



WOW! HOTELS: LONDON, HONG KONG, ABU DHABI, MADRID, MELBOURNE

BY NADINE JOLIE COURTNEY

I confess: I'm a luxury hotel junkie.

When I'm planning an international trip, I don't worry about the restaurants, bars or art museums—that's what travel blogs are for. My primary concern? Finding the best, most jaw-dropping, most Instagram-worthy hotels. Period.

Sure, I love strolling around cities and checking out the nightlife with my husband, but he's an explorer and I'm a lazy loungeur. Left to my own devices, I'd be lying about the hotel room all day in my Frette robe, drawing steaming hot baths in marble claw-foot tubs, ordering champagne room service while chained to my iPhone and MacBook and only emerging after 8pm. (Hey, the first step is admitting you have a problem.) As for waking up in a foreign hotel room—obviously on your own timetable, *not* by alarm clock—is there anything better?

I scoured the globe for this fascinating assignment, looking for the Wow! hotels in five sexy cities: London, Hong Kong, Abu Dhabi, Melbourne and Madrid. As a travel writer, I've been lucky enough to stay in some fairly epic locales, and even I was impressed with this bunch. The rooms are gorgeous, the perks are next level and there's enough to satisfy you no matter *what* your travel style—explorer and lazy loungeur alike.

LONDON 45 PARK LANE

The Dorchester's cooler but no less extravagant younger sister, 45 Park Lane is an Art Deco dream right off Hyde Park in the heart of Mayfair. If the Dorchester is haughty, elegant class—as British as clotted cream and Buckingham Palace garden parties—45 Park Lane is hip, rock 'n' roll, modern London. It only has 45 rooms (get it?) but the best by far is the Penthouse Suite. Only accessible by a key-controlled private elevator, the room has a 360-degree view of London and overlooks Hyde Park. Just imagine the luxe soirées you could throw on the wraparound outdoor terrace. The in-house restaurant is Wolfgang Puck's supernova steakhouse, CUT, and priceless artwork is scattered about: Here's a Damien Hirst, there's a Bruce McLean and—are those pictures on the staircase by Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones? Definitely not your grandmother's hotel—unless your grandmother happens to be Vivienne Westwood.

hotel and city info; carefully curated Asian art abounds; and there's a secret garden on Level 6. As you'd expect, the rooms are large, tasteful, elegant, refined. Bathrooms are almost as big as the automated, ultra-modern bedrooms themselves, with jaw-dropping tub views and an extensive assortment of REN skincare that puts normal hotel toiletries to shame. But, then again, there's nothing normal about Upper House. It's minimalist perfection.

beach and downing coffee, tea and dates in a Bedouin tent? *Obviously.* The premier Palace Suite is 7,319 square feet and features a dining room, private terrace, three bedrooms and a palatial bathroom. If you need more excuses to check in, there's a Moroccan-inspired spa, 14 restaurants including a Hakkasan outpost, a cigar and cognac bar, a caviar and champagne bar and the hotel's famous Palace Cappuccino, sprinkled with actual gold flakes. It's the stuff dreams are made of.

staircase and a dizzying array of electric blues, crimsons and purples—you're dazzled by a *Moulin Rouge*-worthy feast for the eyes. It's like Buenos Aires meets Art Deco on acid. In a city notoriously lacking in buzz-worthy hotel options, the Gran Meliá Félix doesn't disappoint. Its Dry Martini bar is one of the most popular in town; there's rooftop dining overlooking the Plaza de Colón; the soundproof rooms are stylish and hip; and the Salamanca location, close to Retiro Park, is excellent for walking around and drumming up a late-night appetite. Stay on the "Red Level," where rooms have panoramic views of the city, and you can skinny-dip *al fresco* in a Jacuzzi tub on your private outdoor terrace. Now, *that's* a hotel stay.

ABU DHABI EMIRATES PALACE

Let's be honest: Five stars in Abu Dhabi is basically seven stars anywhere else in the world. So you want excess? The \$3 billion Emirates Palace is your fix, catering to all your *Arabian Nights* fantasies. Twenty-four-hour butler service? Check. Beachfront views of the turquoise blue Arabian Sea on one side, with the Abu Dhabi city skyline on the other? Check. Riding camels on the

MADRID GRAN MELIÁ FÉLIX

Now *this* is the kind of hotel lobby design I can get behind. From the second you walk into the lobby of Madrid's Gran Meliá Félix—featuring a domed, stained-glass ceiling, marble columns, a massive chandelier, a sweeping red-carpet-covered

FILET ENFLADE

The elegant dining room of Wolfgang Puck's steakhouse at London's 45 Park Lane.



HONG KONG UPPER HOUSE

It's all about divine customer service at Upper House, a genteel, white-glove hotel that's the tippity-top of luxury in a city that defines luxury. Maybe you were escorted from the airport in one of their Lexus RX-450 WiFi-enabled hybrids. Definitely you skipped check-in, since tech-savvy Upper House has no front desk, wirelessly checking guests in and out from the privacy of their rooms. What else to mention other than the stunning views of Victoria Harbour, the skyline and the Peak? Michelin-starred Chef Gray Kunz presides over Café Gray Deluxe: each guest gets an iPod Touch loaded with

MELBOURNE CROWN TOWERS

Sydney gets most of the love, but experienced jet-setters flock to Melbourne, Australia's culinary and cultural capital. Hands down, the best hotel in town is the 482-room Crown Towers. With a driveway full of Bentleys, located next to the Crown Level 1 Casino, sitting on top of a luxury shopping center (Louis Vuitton, Prada, Versace), and featuring a massive spa and a Nobu, it's all a bit Vegas-y—but in the best possible way. Even the normal rooms are plush and comfy, with rainfall showers, HD LCD-TV mirrors above deep tubs, and views of either the city skyline or Port Phillip Bay. However, you'll want to opt for the Tower Suite—it has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a lounge, living room and dining room—or one of the huge Deluxe Villas, which have views of the Princes Bridge, feature private elevator entrances and include twenty-four-hour butlers. Swanky. 🍷