



Blakes Anouska Hempel style with an air of romance

Downtime

The ultimate staycation

CHECK INTO LUXURY... IN YOUR HOME TOWN

In your London apartment, you have Ralph Lauren bed linen, wi-fi, a DVD player and a well-stocked fridge; but this Friday night you choose not to go home, but check into Blakes hotel, instead – for a long weekend. You crack open a bottle of Ruinart as your partner arrives, knowing you have days ahead to do as you jolly well please.

This idea of staycationing in your own city is something that hotels have been picking up on. “It’s been a trend

at Blakes for many years now,” says the general manager Marco Cilia, “so much so that more than 20 per cent of our business comes from guests who actually live in London.”

It’s a similar story over at the Connaught: “It’s a luxury in these frenetic times just to catch your breath,” says the general manager Nathalie Seiler-Hayez. “Staying in a London hotel feels like an indulgent treat without all the hassle of travel.”

At a time when we treasure our weekend breaks as much as our big annual blow-outs, the city staycation

can help you decompress after a busy week, and give you the chance to see your own city with fresh eyes, visit a new gallery or catch a show. This year, the minibreak got even more mini.

Blakes, for spoiling a new squeeze. Designed by Anouska Hempel and oozing glamour, each room has its own distinct look inspired by far-flung places: Russia, India, Turkey... while the restaurant cunningly blends flavours from East and West. And all this just a stone’s throw from the Fulham Road. *London SW7, rooms from £195 (blakeshotels.com)*

The Connaught, for some me-time. The Connaught’s subtle makeover couples a sense of history and space with contemporary design. That is lovely, but more to the point it has the only Aman spa in the UK, offering serious, two-and-half-hour treatments, so you’re utterly refreshed. *London W1, rooms from £420 (the-connaught.co.uk)*

Claridge’s, for a swanky soirée. London’s Art Deco jewel continues to sparkle. Treat your friends to an evening of champagne and canapés in a penthouse suite to enjoy the sun setting over Mayfair. And when you’re through with your party? Sleep it off

in your spick-and-span bedroom and grab a full English before catching a cab home. *London W1, rooms from £369 (claridges.co.uk)*

The Dorchester, for wining and dining your overseas friends and family. Loved ones coming to stay? Book everyone into this great British institution. Take the weekend off, see a West End show, dine at your favourite restaurants and go home on Sunday night refreshed for the week ahead. Bliss. *London W1, rooms from £318 (thedorchester.com)*

The Lowry, for a blow-out Saturday night... and Sunday lunch. On a waterside piazza near the clubs, bars and restaurants of Manchester, the Lowry, beloved by footballers, won’t fail to raise your spirits. The great glass façade opens into a stress-busting light and airy interior. *The Lowry Hotel, Manchester, rooms from £169 (thelowryhotel.com)*

Hotel Missoni, for a bit of Italy. Innovative design and a remarkable setting in the heart of Edinburgh’s Old Town make the suites a quirky treat, whether you’re entertaining friends, lapping up the decor or enjoying the city views. *Hotel Missoni, Edinburgh, rooms from £300 (hotelmissoni.com)*

Laura Ivill

Claridge’s Move into Mayfair for DVF’s Art Deco update



The Dorchester Check into Park Lane for the night



The Lowry Enjoy the northern lights over Manchester



Getting there | The way we fly

REPORT Catherine Boyle



If flying has lost much of its allure in the era of budget travel and metal detectors, you can’t blame the big airlines for trying to bring back glamour. Witness BA’s new first class, with cool, slightly sci-fi chic cabins offering

more privacy, along with some old-school English luxury. Afternoon tea, anyone?

As Hamish McVey, head of brands at British Airways, sees it: “People still have very high expectations, whether in first or

in hold.” But sometimes those expectations are more about convenience than luxury. “You’d be surprised how many budget-airline flights we book,” says Mark Izatt of the concierge service operated by luxe phone

company Vertu, identifying a surprising degree of pragmatism among his well-heeled clients. “If it’s a short flight then it’s all about convenience, and often that can be delivered by a low-cost carrier,” even if, when customers land, “they check into a five-star hotel”.

They might also prefer to fly with a budget airline for a short break with friends who don’t have the same spending power. But they’ll treat themselves to first class with their partner and think nothing of using a helicopter and private jet to entertain important clients. What’s not to like about a jaunt to Cannes, say, without queuing up shoeless in what’s laughably called fast track? And what’s better for schmoozing than drinking bubbly in a cosy little cabin, says David McRobert, managing director of PremiAir, the private aviation company.

Meanwhile, Victor, a new private-jet-sharing service, could blur those distinctions still further by reducing the cost of private aviation to airports that have been abandoned by airlines. Clive Jackson, chief executive of Victor, got the idea after BMI stopped flying to the airport near his second home in Majorca. His idea is both clever and simple: a website of subscribers (flyvictor.com has about 500) who find other people who would like to join them when they charter. This can make their flight cost as little as £625, one way.

“Flying easyJet without booking far in advance can cost close to £500, so the economics of a private jet start to make more sense,” explains Jackson. “There are only so many people who can fly private all the time, so we hope that this will bring more consumers in.”

Spas now

Clinical excellence

DITCH THE DIPPINESS, WE WANT RESULTS

One of the few welcome side effects of the economic downturn is that the spa industry has had to raise its game. Listless, half-trained halfwits spouting half-baked nonsense about auras just won't wash with a public increasingly short on time, money and patience: pampering just got Darwinian.

The result is a return to rigour: results-driven treatments administered by seasoned professionals in high-end surroundings. Luxury still matters, but we're not half as impressed as we used to be by a few fluffy towels and some free fruit. We want value for money, and an almost clinical focus, without the lotus blossom and ambient music. No one wants to shell out £90-plus just to have someone rub a bit of oil on their back. They want a proper massage; and practitioners are chosen for their expertise, not their looks (one of the best massages I ever had was from a tiny, wizened woman). Think Chewton Glen or Cowley Manor in the UK, the divine Rosa Alpina in Italy or the Kempinski in Turkey. Dive in: it's a buyer's market.

Sarah Vine