

SELECTIONS



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PARIS
AS ONLY A
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KNOWS HOW

CHANEL
SPECIAL

THE REAL
MICHELIN STARS
GATHER IN MONACO

SIX OF THE BEST HISTORIC HOTELS

WORDS: Stephanie Plentl

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01

THE SAVOY, LONDON

Selections asks seasoned travel writer Stephanie Plentl to recommend six of the best historic hotels.

Peter, Count of Savoy, built an impressive palace in 1246 using river front land presented to him by King Henry III, his nephew through marriage. Over 600 years later it was reborn as the Savoy Theatre, famously staging the operettas of Gilbert & Sullivan. The theatre's impresario, Richard D'Oyly Carte, added a hotel - the first luxury hotel in London - in 1889. It broke many precedents: the first to use electricity, to have electric lifts, and to provide mostly en-suite bathrooms. It was from Savoy hotel rooms that Monet and Whistler painted iconic London cityscapes; the Art Deco period then defined its style and cemented its prestige, attracting stars such as Noël Coward, Coco Chanel & Vivien Leigh (who met her future husband Laurence Olivier in the Savoy Grill restaurant.) A recent ambitious refurbishment has introduced a swathe of modern technological conveniences and refreshed its look - without destroying its classic ambience.

Strand, London WC2R 0EU,
Tel: + 44 207 836 4343,
www.fairmont.com/savoy

02

HOTEL PLAZA ATHÉNÉE, PARIS

Ideally positioned next to the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, both of which opened in 1913, the hotel was an instant magnet for eminent composers and performers. In 1949, when Avenue Montaigne established itself as the home of haute couture with the arrival of The House of Dior, the Plaza Athénée became the go-to hotel for fashion icons and film stars. Marlene Dietrich had already ensconced herself in seven rooms for three weeks in 1933, but Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor trumped her with a six-month stay in 1971. It's also a celluloid celebrity in its own right having featured most recently in Woody Allen's 'Midnight in Paris' and in the final episode of 'Sex in the City.' Today, with The Dior Institute as its spa, recently renovated rooms that are fragranced with amber and restaurants that have harnessed the talents of chef Alain Ducasse, the Plaza Athénée continues to exude allure.

25 Avenue Montaigne, 75008 Paris;
Tel: +33 1 5367 6665,
www.plaza-athenee-paris.com

03

HOTEL MOUNT NELSON, CAPE TOWN

So named in honour of Lord Nelson and the nearby Table Mountain, almost immediately after the hotel opened in 1899, the Second Boer War began. Hotel Mount Nelson was appropriated by the British as their military headquarters and a young war correspondent by the name of Winston Churchill praised it as 'a most excellent and well appointed establishment which may be thoroughly appreciated after a sea voyage.' When the First World War ended the hotel was painted a pink blush in celebration, for which it is now known. John Lennon - who checked in as 'Mr Greenwood' - was a guest here shortly before his death, and the Dalai Lama once addressed 500 Capetonians from the ballroom. Set within manicured lawns and with the Company Gardens on its doorstep, the 'Nellie' is now a perfect oasis within a bustling city.

76 Orange Street, Cape Town 8001,
Tel: + 27 21 483 1000,
www.mountnelson.co.za

04

THE PENINSULA, HONG KONG

This Hong Kong Grand Dame has been enchanting guests since 1928 and remains the pinnacle of impeccable Asian hospitality. Once the last stop for Trans-Siberian train passengers from Europe and a pivotal harbour for luxury ocean liners, The Peninsula on the Kowloon side of Victoria Harbour has long been accustomed to welcoming the crème de la crème of world society. It is cherished for its staff (the highest staff to guest ratio in Hong Kong), its much-cherished colonial Afternoon Tea and its fleet of green Phantom Rolls-Royces. With a keen eye on Hong Kong's dramatic development, The Peninsula has continued to define itself and maintain its status: in 1994 a 30-storey tower was added replete with a helipad, used to whisk guests to and from the airport by helicopter. It is from these additional rooms that guests get a perfect view of the dramatic lightshow that happens nightly on Hong Kong's skyscrapers.

Salisbury Road, Kowloon,
Tel: +852 2920 2888,
www.peninsula.com



05

TAJ MAHAL PALACE, MUMBAI

The vision of Jamsetji N Tata – the founder of Tata Group, India’s largest conglomerate company – this grand hotel opened in 1903 having had no expense spared. The commercial capital of India was given an architectural jewel with the most modern conveniences: its own power plant for electricity, an ice machine plant for cooling systems, modern sanitation and later, the country’s first discotheque and Mumbai’s first licensed bar. The Palace attracted Maharajas and Princes who felt suitably at home in its opulent surroundings – although the official architect of the conception of a building was in fact a radical Englishman, W.A Chambers. In the ultimate tribute, the hotel became a hub for the Indian Freedom Movement and in 1947 one of the first speeches of a new Independent India was made here. The hotel was rigorously renovated for its centenary year, using international architects fused with the talents of local artisans.

*Apollo Bunder,
Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra,
Tel: +91 22 6665 3366,
www.tajhotels.com*

06

THE WALDORF ASTORIA, NEW YORK

Occupying an entire block of midtown Manhattan, the Art Deco facade of the Waldorf Astoria is now an official New York City landmark. The fusion of the Waldorf and the Astoria Hotels, each owned by Astor cousins, the original Waldorf Astoria stood on land now occupied by the Empire State Building. It was at this previous location that its iconic dishes were invented, including the Waldorf Salad and Eggs Benedict. The hotel also popularised Red Velvet Cake, Thousand Island dressing and the use of room service. When the current hotel opened in 1931 it was the world’s largest and tallest hotel, and, with its 1,415 guest rooms and suites, it remains one of the world’s largest Art Deco buildings. Taking advantage of its Art Deco splendour, more than 20 movies have been filmed here including ‘The Out of Towners’ (1970), ‘Maid in Manhattan’ (2002) and ‘Mr and Mrs Smith’ (2005). ●

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www.waldorfnewyork.com*

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