

luxury hotel special

Image as a 'Global City' is well-earned

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A few years back an American friend on his maiden trip to Japan remarked, "When I visit Europe, I feel as though I've gone back in time. In Tokyo I feel like I've arrived in the future."

He made the remark while marveling at the trains arriving like clockwork every minute or two at Tokyo Station. Indeed, the 130 railway lines in greater Tokyo transport 14 billion passengers annually, more than any city anywhere.

Mass transit is one reason why Tokyo qualifies as a "Global City," a term coined by sociologist Saskia Sassen in her classic book of the same name. Further reasons Tokyo displays the escutcheon of globalization include its vigorous cultural scene, concentration of sports teams and facilities, stock exchange, international corporate headquarters (seven

in Forbes' top 100), and ethnic cultures and communities.

While the expat enclaves in Minato Ward were noted by Sassen as far back as the '80s, since then an Indian community has sprung up in Nishi-Kasai, and a Chinatown is coalescing in Ikebukuro.

And it can now lay claim to the title of gastronomic capital of the world after Michelin, the French restaurant guidebook, gave 191 stars to its restaurants, compared with 97 and 54 for New York and Paris eateries.

While my friend was transported by the modern, the walker in the city comes across old shrines and temples, or signs engraved with explanations of historical events or structures in Edo, the seat of the Tokugawa military government, ipso facto, the center of power, with the pleasantries of daimyos and a mercantile class patronizing kabuki, puppet theater and

woodblock artists. The signs memorialize victims of war, fire or quake — or wrecking ball, for the Janus-faced city mostly looks to the future, with even the venerable Kabuki-za scheduled for demolition.

The city comprises quarters like stanzas in a "renga," each linked yet different, such that the city defies facile characterization. Shinjuku shares with Manhattan a forest of high rises, Harajuku's Omotesando compares with the Champs-Elysees, the shitamachi resembles the East End of London, Shibuya is perhaps like no where else.

Counterintuitively, the city's luxury hotels embody Tokyo's salient characteristics. They serve as high-tech oases for road warriors. They blend Japanese tradition and high tech. They mesh with their locales. Here we look at the best of Tokyo's upscale hostelry.

Hong Kong cognoscenti will recognize the pair of white-gray marble lions at the entrance of The Peninsula Tokyo, in Marunouchi, across the moat from the Imperial Gardens. They descend from a pair of leonine carvings outside The Peninsula Hong Kong, the flagship of The Peninsula Hotel Group.

Other Peninsula icons in evidence at the Tokyo hotel are the page girls and boys in white uniforms with pillbox hats, the helipad and the green Rolls Royce Phantoms, the last two reflecting Chairman Sir Michael Kadoorie's interest in aviation and classic cars.

The Peninsula Tokyo honors still another tradition — incorporation of local culture. Designer Yukio Hashimoto's hand is felt nearly everywhere, in the pine needle pattern in the carpet and lattice walls of the lobby; the lacquer desktops, horse chestnut sliding doors, and cedar ceilings in guest rooms; and in the artwork, more than 90 percent of the 1,000 pieces by local artists. The building itself, tall and triangular, resembles a glowing Japanese lantern at night.

The Peninsula Tokyo blends Japanese design with high-tech. The Peninsula Hotel groups' Hong Kong-based Electronic Services Department develops and tests in-room technology. Its 20 engineers have fashioned an array of user-friendly gadgets including a fingernail dryer, phone displaying both Japan time and the time in the guest's country, and a night light button for switching on a softly lit path to the bathroom.

Also iconic is The Peninsula Classic Afternoon Tea served at tables in the intimate lobby from 2:30 to 5 p.m. The three tiers of scones, finger sandwiches, chocolates and pastries, and the selection of teas are the same as the original Peninsula's. On weekends



Dining in style: The Peninsula Boutique & Cafe, with direct access to Hibiya Station, is emblematic of the hotel's motto of "accessible luxury."

the queue winds up the spiral staircase off the corridor to the lobby. The price of this traditional British repast served in posh surroundings is surprisingly low at ¥3,500.

This is in keeping with The Peninsula's motto of "accessible luxury." A further example is The Peninsula Boutique & Cafe. Characterized by lavish woodwork and seats opening onto a marble corridor, this chic, cozy cafe serves a continental breakfast from 7:30 a.m. and dishes a la carte from 11 a.m. until last order at 7:30 p.m. The all-day menu includes a smoked salmon and cream cheese on whole wheat sandwich, a mozzarella, tomato, eggplant and basil tartine, and a Mediterranean chicken wrap, all ¥1,600; old-fashioned meat pie, ¥1,500; and pasta of the day, ¥1,500.

Located on basement level

one with direct access to Hibiya Station, the cafe is convenient for straphangers who want to have a quick bite or to take out, say, a Focaccia or bagel sandwich.

Adjacent to the cafe is a boutique offering Peninsula Chocolatier chocolates and other gift items.

Up on the second floor, Hei Fung Terrace serves authentic Cantonese cuisine, reflecting the hotel's Hong Kong origins. The interior, however, has a Suzhou gardens setting, a nod to the nearby Imperial Gardens and Hibiya Park. The use of light and shade suggests garden ponds. Two of the three private rooms look onto the Imperial Gardens. Couples can cotton together in niches in the wall. Six diners can sit at the kitchen's stainless-steel chef's table with a view of the fish tank through one window



Prime location: The Peninsula Tokyo, which stands in front of Hibiya Park, has convenient access to the Marunouchi business district.

and of the chefs in action through another.

Poultry, seafood and pork dishes on the a la carte menu are generally in the ¥3,000 to ¥4,000 range.

While Hei Fung Terrace harkens back to medieval China, Peter, on the 24th floor, offers a modern interior on the theme of a drama in which you have a starring role. You enter the restaurant through a steel-structure tunnel and emerge on a catwalk to a stage, while behind you an interactive video wall displays images of Hong Kong. Below are avant-

garde tables arranged in whorlish patterns with a view of the Imperial Gardens during the day and of the neon-scape beyond their black expanse at night.

The three-course lunch autumn menu is ¥4,800 and the chef's recommendation one-plate dinner is ¥4,500, with main courses ranging from ¥2,500 to ¥3,700.

Marveling at the cityscape while savoring Peter's international cuisine, you'll agree that luxury is indeed accessible at The Peninsula Tokyo. (B.S.)



Hong Kong style: Page boys in white uniforms and Rolls Royce Phantoms welcome customers at The Peninsula Tokyo.

Grand Hyatt takes full advantage of prime Roppongi Hills location

Roppongi has long attracted the in-crowd, fashionistas, the jet set. The district took on a cultural hue with the completion of Roppongi Hills, a massive complex of shops, restaurants, theaters, and high rises — a self-contained city completed in 2003 by developer Minoru Mori.

The Grand Hyatt Tokyo complements Roppongi Hills by providing international visitors with luxury accommodations, class restaurants and other facilities. Indeed, on weekdays international guests make up 60 to 70 percent of its guests. They are served by a hotel staff speaking a total of 16 languages.

Synergies with Roppongi Hills abound. Corporate guests pow-wow with local branch staff or conduct business with clients in offices in Mori Towers. The hotel provides facilities for events related to movie premieres at the Toho Theaters. Leisure hotel guests take in contemporary art in the Mori Art Museum or savor the panorama from Tokyo City View, both in Mori Tower.

Located at a crossroads of the world, the Grand Hyatt To-

kyo felt no need to go native. Still, the hotel has incorporated elements of Japanese design and culinary culture.

For example, the Japanese bathing experience has been replicated in hotel rooms through installation of a deep soaking tub that in "ofuro" fashion allows for overflow of water into the showering area in a bathroom taking up as much as a quarter of the room.

The Shinto shrine is, of course, the epitome of Japanese style, with its simple interior of plain cypress walls. But most brides prefer to wear a wedding dress for nuptials held in the Grand Chapel.

Takashi Sugimoto designed both shrine and chapel. The latter features cedar walls, chestnut benches, and a 16-meter-high ceiling with skylight.

Sugimoto also designed the sixth-floor Shunbou, serving Japanese cuisine in "kaiseki" (course) and "kappo" (a la carte) styles at cherry-wood tables with views of a central glass-enclosed garden. Aji-ishi granite from Kagawa Prefecture fringes the open kitchen.

On the same floor is Roku



Trendy: The Grand Hyatt Tokyo in the Roppongi Hills complex provides international visitors with luxury accommodations, first-class restaurants and other facilities.



DINING WITH A VIEW

Located on the 24th floor of The Peninsula Tokyo, Peter offers internationally inspired cuisine set in a modern and contemporary interior with breathtaking 360-degree views of Tokyo and the famed Imperial Palace Gardens. Chef de Cuisine Patrice Martineau, formerly of The Savoy in London and Daniel in New York, emphasizes fresh ingredients, simple preparation and healthy eating. A delectable three-course meal is ¥4,800 for lunch and ¥8,500 for dinner, including tax and service charge. For more information or reservations, please contact Peter at (03) 6270 2763 or by email at peterptk@peninsula.com.

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(Publicity)

luxury hotel special

Four Seasons Chinzan-so mixes business, culture

With massive projects completed or under way in Roppongi, Shiodome and Marunouchi, Four Seasons Hotel at Chinzan-so, in Bunkyo Ward, northeast of Tokyo Station, is somewhat apart from trendy new business centers. Le Corbusier, the architect and urban planner, advocated proximity of residence and workplace, but their separation, too, can have merit, putting a

little distance between you and garish city lights, letting you unwind. That is especially true if you are staying at the Four Seasons situated in tranquil Chinzan-so, a historic garden with origins in the late 19th century.

Four Seasons at Chinzan-so capitalizes on its garden location. Almost all of the hotel's conference rooms are situated to receive from the garden

natural light, regarded as almost a must for meetings nowadays. Lobby Lounge Le Jardin uses the garden as a "shakkei," borrowed landscape, which distinguishes brunch there from elsewhere in the city. Noted lighting designer Reiko Chikada was employed to illuminate the garden's sculptures and 1,000-year-old pagoda, which has transformed the garden into an evening must-see location.

Four Seasons at Chinzan-so enables corporate guests with no time to visit Kyoto the chance to experience real Japanese culture and also do business. An onsen offering healing mineral water brought weekly from Ito on the Izu Peninsula enhances the Japan experi-

Meditative viewing: The Chinzan-so garden can be appreciated through the windows of the Lobby Lounge Le Jardin. The garden view adds great charm to many of the hotel's rooms and restaurants.



ence. In fact, guests are drawn not only by the Four Seasons brand but by the hotel decor, restaurants and overall level of attention to guests needs.

Not that Four Seasons at Chinzan-so is purely Japanese in decor. Because it was the first five-star international hotel in Tokyo, interior designer Frank Nicholson gave the hotel an elegant European feel, evident in the moldings of oak, mahogany and maple used for guest rooms. He designed most of the furniture and fixtures himself. He imported from Italy the green and white marble used in "Yu — The Spa" at Four Seasons.

The spa was chosen by Elemis, a globally renowned British spa and skin-care brand, for the Japanese launch of both its products and its advanced anti-aging facials. Even after the exclusive contract with Elemis expires at the end of November, Yu will remain the brand's flagship location in Tokyo.

The Four Seasons' service

was surely one reason the property was chosen to launch Elemis. Four Seasons' staff go the extra mile to give guests an unanticipated experience. Because guests expect the best, to exceed their expectations is the goal for all the team, from the front of the house to the heart of the house. Staff look for those moments when they can wow guests.

Providing good service is a collaborative effort of all Four Seasons hotels. While strict adherence to privacy policies does not allow for passing of guests' information from one Four Seasons to another, very regular guests are invited to participate in a global program that allows all hotels to anticipate and prepare for guests' preferences.

Another example of collaboration is a current plan in which couples who tie the knot at Four Seasons Chinzan-so enjoy special preference during a honeymoon at the recently opened Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora, in French Pol-

ynesia.

The staff's efforts to provide superior service were recognized by the 2009 Zagat Survey, which rated service at Four Seasons Chinzan-so's Italian restaurant the best in Tokyo. The restaurants are also reputed for their cuisine. Il Teatro, whose chef hails from Italy, is regarded as one of the city's finest Italian dining rooms. The hotel's restaurants ban smoking, a prohibition as welcome as rare in Tokyo, except Le Marquis bar which caters to those wishing to savor a fine Cuban cigar.

Outside the hotel the pagoda takes on reddish hues, its image reflected in the mirror pond. Crickets chirp above a cascade of water in shadows. A waterwheel slowly turns. In June visitors will watch fireflies from vermilion Benkei Bridge. And at the end of this month they will savor scarlet and yellow leaves — prime time for a meal at one of the hotel's restaurants with a garden view. (B.S.)



Historic: The well-lit 1,000-year-old pagoda in the Chinzan-so garden is reflected in the mirror pond. (B.S.)

Grand Hyatt — Roppongi Hills jewel Conrad Tokyo close to everywhere in capital

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Roku, a sushi restaurant where Sugimoto used columns of Aji-ishi, illuminated such that their surfaces partially lie in shadow. This chic restaurant is well stocked with boutique sakes, wine and champagne.

In contrast, The Oak Door, elsewhere on the floor, is a spacious steakhouse offering a variety of cuts, including Australian rib eye and Kobe, Kagoshima, and Hokkaido sirloins prepared in oak-burning ovens. Mammoth overhead doors can be slid upward to merge restaurant and terrace.

In the fourth-floor Keyakizaka teppanyaki restaurant, diners seated at a walnut counter under Edison lights choose from a nosegay of seasonal meats, seafood, poultry and vegetables arranged on a counter along the iron griddle.

This "teppan market" experience was awarded a star in the Michelin Guide Tokyo.

What about prices at a hotel in the heart of Roppongi? Bargains are found.

The French Brasserie & Bar on the second floor offers "The French Grand Buffet," a smorgasbord of such brasserie dishes as beef terrine, fish escabeche, marinated herring and foie gras. The cheese selection reads like a lesson in French toponyms: Sainte Maure de Touraine and comte, Pont l'Eveque and Camembert. Fruits rise in three tiers at the dessert station. Most evenings a chansonnier performs. The cost of the buffet? ¥8,600 (¥4,300 for children).

Further bargains are the Christmas packages (Dec. 19 to 25) for couples, the "Simple Christmas Stay," from ¥49,896 and including a night

in a Grand Room, a bottle of Louis Roederer champagne served in one of six restaurants, an Italian Christmas cake, and waiver of the cover charge (¥2,100 per person) at Maduro, the main bar; and "Christmas Feast in Room," from ¥86,856 and including all of the above plus a Christmas room service menu. Prices include consumption tax and service charge.

On Dec. 26, the Grand Hyatt offers Dine & Soul, dinner at a hotel restaurant and a performance by "The Three Degrees," of "When Will I See You Again" fame, in the Grand Ballroom (¥35,000). This is followed by the disco event "Club Chic 2008 winter," also in the Grand Ballroom (¥10,000 for an advance ticket). The sight of a thousand gyrating bodies is worth the price of admission alone. (B.S.)

Location is destiny. Shiodome was proven the perfect site when Conrad Tokyo was selected Best New Business Hotel in Asia-Pacific in 2006 by Business Traveller magazine.

Conrad Tokyo is located in a business subcenter and accessible from Haneda airport in 30 minutes and Narita in 80 minutes. It is convenient to sights. The tony shopping district of Ginza is 10 minutes by foot. Tsukiji Fish Market, the world's biggest, is a 15-minute walk, made by many Conrad guests at 4:30 a.m. so they'll be in time to watch the unloading of tons of tuna and the frenetic bidding. Asakusa, the soul of plebeian Tokyo, is a 35-minute trip up the Sumida by water bus.

Conrad guests can board the water bus in Hamarikyu Garden, the former grounds of a Tokugawa family villa, with a teahouse serving "matcha" on an island in the center of a pond.

The view of Tokyo Bay and the 250,165-sq.-meter garden is the pride of the hotel and has been reflected in its design.

The design is Japanese contemporary, traditional Japanese motifs in modern materials. The modern design is announced by Nobuyuki Tanaka's "Purification 1," an abstract petal and center of a flower, in red lacquer on wood, at the hotel entrance, and in the bamboo-design lattice of the lighting in the elevator whisking you to the lobby on the 28th floor.

Here become apparent other elements of the hotel design: the high ceilings (8 meters), and the spare decoration, creating a minimalism that relaxes and throws into relief through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the TwentyEight Bar and Lounge and the panorama of Hamarikyu Gar-

den and Tokyo Bay. TwentyEight's afternoon tea from 2:30 to 5 p.m. is popular with housewives. Evenings bossa nova with vocals counterpoints conversation over drinks. The band plays four sets from 8 p.m. to midnight. The night view of Rainbow Bridge and Odaiba alone merits the ¥1,800 cover.

The corridor, softly illuminated by lamps with large flat covers creating a shoji effect, leads to the hotel's restaurants.

Kazahana, designed as a modern take on a "kura," features the white walls of the Japanese earthen storehouse. The restaurant has a sushi counter; a teppanyaki grill with a view of Rainbow Bridge; and tables and couple's seats, against the window with a bay view, for "kaiseki," Japanese haute cuisine.

Across the corridor are Cerise by Gordon Ramsay and Gordon Ramsay at Conrad Tokyo. The British celebrity chef and restaurateur is consultant for both brasserie and restaurant. Cerise's English and continental breakfasts, a buffet style with 15 different kinds of bread, are popular with both guests and visitors.

The restaurant offers modern French cuisine including tortellini of lobster with tomato chutney, roasted pigeon with foie gras, and toasted fillet of beef with meat and potato pie, at either dining tables or Gordon Ramsay's signature chef's table, of bronze inlaid with mother of pearl, close to the kitchen for bantering with the chefs.

The corridor narrows to a walkway of glass and granite under huge blue lanterns. Welcome to China Blue. Hong Kong-born chef Albert Tse serves French-style individual servings of original modern Chinese dishes. In the far cor-



First-class restaurants: Through the high-ceiling lobby, the softly illuminated corridor leads to the hotel's premier restaurants, such as British celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay's Gordon Ramsay at Conrad Tokyo (below left) and China Blue, which both earned a star in the Michelin Guide Tokyo 2009.



ner rises a tower of 3,500 wine bottles. Against the back wall are couple's seats with an ocean view.

Guest rooms, on the 30th to 37th floors, feature round tables for dining or working and, in keeping with the minimalist aesthetic, cabinets with vertical sliding doors for mini bar and coffee maker, fridge and

DVD player. The design theme of Japanese contemporary is evident in the cherry blossom figure in the carpet and in the "sumi-e" style cherry blossom painting in the bed head, where perches on a branch a fanciful "Shiodome plover," recalling Hamarikyu, Tokyo's last tidal garden. A glass partition between

bathroom and guest room enhances the feeling of spaciousness. The bathroom, with dual white marble basins, can be used by two people.

For a room with a garden and bay view guests pay a ¥7,000 premium, a bargain for the vista of the water-girt lush green mandala beneath their window. (B.S.)



Happy holidays: Christmas accommodation packages, including a night in a Grand Room, a bottle of champagne and other benefits are now available.

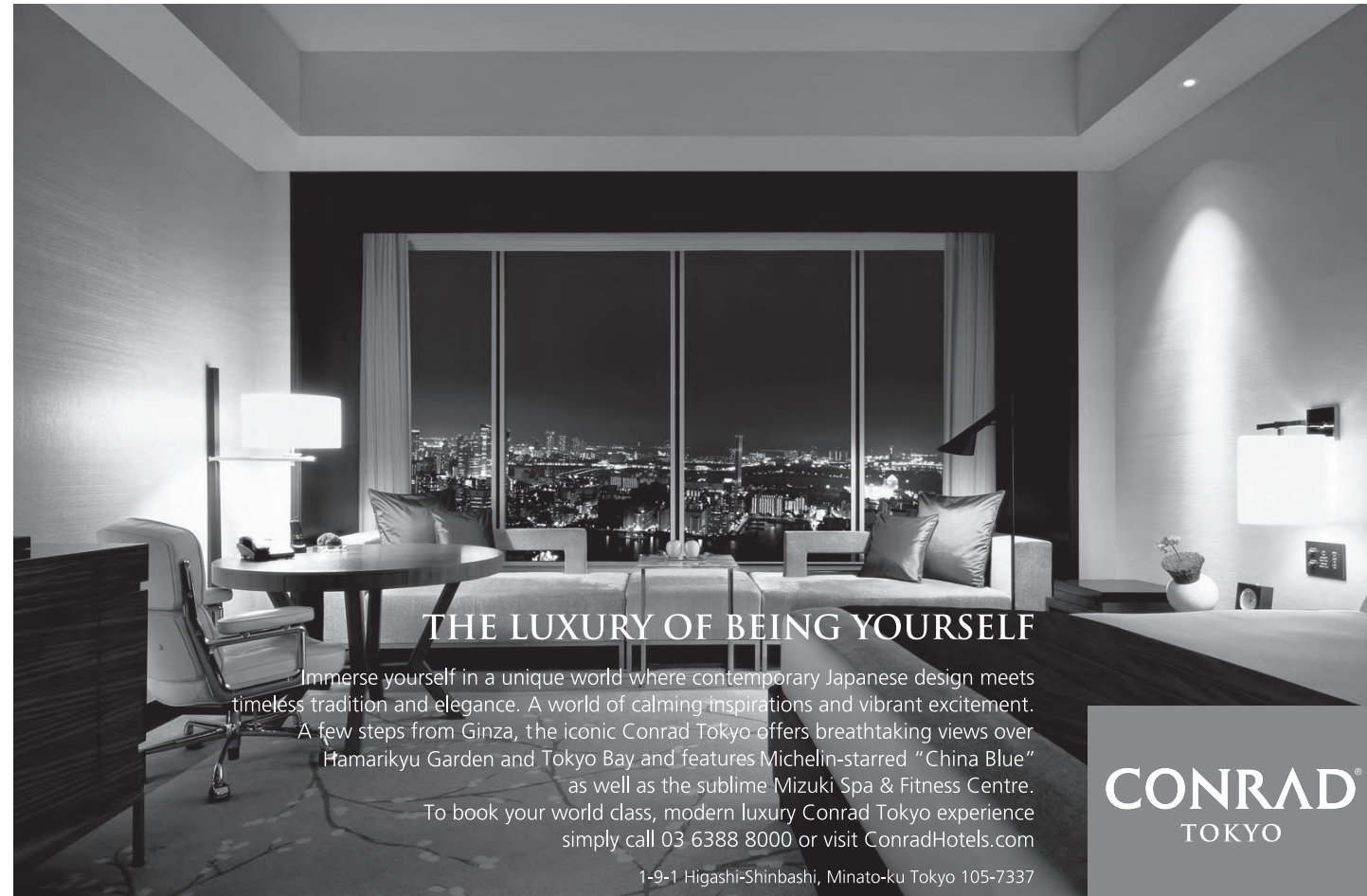


FOUR SEASONS HOTEL
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