

# Le Bon Journal

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A hotel stay from a guest's point of view is about comfort, cleanliness, and service. Or is there more?

## **Grand Hotel Duomo, Milan**

The famous Duomo is the centre of Milan. It's a majestic cathedral that took ages to build. Facing it, on the left-hand side is the equally famous Grand Hotel Duomo. The Beatles stayed there as did many other stars.

I asked the receptionist if I could get the same rate as my colleague who was checking in the next day. Much to my dismay and embarrassment, my colleague was not in the system. Without prior reservations, it seemed really cheeky of me to ask if I could get the lowest possible rate for the night. Even cheekier still, I asked if I could be shown rooms facing the Duomo with balcony. The first two did not have bathtubs. Eventually, they led me to one with high ceilings and a bathtub.

Guests at five star hotels do not ask to be shown rooms. They either book in advance or just ask for a room. So I failed rule number one.

Rule number two, you should always tip. I figured since I was paying so much money already (Euro 295), I didn't need to tip.

The concierge was extremely knowledgeable and friendly. That is usually the case with five star hotels. The restaurants he recommended were impeccable.

What's so memorable about staying at this hotel was the view of the Duomo. It was a historical experience to wake up at dawn and see the morning sunlight on the square. After this one night, I decided that I should always try to stay in hotels with historical significance, character, and atmosphere.

## **Hotel Avalon, New York**

After a sleepless night at the Holiday Inn Martinique, I was ready to check out early. Here was Little Korea, near Penn Station, full of

wonderful Korean and Japanese restaurants. There must be a nicer place to stay my remaining days in New York.

Hotel Avalon is quite inconspicuous in its black and gold trimmings. Only twelve stories high, it nevertheless reminded me of the Millennium Hilton in its monolith appearance - relative to this neighbourhood, at least. Two good-looking clerks at the front desk greeted me politely. The blonde from Iceland showed me the hotel's executive suite, queen deluxe, and standard room.

The decor was marble and classic. The clerk informed me that the hotel was only two years old, having been completely renovated from old offices. They thus have high speed internet connection. A few of the rooms even had flat screen computers. The interior reminded me of the private Wall Street Inn where I had stayed one night. I had concluded then that the class of hotel was directly related to the quality of linen, with Egyptian cotton being private and elegant.

Since the daily rate was only one dollar more than the Holiday Inn, my decision was a no brainer. But what clinched the deal for me was the free access to a nearby health club. I had enquired a few days before - a single visit was \$25. Most hotels in Manhattan are not equipped with swimming pools. Access to a pool, sauna, and steam room is rare indeed.

While the Holiday Inn had upgraded me to an Executive Room which included a complimentary American breakfast, The Avalon offered a complimentary continental breakfast far superior in atmosphere and quality than the noisy touristy Holiday Inn diner.

The only drawback, I suppose - after three tranquil nights, was that the 100 or so rooms may fill up quickly. Without any affiliation with airmiles or other perk collections (such as Marriott Rewards, Hilton Honors,

etc.), some people may prefer to stay elsewhere. I, for one, would return again, even if a toll-free call cost a minimum of one dollar.

## **Hotel Grand Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam**

The Dam in Amsterdam is equivalent to Piccadilly Circus in London. It's the centre of town. And this hotel sits grandly in one corner.

The receptionist assured me that this was a five star hotel. Since there was a lot of construction in the middle of the square, she gave me a room in the newly built Royal Wing. On the way there, I passed by a Japanese Restaurant and a shoe polish machine.

My room on the fourth floor faced the roof tops and a narrow alley way. The year on one of the houses read 1369.

The bathtub was more than six foot long and deep enough to have a relaxing and dreamy bath. As usual, I brought a bottle of aromatherapy oil from home to help me relax. The windows could be opened - what a plus! I like being able to open my windows and breathe in fresh air. Few modern hotels offer this basic requirement these days.

The Winter Garden was THE place to have breakfast. But this opportunity didn't arise until the day I checked out.

It was excellent in every way, except that it did not have a swimming pool. The Yamaha grand piano downstairs was well-tuned. Unfortunately, I had forgotten how to play my usual medley of Chopin and Rachmaninoff - and ended up improvising some popular tunes instead.

## **Roger Williams, New York**

The idea of staying in a modern style hotel occurred to me when I visited New York last summer. Roger Williams sits on the corner of Madison and 31st. It is a "minimalist" hotel, newly designed and refurbished.

In the middle of the lobby sat an old Steinway grand. I asked the front desk if I could play it. He said, "Yes, but only a few notes." What did that mean? I soon learned that it was saved for performances - the most recently being by the lady from the Young and the Restless.

The 14th floor superior room came with a balcony, to my pleasant surprise. I walked outside to feel the Manhattan spring air. Had there been chairs I would have sat outside for a while. But the air was chilly.

The bathroom was unique. Aside from mirrors, frosted glass door, and glass shower separator, it had a special feel to it. There was no bathtub, but a wooden deck on the floor for the shower.

This was the first hotel I stayed that had a CD player. I put on the CD made by my new friend. It sounded better from it than from my laptop.

The true test of a hotel is, however, by the quality of the bed sheets. Mine was of the highest kind.

Due to my schedule, I could only stay one night. Complimentary continental breakfast was served from 7 to 10 am. This was the second test of a hotel. Not bad at all.

I liked the high ceilings. I liked the proximity to Korea town. I liked all of it, except not being able to play the piano.

### **Arabella Grand Sheraton, Frankfurt**

There are only six floors above the ground floor reception, restaurant, and shopping area. Four elevators are adequate serving the first floor conference suites, rooms from second floor upwards, and the health club on the top floor. More than 300 rooms, it said on its Web site.

My request for a quiet room landed me a spacious one facing the courtyard. It had everything I desired, for it was a five star hotel.

The health club consisted of a small area for weight training and other machine-assisted exercise, a small but nice swimming pool facing the court yard. This set up reminded me

a little of the Millenium Hilton in Manhattan - floor to ceiling window. The sauna facilities were extra (15 DM). The small health bar sat between the changing rooms and the swimming pool. Unfortunately, the ashtray invited smokers to relax by the pool. This, I found disturbing.

There was no separate smoking area in the conference floor and in the brasserie restaurant. People were free to smoke in your face. I just could not get used to the irony of such a fine hotel, polluted by bad air.

Every night I set my room temperature thermostat to neutral and shut the curtains completely. Every night I slept soundly.

It was a short walk to the train station. Even with my limited German, I could find my way to the correct S-bahn train.

### **Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton**

The venue search booking agent assured me that it was a four star hotel, newly renovated and conveniently located.

The Royal Albion in Brighton, England was a big white house right by the famous Brighton Pier. It was more than one hundred years old, if not the oldest hotel in this seaside resort. After a fire which scorched the roof took down an entire east side of the building, it was shut down for complete renovation. The fire was apparently caused by an apprentice cook who forgot about his burnt sausage. The reception was spacious but minimally furnished, like the rest of the hotel. One lift served all five floors sprawled in non-symmetrical directions.

My room half-faced the turbulent sea. For that I was glad. However, the secondary glazing did not stop the sound of the whistling wind all night. The next evening, the old radiator acted up. It groaned like a pressure cooker on heat. I had to get up every few minutes to tend to it. Finally I called the front desk. A timid lad came to my rescue at two in the morning, only to suggest that I move to another room, noisier than the one I was in. So I decided to

suffer in what seemed now more like a two star hotel. When I checked out, the receptionist didn't even acknowledge my problem. Another disgruntled guest told me the next morning at breakfast that he was woken up at midnight by the sound of someone trying to get into his room. The porter had used his keys to open the room claimed by another guest. "Didn't he have the brains to check the registry?"

For all the grandeur of new wallpaper and carpeting, history and tradition, the Royal Albion just doesn't cut its four star rating.



### **Editor's note:**

These reviews are extracted from analyticalQ.com, a platform for self-expression, including Anne Ku's reviews of restaurants, theatre shows, movies, and other places one can "experience."

### **Feedback from readers:**

**England:** *I read with interest your review of the Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton. You may like to note that it hasn't got any better since your visit in October 2000. They "hosted" my wedding in December 2001 and I can honestly say I've never encountered a more amateurishly run establishment - and I've seen a few!*

**Lebanon:** *I'm studying hotel management and this is my first year. I was asked to do research on different types of hotels, and I think you're able to give me some help. I just want to know what are the different types (this is my second week) with a little bit of explanation. I appreciate a lot if you will help me with this as soon as possible -- that means today.*

**East Borneo:** *Is Anne Ku a person or an IT team? But it's interesting. Keep up the good job. Reading your diary makes me feel as if I'm a thousand miles away from Indonesia.*

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