

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

CHECK IN

TIGHT FIT, PRIME LOCALE

LONDON — Some people like to stay in fancy hotels on vacation. Others would rather stay in modest accommodations and spend their money elsewhere. Travelers who, like me, fall into the latter category, should check out the Z Hotels in London. There are three, all in prime locations: Piccadilly, Soho, and Victoria. But there is a catch to their economy: The rooms are small. Compact. There is no dresser or closet, just a section of the wall adorned with two rows of hangers on pegs to hang up to five articles of clothing — perfect if you’re staying for two or three nights (or longer if you’re an exceptionally light packer). Despite our room’s modest size, my son and I enjoyed a recent three-night stay at the Z Piccadilly. The staff was friendly and helpful, and they seemed to truly enjoy talking with guests who gather in the hotel’s modest lobby — which doubles as a cafe — during the nightly free wine and cheese reception. Located on Orange Street, the 112-room converted office building (which has floors below, at, and above ground level) is in the heart of the West End just steps from many popular attractions including Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus. Our room had all the basic necessities, including high-end toiletries, and great water pressure in the shower, a biggie for me. The double-size bed featured plush bedding and was very comfortable, but it was fitted into a space where walls cradled three out of the four sides, which meant the person sleeping on the inside had to do some tricky maneuvering to climb over the other person and out of the bed. All rooms at the Z Piccadilly have large flat-screen TVs at the foot of the bed and a nightstand between the bed and the glass wall that separates the snug bathroom from the rest of the living space. This meant that either my 6-foot-4-inch son or I had to stay on the bed if the other was trying to move around. But lucky for us, other than to sleep, we were hardly in the room at all, since there was so much to see and do right outside the hotel’s front door. It’s a great concept, and certainly works for those more interested in location than legroom. In addition to the Z Hotels in London are ones in Liverpool and Glasgow. The rooms in London start at about \$100. For more information, visit www.thezhotels.com

JULIET PENNINGTON



STAR BUZZ ON SOUTH BANK

Mondrian complements its surroundings with bold design, cool accouterments, hip patrons

LONDON — It’s difficult to believe that the Mondrian London, a hotel full of bold design flourishes courtesy of interiors ace Tom Dixon, languished as a drab 1970s office building for decades. It sat awkwardly as London’s South Bank blossomed around it. No longer. Think of the Mondrian as the dowdy office assistant who received a sexy makeover and is now the center of watercooler buzz. The Mondrian opened in late September after a multimillion-dollar renovation and is in an enviable location: On the doorstep of Tate Modern, Borough Market, and the National Theatre. Nearly half of the 359 rooms and suites have river views. Its central location, between the OXO Tower and Blackfriars Bridge, makes walking to at-

tractions fairly easy. But for the moment, the hotel itself is the star of the neighborhood, along with its restaurants and a craft cocktail bar. There are nautical and Art Deco touches, but these themes are subtle, or presented in unexpected ways. It starts in the lobby with a massive handcrafted copper hull, which curves from the Lazarides Edition gallery through reception and around to riverbank views. The Dandelyan bar follows the updated art deco theme, but crowds don’t converge here for the decor. The cocktail menu is designed by Ryan Chetiyawardana (better known as Mr. Lyan), London’s bartender of the moment. It’s worthy of the hype, and the \$18-a-drink price tag. I quickly sucked down the Crystal Lyan (sparkling Grey Goose vodka, crystal peach nectar, lime-flower blossom, and vanilla).

Upstairs, the Rumpus Room (pictured above) offers beautiful views of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Even on a dreary Wednesday night, the rooftop bar was buzzing with an impossibly good-looking young crowd. On rare sunny and warm London days, that attractive crowd can enjoy their cocktails on the bar’s terrace. Guest rooms feel downright austere in comparison to the rest of the Mondrian’s bold design. But a hotel room should serve as a retreat from the constant flutter of the city, and the Mondrian’s rooms offer just that in soothing grays with pops of pink.

MONDRIAN LONDON 20 Upper Ground, London SE1 9PD, 011-800-4969-1770, www.mondrianlondon.com

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

HERE

A HAPPY NEW HAMPSHIRE NEW YEAR’S EVENT FOR KIDS Who wants to ring in the New Year with tired, cranky kids in tow? Head to the Children’s Museum of New Hampshire in Dover on Dec. 31, and your family can enjoy a daylight celebration — complete with ball drops and confetti — and still be home in time for bed. The museum’s Family New Year’s Eve Celebration runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and includes three count-downs to midnight, at 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 2 p.m., when a glittery ball “drops” 30 feet as visitors rev up their noisemakers and toast bubbly ginger ale in plastic champagne glasses. Make your own sparkly party hats there, and write your wishes for the coming year on mini flying blimps that get launched during each count-down. Then explore the museum’s interesting exhibits, including the Dinosaur Dig and Music Matrix. Admission: \$9 anyone 2 and older; \$8 seniors; under 2 free. 603-742-2002, www.childrens-museum.org

NEW YEAR’S SOIREE FEELS LIKE FRENCH ON NANTUCKET Enjoy a French-themed New Year’s celebration at The Nantucket Hotel and Resort with a prix fixe dinner at Breeze restaurant and a gala ball featuring the Perri Rossi Orchestra, hors d’oeuvres, a dessert buffet, late-night nibbles, and a champagne toast. Attend the Moulin Rouge event whether or not you stay at the hotel. A complimentary Kids’ New Year’s Eve Party for children 4 to 13 will run from 9 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. in the Kids Club for overnight guests. The hotel sits in a quiet residential neighborhood just two blocks from Children’s Beach and the Nantucket Whaling Museum. Rooms run \$215 per night Dec. 26-30,



\$325 per night on Dec. 31, double occupancy; New Year’s Eve special includes continental breakfast on New Year’s Day. Dinner \$75 per person; New Year’s gala, \$120. 866-807-6011, www.thenantuckethotel.com

THERE

TOUR LESSER-KNOWN SPOTS IN A POPULAR LONDON DISTRICT Discover some of the best-kept secrets about the St. James’s area of London during a new walking tour run by the executive concierge at The Stafford London, Frank Laino. The three-hour Secrets of St. James’s tour begins at St. James’s Place, where Laino (pictured above) takes up to 14 hotel guests into the Spencer House to see the ground floor of the city’s only intact private palace. Then wander over to Green Park, so called because it’s the only London park without flower beds, Queen’s Walk, and Buckingham Pal-



MITCHELL WINTON

ace. Also see Clarence House, home to Charles, Prince of Wales; the oldest hat shop in the world, located on St. James’s Street; The London Library, which houses more than 1 million volumes; and the spectacular Red Lion Victorian pub. The tour ends in the courtyard of The Stafford London, where the former stables — built in 1742 — now serve as the hotel’s rooms and suites. \$55. 011-44-20-7493-0111, www.thestaffordlondon.com

BRITISH COLUMBIA’S BIGGEST RESORT GETS BETTER Gain quicker access to Whistler Blackcomb’s expansive terrain in the resort’s new eight-passenger gondola cabins, which now whisk more than 2,100 passengers an hour from Whistler Village to Roundhouse Lodge at 6,000 feet. The old cabins on the Whistler Village Gondola started transporting guests up the mountain in 1988, and had small ledges or “half seats” for passengers to lean against on the 25-



minute ride. The swanky new “diamond-level” cabins, built in France, have comfortable bench seats so passengers can actually sit down, and racks on the outside for skis and snowboards. Don’t ski? Take the Whistler Village Gondola up to Roundhouse Lodge and then go for a scenic ride over to Blackcomb Mountain on the Peak 2 Peak gondola, which has the longest unsupported span in the world (1.88 miles) and travels 1,427 feet above the valley floor. Tickets, giving access to all trails and gondolas: \$105.50 adults; \$96.60 online or at a 7-Eleven store. 888-403-4727, www.whistlerblackcomb.com

EVERYWHERE

CAPTURE BIG-TIME ACTION WITH A TINY CAMERA Polaroid has created an adorable, ice cube-sized video camera that can attach to your climbing, ski, or bicycle

helmet, your handlebars, your body, your dog, appliances, and other metal objects for capturing life on the go. The fun and colorful Polaroid Cube weighs less than 2 ounces and comes in red, blue, and black. It sticks to objects via the strong magnet on the bottom, or buy one of the many mounts for attaching it to helmets, bikes, surfboards, and more. Even in its waterproof housing (sold separately), the camera remains low profile. The wide-angle Cube offers 124 degrees of coverage, and can handle a microSD card up to 32GB. It takes high-def video at 1080 or 720 pixels, and 6-megapixel still shots. \$99 camera; \$17.99-\$39.99 per accessory. 800-226-6534, www.polaroidcube.com

EVERY TRAVELER NEEDS AN AMBITIOUS WINGMAN Timbuk2’s versatile Wingman Carry-On Travel Bag has a split personality: Use the shoulder strap and it acts like a large briefcase or messenger bag, or pull out the tucked-away padded shoulder straps and it transforms into a comfortable backpack. The sleek and stylish overnight bag (pictured above left) is slim enough to fit into the overhead compartment of even the smallest puddle-jumping plane. It also has four handles so you can quickly grab the bag even if the plane’s contents shifted during the flight. Throw a spare pair of shoes or your toiletries into an expandable compartment that’s accessible from the outside, and keep your clothes and other items in place using the internal compression straps. You can stow your wallet and travel documents in a front zippered pocket, and stash work papers, a magazine, and your Kindle or tablet in two other outer pockets. \$149 (currently \$104 online). 800-865-2513, www.timbuk2.com

KARI BODNARCHUK