige-on-beige' austerity in favour of a soft palette of pastels. However, I would recommend that you opt at least for a Junior Suite, all of which have separate sitting rooms and offer very good value.

The lavish flower arrangements are courtesy of the owners (one of their businesses). Thus, there is always a massive tree of Casablanca lilies at the entrance, which has become a signature feature. A complimentary limo can take you to all the best Beverly Hills shops, and this is probably *the* hotel in the area where you are virtually guaranteed to bump into at least one Hollywood star in the popular Bar or restaurants. However, the nice thing is that even the humblest guest will never be overshadowed. Here, everyone gets the same remarkable service. Do go.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

The Peninsula, Beverly Hills.

The first words from the man at reception were "Can I have a credit card for incidentals?" No welcome, no smile, no warmth. Ho hum. We then kicked our heels whilst he dealt with another guest and had to remind him that we were still waiting for our room key.

Some readers have been telling me for a while that this hotel now thinks it is superior to its guests. Our initial experience appeared to confirm this.

The suites, of course, were all taken and although there are only 32 and 16 Villas, the Pen's reputation does, one feel, rest too heavily on the suite experience rather than the run-of-the-mill rooms.

Eventually, we were shown to ours, #213, which was almost identical to the room we last stayed in, but was looking a little tired and dowdy. The armchair was patched and marked; the furniture scuffed and scratched. Even the single plant had a dead leaf. The view was of the internal courtyard where we could watch guests and staff climbing the private stairs to Villa #137; not a great experience for either of us and very noisy, too. Talking of which, at 6.45am the next morning, housekeeping spent an hour entering and exiting the neighbouring room in a timpani of sound that spoke of complete disregard for other guests. It seemed to us that The Pen was run for the convenience of its staff and that we were mere inconveniences.

Now, as you all know from experience, every traveller has disastrous stays at hotels. Even the best get it wrong, and if I had not heard similar murmurings from you, dear readers, then I would have aimed off; but you know, sometimes success goes to the head of famous hotels and they forget their *raison d'être*. Let us hope that this reminds them, for The Pen has an awful lot of good points.

The public areas here are super stylish and pleasantly intimate. Rooms, although small, are well equipped with pretty pink and white marble bathrooms, deep tubs that fill instantly and separate step-in showers. Although the rooms are devoid of flowers, one does receive a plate of shiny apples, but for all the touch button bedside controls and gizmo-filled armoires, our room felt like a Single, as there was but one chair by the desk, which even room service found odd when they served breakfast.

The main restaurant is secluded and almost rural in its peacefulness. The rooftop pool, with its private cabanas and fashionable parasoled café is very Beverly Hills. The newly expanded Spa is pleasantly marbled and, although not large, offers a huge range of treatments.

They have a repeat guest rate of 68% here, so they must be doing something right. Frankly, though, I think that the only accommodation worthy of you, dear readers, is one of the 16 Garden Villas, which range from Junior-style to Full Suites. These, which have all been completely remodelled, are splendid habitats, with striking decor, good art and lovely gas-



A typical room at The Peninsula Beverly Hills.

fired fireplaces. They remind me a little of the villas at the Bel-Air. The current best are #128 and #125, which have their own outdoor jacuzzis.

If, however, you plan on staying in a room, then frankly I think you can do better elsewhere, for they are much too small for comfort.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓

The Beverly Hills Hotel.

Since its major renovation, the "Pink Palace", Beverly Hills' original star-struck landmark, has not enjoyed a particularly kind press and, to be honest, we were not expecting greatness. Compared to the Four Seasons and The Pen, this historic 1912 idyll appeared to be positively empty; yet in talking with other guests, we discovered that the hotel was, in fact, full and that we were very lucky to have obtained a room.

When we arrived at the famous red-carpeted *porte cochère*, staff were swift, smiling and utterly charming. The lavish Art Deco lobby, all peach and gold roundels, was wholly original and apposite for this glitzy part of town, and Reception could not have been more welcoming and helpful.

I had booked a Deluxe Double direct with the hotel and was pleased to find that we were to be sequestered in one of the garden-set bungalows; for me by far the nicest place to stay, as they are quiet, private and countrified in style, reached via a series of pathways that are carpeted in special material that resists the weather. The rich, heady perfume of jasmine fills the air and everywhere one looks, there are huge banana trees, palms and a plethora of bright blooms.

Delightful Assistant Front Office Manager, Payal Paniz, led us to Bungalow 16B, which

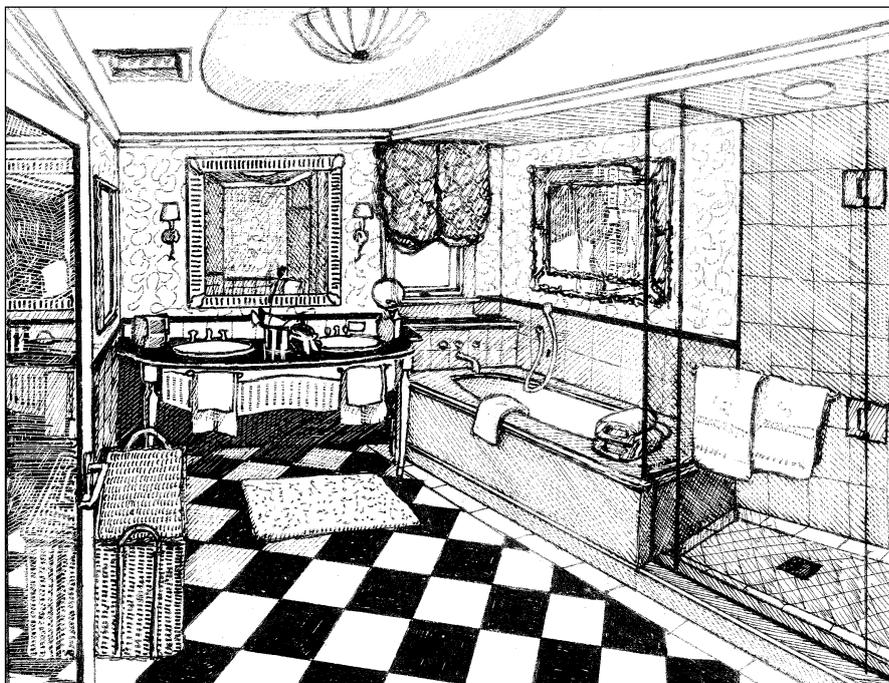
was situated at the top of a wooden stairway. OK, the views were of the carpark, but as we were only staying one night, we did not mind, and the junior-suite sized Bungalow was so pleasant and spacious and the bathroom so splendid that we were utterly content.

There was a real sense of place and individualism about this hotel. It could only be in Beverly Hills, and we liked the honesty of its style, its very American persona. Although now owned by the Sultan of Brunei and managed by the UK-based Audley Group (The Dorchester, London; Le Meurice, Paris), this was vintage Hollywood encapsulated.

The room itself was really comfortable, with a 2-seater sofa and armchair, silk taffeta draped kingsize, ginger Deco-style furniture and a private fax, ready for business, next to the desk. A vast tapestry rug covered in roses set off the dusky pink silk bed-cushions, and at the windows, fine linen nets were flounced by pale chintz drapes. A good walk-in wardrobe was large enough to take all our bags, and a proper chest of drawers made unpacking simple.

The bathroom was awash with coral marble; the floor chequered with dark green. An ornate double marbled vanity with gold taps sported a super signature pink and green hatbox filled with tissue paper and rich custom pink and green toiletries. A small Sony colour Watchman TV sat on the vanity and the walls were softly papered, setting off two ornate gilt mirrors and a floral print. Dimmers were much appreciated; electronic Dutch blinds at the sunny window and a deep tub and large glassed-in shower making for utter contentment. This really felt like a small home, and after so much travelling, we welcomed its relative serenity and privacy.

For lunch, we wandered back through the gardens and decided to eat at the legendary *Fountain Coffee Shop*; a tiny diner-style eatery that has not changed one iota since David first breakfasted there in 1974. Of course, it has been refurbished, but no pretensions have been added; it is a simple, wholly American breakfast and lunch bar with high stools and girls in pink aprons; a burly chef preparing great home cooking right before your eyes. We had Angel Hair Pasta and Gary's Salad, both of which were excellent. No wonder this place is so popular with the locals.



Our marbled Bungalow bathroom at the glorious Beverly Hills Hotel.

We then went for tea around the pool at the *Cabana Club Caf *, which serves breakfast, lunch and cocktails in a palm-strewn, sun-filled oasis that has seen every famous Hollywood face imaginable. The private cabanas, replete with 'phones of course, started the trend and some of Hollywood's biggest deals were done here.

However, you do not need to be famous to receive six-star treatment here. Everywhere we went, the staff were superb. When we 'phoned Housekeeping for an iron and board, it was delivered within 5 minutes, even though our bungalow was a fair walk from the main hotel. When we asked the Concierge how to get to *Barney's*, he told us that one of the hotel's courtesy limos would drop us off, and it did. Now, all the Beverly Hills five stars tend to do this, so the service is not unique; but what impressed us was the sheer warmth and friendliness of the procedure. There was not an ounce of stuffiness or pretension here.

The "Pink Palace" is a very acre-rich property; a real oasis of calm that is more resort-like than any of the other Beverly Hills hotels. As well as a large pool, there are two outdoor tennis courts, a big well-equipped fitness centre and the *Maurice Azoulay Salon* for hair and beauty. A sprinkling of boutiques tempts one to linger, and apart from a signature shop and men's fashions, *Asprey* glitters in diamond perfection.

For dinner, we booked a table in the *Polo Lounge*; a very civilised retreat that

winds around a central flower-filled courtyard. Japanese chef, Suki Sugiura, is of star quality. Every course, from rice paper spring rolls to home-made ice creams was astoundingly good and service was the best ever.

We returned late to our bungalow, having spent the early evening with a Do Not Disturb sign on our door. At The Pen, Housekeeping had slipped a card under the door telling us to 'phone if we required a turndown. At the Beverly Hills Hotel, however, Housekeeping were invisible. They came and went whilst we were out and everything was perfection. No notices, no noise, just fabulous, discreet service.

Interestingly, when this hotel reopened after its 2-year renovation, the criticism was all about service. Well, I have to report that service is now sublime. Quite unexpectedly, we loved this hotel and I really urge you to book yourself a Bungalow next time you are in town and experience the essence of Beverly Hills hospitality. The best location in Beverly Hills, best cuisine, characterful decor and wonderful service earns this hotel five ticks.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

Hotel Bel-Air.

Well now, I think that the Bel-Air has developed a little attitude problem since our last visit and I do not think that it is entirely due to its major on-going refurbishment, which, although unsettling for

staff, cannot be blamed for everything. I mean, why, for instance, did we return from dinner to discover that Housekeeping had left a used bath mat and towel on one of the dining chairs? Why, when we booked a table for 8pm in the Restaurant were we told that it was for 8.30pm and that we could only sit out on the terrace, which, although heated, was decidedly chilly; and why was the service so uncaring and churlish? When I ordered a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, I felt as though I had committed a major sin, such was the disdain that greeted my choice.

We listened in to what was going on at the surrounding tables and although one or two diners were obviously regulars, even they were treated in a very off-hand manner, with hardly an ounce of warmth.

If you like English country house hotels, then you will probably like the Bel-Air, for it, like many of them, thinks itself superior to its guests. Unlike the better English hideaways such as Chewton Glen, the Bel-Air retains its tiny, chilly bathrooms and seems to positively relish its historical inadequacies. Created in 1946, its structural limitations may be adequate for nostalgics, but I suspect that many of our Asian readers would be rather disappointed by the tiny in-tub showers with plastic curtains, single vanities, cramped loos and inadequate heating. I certainly was.

Our suite, #110, was set off a pretty fountained courtyard and was comfortable, homely and welcoming. The gas-ignited fireplaces are one of the things that David and I like about this place; that and the beautiful countrified gardens, full of scented blooms and lush plantings, meandering around rustic rivulets, fountains and the famous Swan Lake. Here, one may stroll through the grounds and see hummingbirds whirling through the air and alight-

ing to drink at a trickling fountain. It is, decidedly tranquil, especially in this part of the world.

Upon arrival, we were served an Asian tea basket of passionfruit tea and a plate of home-baked cookies, which was very nice. The sitting room was splendidly art-directed with a plate of huge, waxy red apples, plump strawberries and brilliant posy bowls of vivid flowers; so bright as to resemble Mexican paintings. Pickled pine, fresh green gingham, smart blue and white pinstripes and restrained chintz came together in a countrified pattern-book style that perfectly complemented the homey hacienda look of this rambling pink enclave.

Our late room service lunch was excellent: vast grilled chicken sandwiches, perfect guacamole, creative garnishes, such as butter pats carved into swans; all was perfection. Even at dinner, the fare was fair, if a little rich. It was the attitude that marred the experience.

Legends, they say, live on. Well, legends also become history and unless this hotel looks to its laurels and to what is occurring elsewhere in town, then, as an hotel, the Bel-Air, like The Breakers in Palm Beach, will become yet another historical footnote; famous but irrelevant. I do hope not.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓

L'Ermitage, Beverly Hills.

It is about time that a new hotel opened in Beverly Hills that looked firmly towards the Millennium rather than back to a make-believe age of gilded nostalgia. In New York, it was the Four Seasons that broke the mould. In London, it was The Halkin and The Metropolitan. In Beverly Hills, it is L'Ermitage; a gorgeous Asian-style mini-

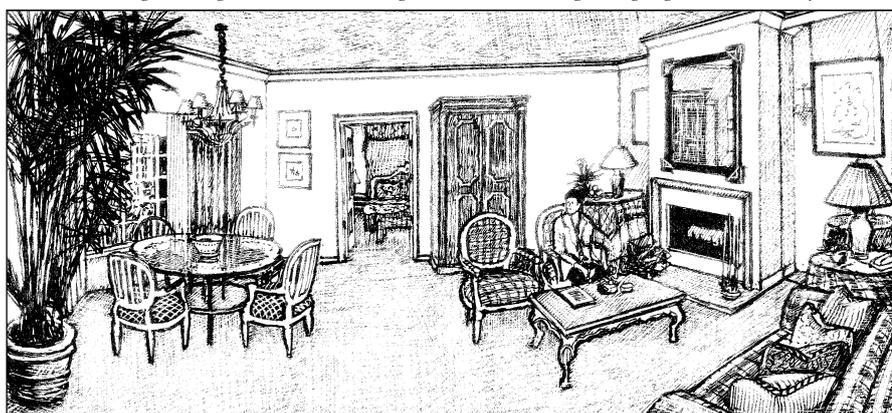
malist masterpiece just a stone's throw from Rodeo Drive and all the best shops.

Acres of pale beige marble and polished blond English sycamore and maple herald one's entrance; the staff attired in ochre or black designer suits. The welcome here is warm and willing, but the service still has a way to go, which is not surprising after just 6 months.

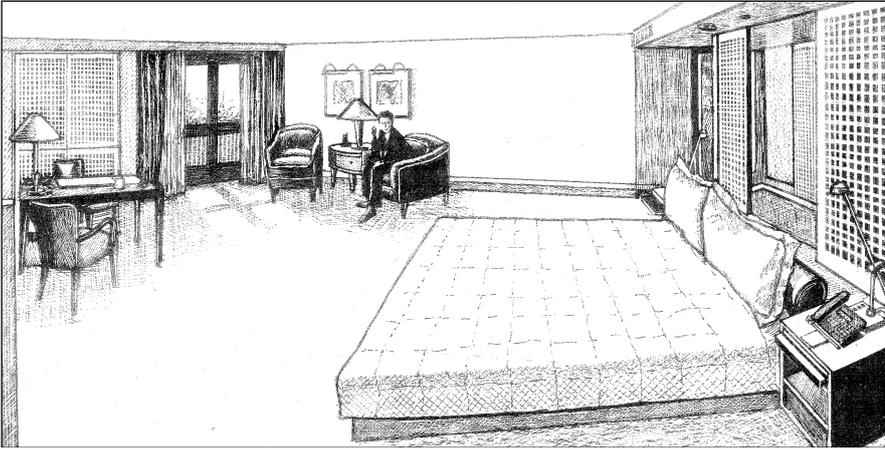
Of the 111 oversized junior-suite style rooms and 13 full suites, all are in the same modern classic style; ours, #818, having superb balconied views across leafy Burton Way. From the rooftop pool, you can even see the Hollywood sign, and by the time you read this, the rooftop restaurant should have its license, so that lunch can be enjoyed with a 360° view of the Hollywood Hills.

The first thing that struck us about our room was its decorative similarity to Amanresorts and Rafael Hotels. The armchairs were exactly like those in the *Hotel du Rhône*, Geneva, and the sliding blond wood trellis screens behind the low, platformed kingsize were pure *Amanjiwo*, in Java. This, I must admit, did not come as a huge surprise. You see, L'Ermitage is a new property sited on the old L'Ermitage lot and owned by a majority shareholder in Amanresorts; so one suspects that quite a few lessons have been learned from Adrian Zecha, if only by osmosis!

The rooms here average 675 sq ft; much bigger than most in this part of town, and feature central kingsizes with anthracite green silk bedspreads, bolsters and cushions, down duvets and clever sliding bedside trays. Each room has no less than four 3-line 'phones, plus a complimentary cellular mobile, so that wherever you are, you can receive calls direct on your specially assigned private line. You also get an amazingly versatile fax machine in your armoire that doubles as a plain paper copier, scanner and colour printer. It, too, is programmed with your own personal number and this, together with the 'phone number is printed on all your personalised stationery. A raft of data jacks caters to the most sophisticated laptops and further intelligent electronic room features include mood lighting that turns itself on when you enter the room, a Sony CD/DVD player with BOSE speakers and a massive 40" Mitsubishi TV fed by digital satellite and featuring 40 channels, including num-



The fireplaced sitting room of our comfortable suite at the Hotel Bel-Air.



Huge, airy modernist rooms with 'intelligent' features help make the new L'Ermitage really special.

erous movie channels, all carefully concealed within the built-in armoire.

Like Amanresorts, great emphasis has been put on the large dressing and bathing areas. An open closet features plenty of hanging and drawer space and the large marbled bathroom, with separate tub, loo, step-in shower and modernist colour TV is awash with soft towels and custom *Aveda* toiletries, including sun cream. Both sets of light waffle and heavy towelling robes are covetable.

Decorative details include custom alarm clocks, etched glass accessories, spot-lit single flowers, an oval magazine table and, very cleverly, a concealed linen cupboard so that housekeeping can stow the bedspread and pillow shams at turndown. Now why don't all hotels think of that? Private bars offer complimentary non-alcoholic beverages, and to further personalise one's stay, you can choose from a huge range of special therapeutic pillows for those of us who suffer from back or sleeping problems.

Climate and lighting are also intelligent and can be controlled from the bedside panels; yet happily, all the technology of this hotel is carefully disguised, so that one never feels bombarded by it, as in some hotels.

Polished wood floors, beige sculpted carpets, spot-lit minimalist art, silent airconditioning, free videos from an extensive list and, unusually for LA, even real leaf tea at breakfast: this was

a genuinely comfortable, thoughtful and refreshingly designed habitat, and the good looks follow through the entire property, which has a very discrete, residential feel to it. The *Living Room* and *Library Bar* on the ground floor are softened by fireplaces and striking artworks, including three framed silk Chinese textiles from the 13th century. The *Restaurant at L'Ermitage* is set on the round and has a domed ceiling and full height windows looking onto a leafy patio with a *laminar* fountain, which emits a spectacular sheet of water.

On the second floor, there is a clubby Executive Centre with a bar and over 90 humidors. There is also a great gym on the 8th floor, just below the pool, with fabulous floor to ceiling views of the Hills.

There are just 13 suites here, so early booking is essential if you want to secure one. The Garden Suites on the ground floor have private entrances and small patios and The Presidential on the 7th floor manages to be both enormous and intimate

at the same time; a space that is meant to be lived in.

Because L'Ermitage is set in a residential zone, planning permission has been problematic and in March, the hotel was still waiting for permission to put breakfast tables and chairs on the balconies and to serve drinks on the restaurant patio and rooftop. Hopefully, the City of Beverly Hills will recognise that L'Ermitage's plans will, if anything, add to the elegance and quality of this leafy enclave.

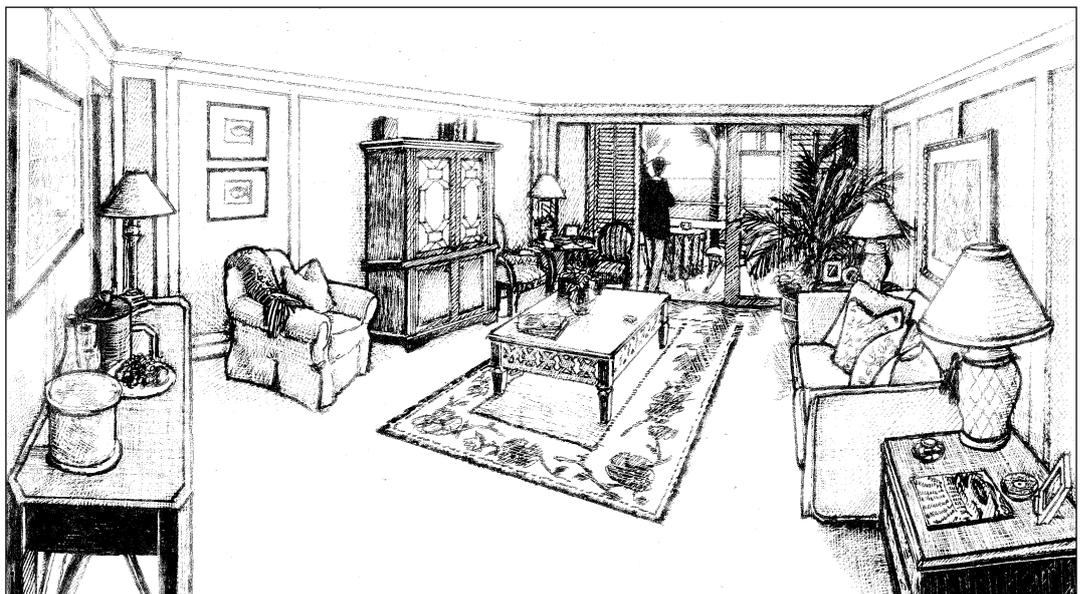
The cuisine here aims for a light fusion of Mediterranean and Asian tastes. It succeeds. A lunch of crisp snapper on a moreish salad bed with Japanese-style dipping sauce was excellent. Dinner, which included Duck and Lobster Spring Rolls with Lemongrass Ponzu and Rack of Lamb, was superb. Best of all were this restaurant's fresh sorbets. Ask for the fresh Green Apple or the Mango, both made from pure fruit and served with flaky cinnamon pastry sticks. The service here is warm and highly knowledgeable; the ambience delightful, especially in the evening.

Although L'Ermitage needs to sharpen up its service in certain areas, under the keen direction of GM Jack Naderkhani, it is well on its way to greatness. We loved it.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★

Shutters on the Beach, Santa Monica.

Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside, as the old English song goes, and in LA, the only place to stay right on the beach is



Genuine home comforts in our Ocean-view suite at Santa Monica's hugely civilised Shutters on the Beach.

this delightful, wood shuttered hostelry. Painted surf white, with quirky beams and a rash of bijou balconies, each sporting a tiny floral-clad table and white chairs, the look is very *Nantucket*; a wholly appropriate, if unique, style for Santa Monica and amazingly, just 20 minutes or so from the airport or the heart of Beverly Hills.

Santa Monica is one of the few cities in the US where walking is not considered an aberration. Here, there is a constant stream of strollers, bicyclists and skaters, and just 10 minutes walk away, a very Mediterranean promenade with palm trees and floral borders; just like the Croisette in Cannes. Whilst we were there in mid-March, the beach in front of Shutters was being re-landscaped to better reflect the rising exclusivity of this area, most of which, you have to believe, is due to Shutters itself, which really sets the tone.

When it comes to accommodation, you must insist on a room or suite at the front of the hotel, looking directly onto the Ocean, as the rear and side view rooms could disappoint. The fireplaced Presidential Suites, #302 and #721 are the best option. However, even the value-packed ground floor, viewless Spa Rooms (4 of which have fireplaces) are exceptionally comfortable and give one ground-floor access to the small but exquisite guest-only Fitness Centre and Spa.

Our Deluxe Ocean View Suite, #202, was a delightfully comfortable and cosy retreat, filled with thoughtful touches, such as a games box, binoculars, pretzel jar and lots of little seaside *objets*, such as bell jars filled with shells, bright planters of palms and spring bedding plants and predominantly ocean-blue art and accessories, such as a snug blue wool throw, which perfectly complemented the cream loose covered sofa and chair and the white painted coffee table.

Our spacious bedroom had two more little sitting balconies overlooking the Ocean, double blue padded bedroom chairs, more flower-filled planters and on the comfy kingsize, sumptuous white Frette bedlinen trimmed with turquoise embroidery, six feather pillows, a ribboned bolster and a goosedown duvet, making one long for bedtime (unusually, every single room and suite has a Frette-dressed bed such as this). White walls, endless white louvered french doors and a really

welcoming ambience made #202 one of life's extra special suites.

The white tiled and green marble bathroom, trimmed with celadon ceramic twists, mirrors and lots of framed prints, sported a separate loo, step-in shower, jacuzzi tub and twin vanities; the *Forest Essentials* toiletries encouraging kleptomania. A bathroom radio, bath toys and big pastel-striped beach towels further added to the appeal. The only negative was the very small louvered clothes closet.

The public areas of the hotel are equally relaxed and homely; the huge open-plan lobby filled with deep clubby armchairs set around two fireplaces, where guests lounge and scour the daily papers, sip cocktails and meet friends. Staff here are friendly, helpful and very attentive.

There is a huge terraced sun deck on the third floor, with a small pool and a very good pool bar serving lunchtime snacks. The views from here are lovely and you really do not feel as though you are anywhere near the bustle of LA.

For lunch, we tried the buzzy, popular *Pedals Café* on the ground floor and delighted in excellent homestyle fare. My Roast Chicken with young Spinach and Chive Mashed Potato was perfection. There is also a good, casually elegant bar on this level and both venues open straight onto the beach, which is why they are so popular.

For dinner, we went to *One Pico*, where Restaurant Manager, Georg Skorka, looked after us admirably at our table by the huge inglenook fireplace. This was a really elegant restaurant, yet without a trace of pretension or stuffiness. Set around the baronial-size log fire, the large tables are widely spaced and romantically lit. The service is utterly discreet yet totally attentive and the cuisine is executed with a rare confidence that demonstrates a perfect understanding of ingredients. My mushroom Ravioli was a symphony of subtlety and the Roast Salmon with a Fennel Crust, utterly perfect. Tarte Tatin was larger than we are used to, but delicious nonetheless. The wine list could do with a little more variety, but overall, this was a top class dining experience.

Shutters is a highly accomplished, relaxed hotel for confident guests and a place we would not hesitate to return to.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★

AT A GLANCE

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL AT BEVERLY HILLS.

Address: 300 S. Doheny Dr., LA, CA 90048. **Tel:** +1 310 273 2222. **Fax:** +1 310 385 3824. **Affiliation:** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 285, including 106 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* \$325-\$455. *Suites:* \$525-\$4,300 + tax.

THE PENINSULA, BEVERLY HILLS.

Address: 9882 Little Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90212. **Tel:** +1 310 551 2888. **Fax:** +1 310 788 2319. **Affiliation:** Peninsula Group, Leading Hotels of the World, Preferred Hotels. **Rooms:** 196, including 32 suites & 16 villas. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* from \$395. *Suites:* from \$700, + tax.

THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL.

Address: On Sunset Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90210. **Tel:** +1 310 276 2251. **Fax:** +1 310 887 2887. **Affiliation:** The Audley Group, Leading Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 203, including 21 Bungalows. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* \$335-\$390. *Bungalow King:* \$390. *Suites:* \$685-\$4,700. *Bungalow Suites:* \$545-\$3,595 + tax.

HOTEL BEL-AIR.

Address: 701 Stone Canyon Rd., LA, CA 90077. **Tel:** +1 310 472 1211. **Fax:** +1 310 440 5866. **Affiliation:** Leading Hotels of the World, Preferred Hotels. **Rooms:** 92, including 40 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* \$350-\$460. *Suites:* \$525-\$2,500 + tax.

L'ERMITAGE, BEVERLY HILLS.

Address: 9291 Burton Way, Beverly Hills, CA 90210. **Tel:** +1 310 278 3344. **Fax:** +1 310 278 8247. **Affiliation:** Preferred Hotels & Resorts Worldwide. **Rooms:** 124, including 13 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* from \$418. *Suites:* from \$780 + tax.

SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH.

Address: One Pico Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405. **Tel:** +1 310 458 0030. **Fax:** +1 310 458 4589. **Affiliation:** Leading Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 198, including 12 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* \$330-\$525. *Suites:* \$750-\$2,500 + tax.

All rates are expressed in US\$.

Gallivanter's Gossip



PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF OUR NEW **E-mail address**, gallivanter.guide@virgin.net which goes directly to Lyn Middlehurst's desk at The Gallivanter's Guide Editorial Office in Wiltshire, UK.

THE OWNERS OF SANTA MONICA'S Shutters on the Beach are currently renovating its historic 1926 neighbour and restoring it as a totally separate grand hotel, to be named **Casa Del Mar**. Like Shutters, it will offer a truly up-scale experience, with 129 palatial rooms and suites befitting its previous incarnation as one of Santa Monica's most opulent 1920's beach clubs. The difference will be in its unique style. Whereas Shutters aims for casual elegance, Del Mar will pull out all the luxury stops. When it soft-opens later this summer, it should be well worth a visit.

OUR FAVOURITE HOTEL IN DÜSSELDORF, Rafael Hotel's, **Breidenbacher Hof**, closes this summer for a multi-million reconstruction and renovation, including new rooms and suites (created from existing offices which will overlook the Königsallee), a state-of-the-art fitness centre and 21st century technology throughout. The hotel re-opens in Spring 2000, when we aim to bring you a detailed update. Meanwhile, the hotel will continue to service guests with its own limo service and block-booked neighbouring hotel rooms.

ALSO CLOSED FOR RENOVATION is the glorious **Hotel Meurice** in Paris (part of the Audley Group), which re-opens in December, and, at long last, **The Regent Sydney**, which closes this month for a major A\$50m renovation, also re-opening in December.

THE NEW OWNERS of the **Four Seasons Milan** have instigated the creation of 20 additional rooms, testifying to the continuing popularity of this beautiful hotel. We just hope it can maintain its intimate charms. The **Four Seasons New York** has also acquired a new owner in the form of American toy manufacturer, Ty Warner. Let us hope that he appreciates the previous Asian owners' enlightened working partnership with Four Seasons, which brought us one of the world's greatest modern day Grandes Dames.

THE AMAZING TRANSFORMATION OF ROSEWOOD Hotels & Resorts, which latterly has emerged as one of the world's most enlightened hotel groups (Las Ventanas al Paraiso, The Dharmawangsa, The Lanesborough) has led to its appointment this month to manage the family-owned 234-room **Badrutt's Palace Hotel** in St. Moritz, Switzerland. Expect lavish enhancements from Rosewood's investment.

TOP **Hotel Affiliations** are undergoing major changes this year. Leading Hotels of the World has outsourced its reservations system, whilst sister company, Prima Hotels, has been sold off. We hear that the prime Prima members will be invited to join a new boutique division of Leading. Small Luxury Hotels of the World is also, allegedly, up for sale. Relais & Châteaux remain unfazed by this current round of musical chairs.

The Gallivanter's Guide is a privately published monthly newsletter with the aim of unearthing idyllic places for the dedicated traveller. The selection of hotels and resorts included in this Guide is made on an entirely independent basis, and all opinions expressed are those of the Editor. Neither the Editor nor Publisher can be held responsible for any problems which may arise through the subscriber or reader's direct experience of any place, hotel or airline as recommended in this Guide. All information, including room rates, is published in good faith, and the Publishers cannot be held responsible for its accuracy. We recommend that you always double check all information with the hotels/authorities concerned.

UK SUBSCRIPTIONS £99 per annum for 12 issues.

EIRE & REST OF EUROPE £125 per annum. AUSTRALIA/ASIA/AFRICA/SOUTH AMERICA £134 per annum.

Address these enquiries to 'Subscriptions', The Gallivanter's Guide, Hill Crest, Malmesbury Road, Minety, Malmesbury, Wiltshire SN16 9QX, UK. [Fax: +44 (0)1666 860063] [E-mail: gallivanter.guide@virgin.net]

USA & CANADA SUBSCRIPTIONS US\$149 (£99) per annum for 12 issues.

Address these enquiries to 'Subscriptions', The Gallivanter's Guide, PO Box 5864, Scottsdale, Arizona 85261-5864, USA.

© Copyright 1999 The Gallivanter's Guide. All rights reserved. Quotation, reproduction or transmission by any means is prohibited without written permission from the Publisher.