

# A NEW Old World

A HISTORIC HOTEL GETS A MAKEOVER IN THE CITY OF LIGHTS, AND SETS THE STAGE FOR THE PENINSULA HOTELS' GRAND ENTRÉE INTO EUROPE.

BY ALYSON PITARRE  
PHOTOS BY THE PENINSULA HOTELS



It has been observed, “All the most original ideas originate in Paris.” The Peninsula Paris, fresh off its August 1 debut, is both the antithesis and embodiment of this statement.

The historic hotel, formerly the Hotel Majestic and one of Paris’ leading “*grands hotels*,” which opened in 1908, has been meticulously returned to its former glory following a four-year, \$1 billion restoration by Qatar’s Katara Hospitality and The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels. The titled and the tycooned mingled here with the vanguards of the arts, literature and music world during the “Belle Epoque” and “Années Folles,” when Paris was at the height of its creativity and glamour. It was the place where George Gershwin famously wrote “An American in Paris” in 1928. It was also the place where writers James Joyce and Marcel Proust, artist Pablo Picasso, choreographer Sergei Diaghilev and composer Igor Stravinsky gathered for dinner in 1922. Old and new live in harmony among resplendent gold leaf, paintings meticulously restored by some of France’s most revered artisans and contemporary furniture exclusively made by lauded designers such as Rosello and Laval.

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Nothing less would do for Peninsula's grand *entrée* into Europe. The 148-year-old luxury hospitality brand is known for making traditional five-star service feel as original now as it was back in 1928, when its first hotel debuted in Hong Kong.

"Peninsula's style of hospitality is rooted in our promise to provide guests with a personal and thoughtful experience," says Robert Cheng, Peninsula's vice president of marketing. "Our service philosophy, since the first hotel opened 85 years ago, has been built around creating treasured and authentic moments for each and every guest."

Guests come to Peninsula not only for "the most personalized hotel rooms in the world," but also because they can call any Peninsula hotel in the world "home." Guests may be picked up from the airport in a vintage Rolls Royce or MINI Cooper or discover their initials monogrammed on a pillowcase. They may also find their native language programmed into guestroom technology (there are currently 11 different languages). And if they want to make a long-distance call back home? Complimentary.

"Our foundation for service standards comes down to our extraordinary staff, who tailor each guest's stay with grace and genuine warmth," says Cheng. "World-class service should speak to the specific needs of each guest, and, to do so, one must have a keen understanding of today's traveler and to predict what that traveler may want tomorrow, in one year and in ten years from now."

The hotel's beloved pageboys are often the people catering to the needs of Peninsula guests. Their crisp white uniforms and pillbox caps have become much-loved symbols of Peninsula Hotels worldwide, personifying the group's personal approach to service since the opening of The Peninsula Hong Kong in 1928. (It was the first hotel in Asia to introduce pageboys.) They welcome guests to the hotels and carry out errands for them, which range from the ordinary (picking up a suit at the dry cleaners) to the extraordinary (arranging a helicopter ride to a private island or organizing a private cooking class with one of Peninsula's executive chefs).

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“The Peninsula pageboys are the people and personalities behind the Peninsula brand, and they bring the hotel experience to life,” says Cheng. “They have become a symbol of our heritage and our approach to personalized service.”

In some respects, the pageboys are a throwback to an era when hospitality was literally white glove (the kind of Old World grandeur and go-to-the-ends-of-the-earth dedication celebrated by this year’s “The Grand Budapest Hotel”). Despite the nostalgia the pageboys can inspire among the older generations of travelers, the Peninsula has somehow managed to keep them current. Even younger travelers, who grew up with electronic key cards instead of bellhops, have embraced them. Notes Cheng, “Of course, modernizing certain traditions is necessary, as the needs of travelers change over the years. So, while indulging in a beautiful afternoon tea in the grand surroundings of The Peninsula Hong Kong does not change, we just make sure that complimentary Wi-Fi is available while they sip on their tea.”

The afternoon tea is another experience that has been part of the Peninsula hotels’ DNA since the opening of The Peninsula Hong Kong in 1928. Each hotel hosts its own Peninsula afternoon tea with scones, finger sandwiches, delectable cakes and desserts.

And who can overlook the fleet of Rolls-Royce limousines parked outside virtually every Peninsula hotel around the world? The partnership between Peninsula and Rolls-Royce dates back to 1970, when The Peninsula Hong Kong acquired its first fleet of seven Silver Shadows. Three 1934 Phantoms in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo—each sporting the signature Peninsula green livery—have especially embodied the hotels’ “getting there is half the fun” motto. Guests at The Peninsula Paris will enjoy a Rolls-Royce Extended Wheelbase Phantom, together

with another classic vintage 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom II, lovingly restored over five years in Ashton Keynes, England. To think you can simply hop into a Phantom and cruise through the City of Lights is an experience to envy in and of itself.

It makes the hotel’s Paris location—set in the heart of the 16th arrondissement—all the more indelible. The hotel rests mere steps from the Arc de Triomphe and Champs Elysées—exactly the sort of geography Peninsula is known for procuring for its growing luxury hospitality empire (ten and counting). There’s The Peninsula Beverly Hills near Rodeo Drive and The Peninsula New York on Fifth Avenue. And of course, Hong Kong’s oldest hotel, the legendary “Grande Dame of the Far East” in Victoria Harbour. “Location, location, location” is a familiar adage in the real estate industry—but it, too, is vital to luring the well-heeled in the hospitality industry. Today’s luxury travelers expect five-star locations to go along with their five-star experiences.

“We spend a lot of time looking for the perfect locations,” reveals Cheng. “A variety of factors are considered in the process, such as its close proximity to shopping and major cultural attractions, and walkability to city centers for both leisure and business guests. It all goes back to the experience we want to give our guests.”

With that in mind, Katara Hospitality and The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels have their sights set on Yangon and London as the next two Peninsula locations. Both hotels are due to come online in the next few years, and both will continue the Peninsula tradition of seamless, white-glove service. Old World hospitality—the original hospitality—has not died. *Au contraire*. It is still very much alive. Old will be new all over again.

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*Read more about The Peninsula Paris at [www.previewinsideout.com/peninsulaparis](http://www.previewinsideout.com/peninsulaparis).*

