

INDULGE LIVING



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FEEL LIKE ROYALTY AT LONDON'S RECENTLY RENOVATED DUKES HOTEL

DUKES HOTEL PHOTO

Natural light in the Conservatory creates a comfortable atmosphere for visitors to the Dukes, one of London's most esteemed hotels.

By ANNE Z. COOKE
Special to The Star

LONDON | You won't see the queen checking in at the five-star Dukes Hotel on St. James's Place despite the neighborhood's rarefied reputation. That's because Her Majesty's in-town digs (Buckingham Palace) are also in St. James's, not five minutes from this exclusive boutique hideaway.

But if you were one of the Dukes' regulars and you took your daily walkabout through St. James's by-ways, you might glimpse the royal car heading for one of the area's legendary landmarks, royal residences that prove the adage about location, location, location. The queen has it — and so does the Dukes.

Not only is this Edwardian hotel tucked away among freshly planted flower boxes in a private courtyard, but it's also minutes from London's finest shops. You're steps from Piccadilly, Jermyn and Duke of York streets, the perfect place to find those bespoke, hand-stitched calfskin loafers for only \$1,100 and silk handbags starting at \$2,350. Stroll northeast toward noisy, neon-lit Piccadilly Circus, or walk 10 minutes the other way, down Queens Walk and the Mall to Buckingham Palace's gates.

Cross Piccadilly for a look at the Burlington Arcade's tiny, one-of-a-kind shops. Built by the Duke of Cavendish in 1819, the covered structure was his way of preventing passers-by from tossing garbage into his garden. When Big Ben chimes 4 p.m., stop for high tea in the Palm Court at the Ritz Hotel (reservations required) on the corner of Piccadilly. You won't find a better brew, served with scones, old-fashioned clotted cream and sandwiches.

At the end of the day, the Dukes is an insider's London home. Seclusion reigns in the courtyard, where the only traffic comes from limos and taxis.

A recent interior renovation hasn't diminished the Dukes' Old World elegance, but it has introduced a more contemporary look. The One Aldwych design-

ers wisely eschewed the trendy but fated-to-be-dated minimalism and instead chose colors that highlight the Dukes' fine collection of portraits, drawings and antique furniture — silver, putty, charcoal, pale suede, champagne and moss greens.

Gone are the country florals that dominated sofa pillows, bedspreads and upholstered armchairs. The newly styled beds gleam with white linens, and wing chairs sport figurative prints. The well-used sofas in the famous Dukes Bar, with its marble fireplace and mahogany bar top, now sport velvet upholstery. Even the wine cellar, always stocked, has expanded its list.

The only strident note is found in the dining room, where the chairs leap up to affront; they've been upholstered in an awful neon red. But order the mouthwatering baked salmon with dill or the rare roast beef with the puffy Yorkshire pudding and you'll forgive them.

While you're at the Dukes, inspect your neighbors. First among equals is St. James's Palace, built by Henry VIII in the late 1530s and, like Buckingham Palace, still guarded by the red-uniformed Queen's Life Guard. The palace was one of Queen Elizabeth I's residences and is still used for official functions. Also open for guided tours is Spencer House, built for the first Earl of Spencer, Princess Diana's ancestor, in 1766. Lancaster House, where Chopin played a private recital for Queen Victoria, was built for the Duke of York in 1825. And Clarence House, built for King William IV (Queen Victoria's immediate predecessor), was the official residence of Her Majesty's mother, the late Queen Mother.

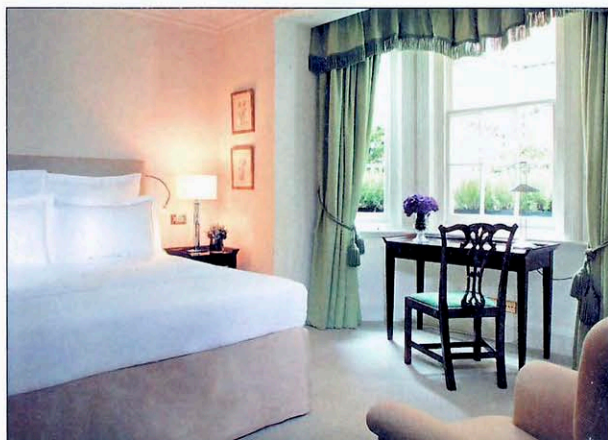
Then stroll over to Buckingham Palace and admire the palace front, facing the Mall (added in 1913!). Arrive shortly before 11:30 a.m. and you'll catch the ceremonial Changing of the Guard, a tradition rooted in the Middle Ages. Get to know it and love it. After all, this is your neighborhood, too.

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STEVE HAGGERTY | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

The connoisseur's choice: Close to the Dukes is the fashionable Burlington Arcade, the longest covered shopping street in England. It was constructed in 1819.



DUKES HOTEL PHOTO

Recent changes brought a more contemporary look to the Dukes, such as white linens in the guest rooms.

TRAVELER'S CHECK | DUKES HOTEL, LONDON

A Campbell Gray Hotel, the Dukes is at 35 St. James's Place, London SW1A 1NY. Every cabdriver knows it.

Amenities include an exercise gym, steam room, daily newspaper, cable television, DVD player, direct-dial phones, Wi-Fi access, individually controlled heat and air conditioning, electronic

safe and minibar. Massage appointments are arranged at Reception.

Double rooms start at 295 pounds (about \$590 U.S.) on weekdays, 175 pounds (about \$350) weekends. Summer rates from July 13 to Sept. 2 start at 155 pounds (about \$310).

To learn more: dukeshotel.com.