

HOT SPOTS

Stephen Lacey

Palace Hotel, Tokyo

What is it? Opened in May, the Palace is Tokyo's newest luxury hotel, although it stands on the site of two previous establishments: Hotel Teito (1947) and the original Palace Hotel (1961).

It's in a good spot then? Well, it's good enough for the Japanese emperor, who has his digs next door. The Palace Hotel even shares his moat and looks over the Imperial Palace gardens, a 3.5-square-kilometre green space in the heart of the city.

A moat! Is there anything living in there? There are giant koi carp and we saw a couple of turtles. Don't say anything, but we stole some sourdough bread from the hotel's breakfast buffet and fed them. Such things are frowned upon in Japan.

Speaking of food, are the hotel's restaurants any good? They certainly are – and there are 10 of them (including bars). French restaurant Crown is a collaboration with Patrick Henrion of La Pyramide in France. This and Japanese restaurant Wadakura (top right) have a good chance of picking up Michelin stars. Afternoon tea is served downstairs in the Palace Lounge, where kimono-clad waitresses serve a *kyubako* (tiered lacquerware box) full of dainty cakes and offer up to 25 varieties of tea. Tokyo socialites seem to approve.

Is the accommodation pleasing?

You'll find all the comforts and mod-cons you'd expect in a brand new US\$1.2 billion hotel. The rooms are spacious by Japanese standards and elegant, rather than funky, with moss green carpets, ink block prints and grass-weave wallpaper. There are 278 guestrooms and 12 suites and more than half feature open terraces and balconies, which is a nice touch, although breathing in the Tokyo air is not to be recommended (unless you've flown in from Hong Kong, in which case you'll probably notice an improvement). Most rooms have open-style bathrooms with separate soaking tubs, in which you can relax while gazing out at the skyline. And you'll be wanting to stash the Anne Semonin toiletries in your luggage. The Imabari bath towels, too.

What if I'm stressed? Head straight to the fifth floor and book yourself a full-body massage at the Evian Spa, the first in Japan. The treatment rooms demand to be seen – they resemble something out of the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Or bored? Impossible. You're in the heart of the Marunouchi business district, a spot that is becoming increasingly popular with fashionistas and foodies. Plus the uber-posh

Ginza shopping district is a 30-minute walk away. Closer to home is the National Museum of Modern Art.

Anything else? If you can put up with the cigarette smoke, the hotel's Royal Bar is a good place to enjoy a scotch. It's reminiscent of a 1960s gentleman's club, with deep purple velvet lounge chairs, banquets and marble tables. The bar itself is from the original Palace Hotel, so it's propped up a lot of wealthy elbows over the years.

It's pricey, right? Well, it isn't cheap, but you wouldn't expect it to be, considering Tokyo has been named the world's most expensive city. Published rates start from HK\$5,000 and go all the way up to a jaw-dropping HK\$70,000.

The Palace Hotel is at 1-1-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan, tel: 81 3 3211 5218; www.palacehoteltokyo.com.



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