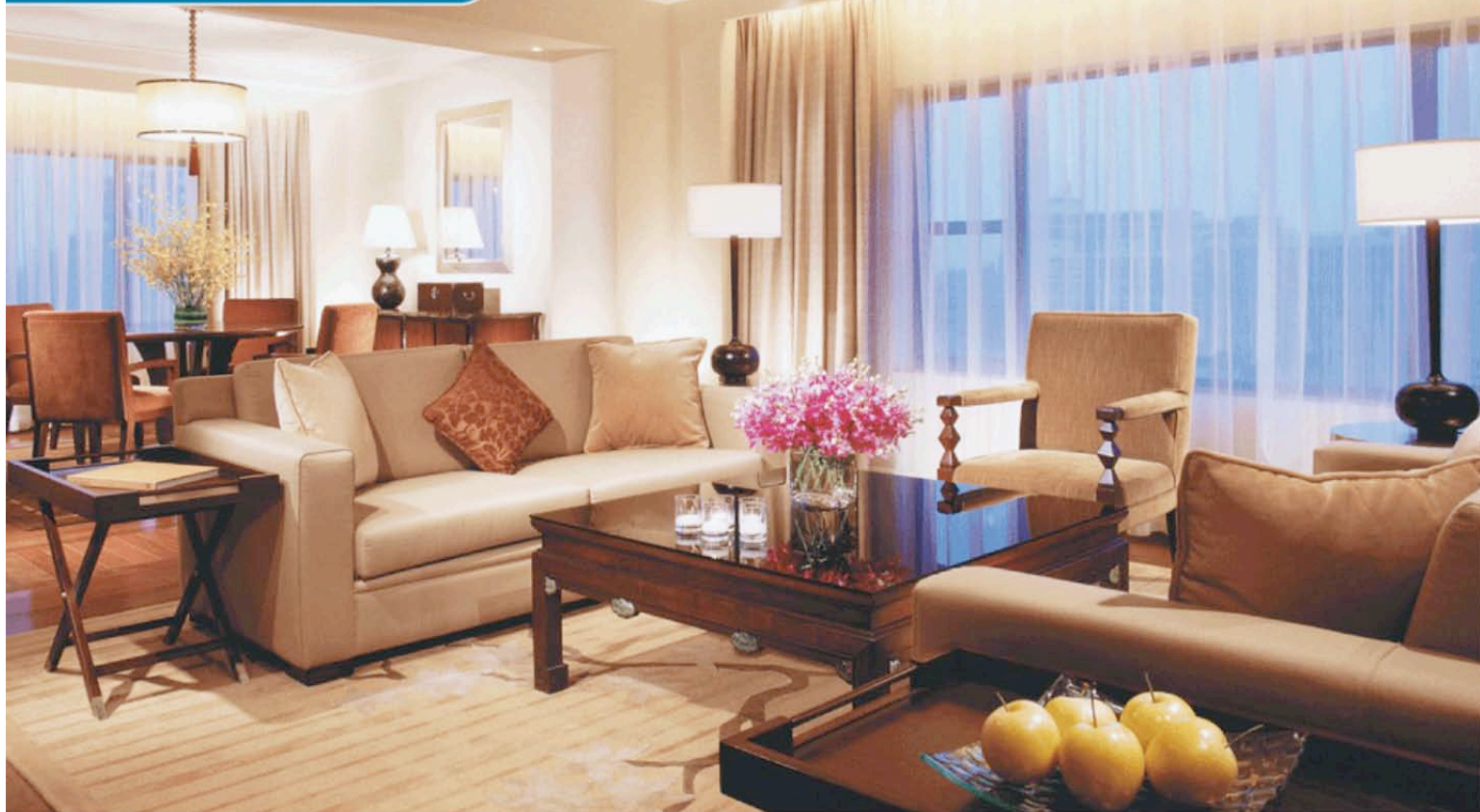


DESTINATIONS



BEIJING

Luxury is making its way to this capital city of fascinating cultures.

BY LAURA WATILO BLAKE

As it readies for the 2008 Olympics, Beijing strives to redefine its image as an ultra-modern capital city with world-class facilities. As a result, the number of choices in luxury hotel accommodations continues to expand at a dizzying rate. However, most options remain centrally located near Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City.

Bill Clinton regularly stays at the **St. Regis Hotel** (www.stregis.com/beijing), known for its personalized service. All accommodations feature warm, inviting colors, luxurious bedding and marble bathrooms with extra-deep tubs. The most requested room may be the Diplomat Deluxe, but Ambassador Suites offer the best vistas, thanks to their corner locations.

All rooms include 24/7 butler service. The butlers have been known to go above and beyond for their guests; one shopped for lamps after hours when a guest didn't like existing room lighting, and another helped bargain for souvenirs at the nearby Silk Market. Insider tip: Head Concierge Lucy Wang (lucy.wang@stregis.com) can arrange individualized tours with experts in Chinese history, art and silk.

When sending a VIP, contact General Manager Cary Gray directly (cary.gray@stregis.com; 8610 6460 6688, ext. 2402).

We were dazzled by the marriage of traditional Chinese architecture and modern luxury at the **Peninsula Palace Beijing** (www.beijing.peninsula.com). For excellent city views, book one of the 18 Duplex Suites on the top floor.

Each features a downstairs sitting area with a beautiful wooden staircase leading to an upper-level bedroom with king-size bed and luxurious marble bathroom.

For the ultimate in sophistication, the recently renovated 10-room, 7,100-square-foot Peninsula Suite features an impressive collection of antiques and a private elevator linked directly to the lobby and hotel restaurants. French President Jacques Chirac was the suite's first guest.

Locals recommend the coconut prawn soup at award-winning JING, or authentic Cantonese dim sum at Huang Ting. Make reservations 24 to 48 hours in advance for both restaurants.

The hotel also offers the most exclusive shopping experience in the city; among the 50 boutiques in the Peninsula Arcade are Louis Vuitton,

Hermès, Cartier and Chanel (the hotel has its own fleet of chauffeur-driven vehicles, including two Rolls Royces).

All rooms are bookable by GDS. Agents with VIP guests should contact Belinda Goh, director of marketing (belindagoh@peninsula.com; 8610-8516-2888, ext. 6600).

Insider tip: Henry Zhu, manager of the Fitness Center and Spa (henryzhu@peninsula.com) can arrange traditional Chinese massage with Peter Zhang or Angela Zhang, two popular masseurs. The spa has two treatment rooms and men's and women's steam baths and saunas.

Other top contacts at the Peninsula Palace include General Manager Donald J. Harrington (donaldharrington@peninsula.com) and Chief Concierge Echo Zhu (echozhu@peninsula.com), who can arrange for access to private clubs in the area.

In its 105-year history, **The Beijing Hotel** (www.chinabeijinghotel.com.cn) has been a key venue for important political functions (it's also the official hotel of the 2008 Olympics).

Song Rui, director of sales and marketing (business@chinabeijinghotel.com.cn; 8610-6513-7766, ext. 709), will help arrange VIP bookings. He recommends the 1,400-square-foot Emperor Room in Building A. The room exudes a stately elegance while offering a commanding view of the Forbidden City.

On the seventh floor of Building C, Tanjia Restaurant serves food that is fit for a king—or an emperor. According to Rui, the restaurant's dishes are based on recipes served in the Forbidden City during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The Beijing Hotel holds an exclusive patent for Tanjia cuisine, which blends Cantonese-style cooking with Northern Chinese ingredients. Make reservations 24 to 48 hours in advance.

At the **Grand Hyatt Beijing** (www.beijing.grand.hyatt.com), nothing beats relaxing at Club Oasis, where guests can take a dip in China's largest hotel swimming pool. The tropical theme includes underwater music and a "virtual sky" that replicates different weather phenomena.

The innovatively prepared meals at Made in

China are just as distinctive, but it's the classic Peking Duck that can't be missed. Make reservations 24 to 48 hours in advance.

Guest rooms, including the popular Grand Suite, are designed for comfort with relaxing colors, genuine goose-down duvets, crisp linens, rich woods and local works of art.

The more exclusive accommodations of the Grand Club occupy the 15th through 18th floors of the hotel. Insider tip: The best rooms to book on each of these floors are the 08, 09 and 10 rooms that overlook the Forbidden City and face



PENINSULA PALACE Beijing Suite (opposite) marries traditional Chinese architecture and modern luxury.

PENINSULA PALACE Peninsula Suite (right) offers an impressive collection of antiques and a private elevator to the lobby and restaurants.

CHINA WORLD (below) makes sure guests are comfortable from the moment they land.



ADVISOR INSIGHT:

"There is a wide gamut of exclusive and special activities to experience in Beijing," says **Nancy Kim**, managing partner of **Imperial Tours**, which specializes in high-end travel throughout China. "The key issue is deciphering which is appropriate to the particular demands of each high-end traveler, with whom we engage on an individual basis."

The Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven top the must-see list for most travelers, but "supposing that these neatly describe Beijing is akin to pigeonholing New York with a visit to MoMA, the Met and the Statue of Liberty."

For a unique experience, Kim suggests strolling through the contemporary art galleries of the Dashanzi Art District, a growing arts and culture center. 798 Space (www.798space.com) is housed in a former state-owned, Bauhaus-style factory built in the early 1950s.

For relaxation, visitors can indulge in a reflexology foot massage or practice Tai Chi in one of the city's parks. (nancy@imperialtours.net; www.imperialtours.net).

a beautiful courtyard.

The Grand Club team is headed by Sarah Zhang (club.beigh@hyattintl.com), who can accommodate specific requests and arrange personalized service for VIP stays. The chief concierge is Keith Zhang (keith.zhang@hyattintl.com) and the general manager is Christopher Koehler (chris.koehler@hyattintl.com).

Efforts are underway to transform the Hilton Beijing (www.beijing.hilton.com) into a "lifestyle hub" centered in the new commercial and diplomatic center. Rooms have been newly decorated with opulent furnishings and designer details, and those on the Executive Floor feature espresso

ST. REGIS (Statesman Suite pictured top) counts Bill Clinton among its regular guests.

BEIJING will host the Olympic Games in 2008. Shown below is the entrance to the Forbidden City.

machines, photocopy and scanning equipment, wireless Internet, LCD screens in the bathrooms and butler service.

The Standard Suite, Presidential Suite and luxurious Imperial Suite offer a choice of one or two bedrooms.

Contact General Manager Vlad Reyes (vlad.reyes@hilton.com; 8610-5865-5000) for VIP reservations.

Voted Best Hotel in Beijing by *Business Traveller Asia Pacific*, the **China World Hotel** (www.shangri-la.com/beijing/chinaworld/en/) enchants guests with its Chinese brand of hospitality. General Manager Stefan Bollhalder (stefan.bollhalder@shangri-la.com; 8610-6505-0848) will make sure guests are comfortable from the moment they disembark in Beijing.

Taking advantage of the hotel's unique airport butler service, guests will be met at their gate,

guided through immigration and customs and whisked away in the hotel limousine.

A private butler is available at the press of a button in any of the hotel's suites—the most popular being the spacious and modern Executive Suite. The Beijing, China, and two Presidential Suites cannot be booked via GDS; call Bollhalder directly.

The most requested of the hotel's premium accommodations is the 591-square-foot Premier Room. Decorated with modern Asian art, the room has a spacious sitting area and a bathroom with separate tub and shower.

Australian Chef de Cuisine Andrew McKee—who combines a chic, innovative flair and fresh ingredients with an emphasis on seafood specialties—heads up the hotel's award-winning restaurant, Aria. Advance reservations are highly recommended.

Insider tip: Head Concierge Edward Li (edward.li@shangri-la.com; 8610-6505-2266) is a good person to know at the hotel; he can assist with customizing guests' experiences, from making adjustments in the temperature of the pool water to arranging flights to Shanghai for a luxurious dining experience at Jean Georges, overlooking the Bund. ■



ACCESS:

Suggested Dining

The Courtyard, 95 Donghuamen Dajie, Dongcheng District, 8610-6526-8882. Perched beside a moat that encircles the Forbidden City. Offers continental cuisine with Asian touches, comprehensive wine list, lower-level gallery featuring local artists and cigar lounge.

Danieli's, St. Regis Hotel, Jianguo Men Wai Dajie 21, 8610-6460-6688, ext. 2441 or 1440. Voted "Beijing's Finest Italian Restaurant." Offers extensive selection of Italian wines and Italian cuisine. Try the lobster spinozini.

My Humble House, W307, Oriental Plaza, 1/F, West Building, Dongcheng District, 8610-8518-8811. Contemporary Chinese cuisine housed in an impressively chic setting.

RBL, 53 Xipeilou Dong'anmen Dajie, Dongcheng District, 8610-6522-1389. Upscale Japanese restaurant/bar featuring two chefs from Megu in New York City.