



Spa and the City

Sneak away for an indulgent night in London – even if you live there! There’s no better pick-me-up

1 PASSPORT TO PARIS ST PANCRAS RENAISSANCE, NW1

This 19th-century, Grade I listed architectural gem, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, next to St Pancras station, was handsomely restored three years ago. Book a suite in The Chambers, the historic part that overlooks the station platforms (this also gets you into The Chambers club, which includes a traditional barber shop and concierge service that can fast-track you through Eurostar security). Sip rum punch from small copper cups in the Booking Office bar (once the station’s ticket hall), while listening to live jazz, and treat yourself to afternoon tea in the taxi rank turned Hansom lounge. There’s also a tucked-away spa where the most indulgent treatments combine beauty rituals from around the world (a crème de rassoul wrap and Moroccan massage in Journey to Africa, say) and fine-dining restaurant Gilbert Scott, where Marcus Wareing has overseen the hearty dishes (mushroom cobbler, short rib and kidney pie) on the Victorian-inspired menu.

DON'T MISS Staying at the hotel for a night before a jaunt to Paris – the perfect start to an uber-luxe mini break.

BOOK IT Doubles from £360.
stpancrasrenaissance.co.uk



2 OUT IN THE OPEN

BAMFORD HAYBARN AT THE BERKELEY, SW1

The first time that you float in the open-air rooftop pool of The Berkeley in Knightsbridge, you know this is a pleasure worth repeating. Overlooking leafy Hyde Park, The Berkeley is known for its oh-so-cute Pret-a-Portea (the fashionista’s afternoon tea with handbag cakes and shoe-shaped delicacies), fine-dining by Pierre Koffmann and Marcus Wareing, and cocktails in the Blue Bar. So, it’s not surprising that when it came for a spa makeover, a distinctive brand was sought. Lady Bamford has been selling farm-fresh organic produce at her company, Daylesford Organic, in Gloucestershire for 30 years, and she has branched out into beauty. The Bamford Haybarn at The Berkeley brings a little bit of countryside goodness in. Painted wood paneling in dove grey is the theme, and pretty pots of chamomile, rosemary, lavender and aromatic lemon thyme are dotted around treatment rooms called the Beehive and the Log Cabin and around the pool, where the roof slides across on cooler days. The treatments themselves use the quality British brand Oskia for the facials, and Bamford Body for the massages.

DON'T MISS The Oskia Rejuvenating Facial (£105 for 55 mins) is a workout for the face that will leave you feeling energised and glowing.

BOOK IT Doubles from £330.
the-berkeley.co.uk/hay-barn

3 OH SO SOPHISTICATED

SOFITEL, ST JAMES, SW1

A good-looking London player with a chic dose of French sophistication. Set in a grade II-listed former bank, just off Piccadilly (don't worry, tourists stay glued to Fortnum's), it's all sumptuous dark fabrics, thick carpets and high ceilings. The 186 rooms have splendid views with mahogany furniture, massive beds and sleek black marble bathrooms. The SO spa is a heavenly place – and almost more handsome than the hotel itself with ornate ceilings, Corinthian-style columns and lots of light. The treatment rooms boast duck down duvets and super-polished spa butlers zip around before you're wrapped, slathered and pummeled with delicious Carita and Cinq Mondes potions. Plump for the de-light package – a glorious body scrub and massage followed by a 500-calorie two-course meal in the terrifically elegant Balcon. It's clever stuff: Carpaccio of smoked salmon; grilled sea bream with wild fennel, tomato and sweet pepper cream, strawberry cheesecake... they even managed to fit in a virtuous cucumber cocktail.

DON'T MISS Make sure you go gallery-hopping while you're here. The RA, National Gallery and Cork Street are just around the corner.

BOOK IT Doubles from £240.

sofitelstjames.com



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4 EARTH, WIND AND FIRE

AKASHA, HOTEL CAFÉ ROYAL, W1

No other London hotel can boast a spa that's entirely dedicated to a holistic approach. What Oscar Wilde would have made of it is anyone's guess. The home of high Bohemia, the Café Royal was where Oscar and a parade of London dandies ate, drank and talked hot air. Now it's transformed into a coolly modern 160-bedroom, David Chipperfield-designed hotel, and an altogether calmer, more zen-like atmosphere prevails. In Akasha, the hotel's soothing, subterranean sanctuary beneath pulsating Piccadilly Circus, it's all about harmony, balance and wellbeing and the four elements: water, fire, earth and air. Plunge gratefully (there's an on-street entrance for day spa members) into a world of meditative calm, gentle sounds and uplifting aromas. Treatments are all about journeys, though, if truth be told, yours may not begin in earnest until after you've fought to get your belongings into the tiny lockers. But then your transport into a state of harmonious, mindful repose will begin. Particularly welcome are the secluded day beds around the 60 foot-long streak of a lap pool, and there are also hammams, sauna, Vichy shower and London's only Watsu pool for hydrotherapies and guided meditation.

DON'T MISS All treatments combine Western practices and ancient Eastern traditions, exemplified by the 50-minute acupressure Polarity treatment (£100): reflexology and Shiatsu combined; stillness and calm guaranteed.

BOOK IT Doubles from £450.

hotelcaferoyal.com



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