

hotel review > The Waldorf=Astoria, New York

Annabelle Hood checked into one of New York's most famous hotels, where a string of kings, queens, diplomats and presidents have stayed. But you don't need to be a celebrity to get star treatment, the Waldorf=Astoria is the business for the business traveller too



Guess where the Waldorf salad originated? From the iconic Waldorf=Astoria no less! Last year, the five-star hotel celebrated the 75th anniversary of its swanky Park Avenue location in Midtown Manhattan.

The original hotel was demolished in 1929 to make way for the Empire State Building, reappearing 15 blocks north in 1931 (making it the largest hotel in the world at the time). The vast building takes up a whole block between Park and Lexington Avenues, and 49th and 50th streets – between Saks Fifth Avenue and the United Nations HQ.

The Art Deco hotel is composed of two parts – the main hotel and the even more exclusive 181-room Waldorf Towers on floors 28 to 42. Fascinating black and white pictures of state occasions hosted at the Waldorf are displayed in cabinets on lower ground floor. Huge historical names have stayed here, from royalty to presidents, even Britney Spears and the Dalai Lama.

Suite success

I had the great privilege of being shown The Royal Suite in the Towers, where Prince Edward and Wallis Simpson resided for ten years when in New York. To this day, photographs of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor adorn the stunning powder blue and gold suite, as if they checked out only yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Presidential Suite has housed every sitting American President since Herbert Hoover in the 1930s, and a multitude of international leaders including General Charles de Gaulle.

This neutral toned Georgian suite is



furnished with furniture bequeathed by various late presidents' offices; John F. Kennedy's (now threadbare) personal rocking chair adorns the suite, as does President Jimmy Carter's eagle desk set and Ronald Reagan's gold oval mirror.

The Cole Porter Suite is where the famous American composer lived for over 25 years, and Frank Sinatra became a permanent Waldorf resident in the 80s.

Waldorf=Astoria has 1,416 spacious rooms (a rarity in NYC), and no two are alike in terms of décor.

Dining in style

If you like your food, the hotel boasts no less than four fantastic restaurants: Peacock Alley offers a fine dining lunch, supper and gastronomic Sunday brunch where diners select from over 180 food stations in the hotel's buzzing lobby.

Hearty steakhouse Bull and Bear (justifiably cited by The New York Times as "one of the world's three greatest") serves the most tender filet mignon steak and delicious Waldorf salad imaginable.

The friendly wine sommelier is a fountain of knowledge. Sushi fans will love the Inagiku restaurant, and Oscar's is a family-friendly brasserie.

A fantastic way of soaking up the hotel's opulence is to have afternoon tea and evening cocktails at the Cocktail Terrace in the glamorous Park Avenue foyer, or head to Sir Harry's bar for a libation or two. The Starbucks in the hotel's lower ground level is also handy.

Having a ball

Planning a conference or a knock-out corporate party? How does 60,000sq.ft and a choice of 38 meeting rooms and banqueting suites grab you? The 15,000 sq.ft Grand Ballroom is the only double-tiered ballroom of its kind in New York. Following a \$15m restoration, the 5,740 sq.ft Starlight Roof Ballroom® on the 18th floor is back to its Art Deco glory of the 30s and 40s. And the lavish 4,224sq.ft Hilton Room is where the dancing scene in 'Scent of a Woman' was filmed.

All in all, the hotel has thought of things the business guest didn't even know they needed.

From knowledgeable and multi-lingual concierges, to a Plus One Fitness Centre and Spa offering treatments like 'The Polished Executive', to a business centre that can even create over-sized

corporate posters for your business presentation, you don't need to be Einstein (who also stayed here incidentally) to realise you are staying in a hotel whose standards of service and list of exemplary 'firsts' have become a worldwide industry benchmark.

WALDORF'S OSCAR WINNER

"Oscar of the Waldorf" (Oscar Tschirky) was the hotel's Maitre d'Hotel. He invented the Waldorf Salad for a society banquet in the 1890s (subsequent Waldorf chefs improved on the original recipe of apples, celery and mayonnaise by adding walnuts).

Oscar also introduced Thousand Island Dressing and Eggs Benedict to the US. As if that wasn't enough, the hotel also helped popularise the American custom of "tipping" good service with a financial reward, as well as the concept of room service.

For your chance to win a two-night stay in New York's legendary Waldorf=Astoria hotel, with free Continental Airlines flights, fill in Dial's reader reply card or log onto www.expotel.com. The competition question is on page 6!