



BURT WOLF TRAVELS & TRADITIONS GREAT HOTELS OF THE WORLD



For over thirty years, I've been traveling around the world reporting on cultural history, tourist attractions and what's good to eat and drink. During those years I learned a lot about where to go and what to do when you get there. I also spent over 5,000 nights in various hotels. Some were great and some were ---- not so great. I thought you might like to see the great ones, so we put together a program with some of my favorites.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL GEORGE V, PARIS



On January 17th, 1928, the George V opened in Paris. It was owned and partially designed by Joel Hillman. Hillman, born in Memphis Tennessee,

had a long history of operating successful restaurants and hotels in the United States. He eliminated the word "hotel" from his Paris property in order to give people the feeling that his place was a private home rather than a commercial establishment.

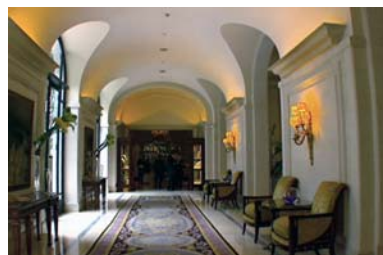
The French press described it as "conceived in the spirit of modern and elegant luxury, and endowed with the latest technological innovations." And that would still be a good description of the property.

They had fitted closets, and they still do. They had an elaborate delivery system so your room service order was properly heated when it arrived in your room, and they still do. And the attention to detail is amazing.

It's one thing to have a traditional American or Continental breakfast brought to your room. But the Four Seasons also offers a classic Japanese breakfast.

But for me the most luxurious element was the introduction of two bathrooms in each suite so that two people could bathe at the same time and be ready to go down to dinner together. Not that it has actually ever happened to me but it's a great theory.

In 1997, Four Seasons Hotels took over the



management of the property and spent over one hundred and twenty-five million dollars on renovations. These days the property is known as the Four

Seasons Hotel George V, and it's more luxurious than ever. Art deco details in the windows and balconies were restored. Hallway arches were brought back to their early size. Much of the original art has been restored and returned, including a set of 17th century tapestries.

CHRISTOPHER NORTON
GEORGE V, GENERAL MANAGER

We create in the George V this bubble. This is a special place. When you come and stay with us you feel cocooned, you feel safe and we remove all obstacles and things that could weigh on your life. So you can concentrate on what is important to you and we'll take care of all the rest for you.

Le Cinq is the main restaurant in the hotel. It has been awarded two out of a possible three stars by the Guide Michelin. That's a big deal.



THIERRY JACQUES
RESTAURANT MANAGER

We started eight years and a half ago in this wonderful place. And it was a gift every day, because when we arrived it was completely empty. It's in gold and grey in terms of color with the wonderful flowers. The service is very professional, very friendly.

Over 50,000 bottles of the world's finest wines rest below the hotel in what was once the quarry that



supplied stones for the construction of the Arc de Triomphe. There's a second wine cellar that is used to keep about 100 different

Champagnes at just the right temperature for immediate use and a third wine cellar just outside of Paris where another 10,000 bottles are slowly aging to maturity.

CHRISTOPHER NORTON

The spa in this hotel is a magical place. This spa stays true to the French environment. It's indigenous to France. So if you go to the spa you will see the murals and the décor reflective of a classic French Garden. Including the water features in the swimming pool and it's just delightful – the French version of Zen. It's a very popular place for our hotel guests to go. And take 2 hours of the day to re-energize themselves.



Of particular interest to me was the relaxation room. The frescoes on the walls are designed to recall a summer walk in the gardens of Versailles – before the revolution.



One of the most extraordinary elements in the hotel are the flower arrangements. Each week, Jeff Leatham and his seven

assistants design a new theme for the hotel and utilize over 9,000 flowers to design 23 major arrangements and 150 smaller bouquets.

And the rooms are pretty magnificent.

Each month the hotel receives over 200 young guests and accordingly they've developed a series of programs to make sure the young guests are happy.

As a man who is a father, a grandfather and about to enter my second childhood, I have a great appreciation for their Young Guests Program.

Upon check-in, each child receives a small

personalized booklet with helpful hints. They get a tee-shirt with their name on it, a plate of kid-friendly snacks, animal shaped soaps for the tub, and wooden letters for play time. They also get to choose a welcome gift from a toy-filled basket.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, PRAGUE



Prague is the capital city of the Czech Republic and one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. It was relatively undamaged during the Second World War and somehow managed to survive a massive onslaught by communist architects. During the past few years I have paid a number of visits to Prague --- sometimes during the summer, and sometimes during the Christmas and New Year's Celebrations.

And each time, I stayed at Prague's Four Seasons Hotel. It has a great location on the river bank looking out at the Palace Complex. And it's at the edge of the historic old town, so everything is in easy walking distance.

The public rooms in the hotel have an intimate quality and I put them to good use. Public areas in hotels and cafés are designed for waiting and meeting



and you need a couple of things to make them work.

You should be able to sit down, because you never know when someone is going to be late, to order something to drink... and to look like you are not waiting for someone while in fact you are waiting for someone.

The hotel also has a collection of Czech art that ranges from old lithographs to modernist abstract paintings to works in glass.

The hotel has a restaurant that has been awarded a star by the Michelin Guide and it's the first restaurant in Central and Eastern Europe to win one.

The chef is Andrea Accordi who was born in Verona and reflects his Italian heritage in three of his favorite dishes. We started with homemade potato gnocchi with morel mushrooms and red prawns, topped with creamed trumpet zucchini and carrot foam. The main course was suckling pig with mashed potatoes, sweet and sour pepper shallots, bacon and warm Chanterelle mushrooms with crispy vegetables. And for dessert, Sicilian cannoli filled

with buffalo ricotta cheese, pistachio yogurt, essence of almond sorbet and Sangria syrup.

The rooms are pretty cool too. And so are the views they offer. Especially the vistas of the roof tops --- beautiful sculptures that you might easily miss from the streets.

The hotel is particularly interested in family guests and while I was there at Christmas time they invited the Prague opera to host a holiday tea party for children.



Often the key to my comfort in the hotel is the concierge and the Four Seasons in Prague has one of the best, Petr Zszula.

A good concierge can tell you where to eat and where to shop. They can tell you what's over-rated and what is yet to be discovered. They can get you tickets to events that are considered unobtainable.

But Petr also has one skill that I had never seen before. Dozens of times each day a concierge is asked about a location. A map comes out, gets marked and the guests are on their way.

Petr takes out the map but he turns it towards the guest and marks it as you look at it. Petr has learned to write backwards so his guests can better follow his instructions.

Each time I come back to Prague something new has been added and someone at the hotel always knows where to find it.

THE DYLAN, AMSTERDAM



Towards the end of the 1100's a group of herring fisherman decided to build a settlement at the mouth of the Amstel River. They drove wooden stakes into

the mud, bound some wet earth and seaweed around the stakes and patched together a few huts on top of the mounds. Nothing to brag about but still something you could call home. There was, however, one serious problem, at high tide; home was about three feet under water. So they built a dam to hold back the sea. And the people called the place the dam on the Amstel.

The city plan for Amsterdam is based on three canals that form three semi-circles, one inside the other. Together they are described as the Canal Girdle. The outside canal in English is called the Prince's Canal. In the middle is the Emperor's Canal, and on the inside, the Gentleman's Canal. It's interesting that the most elegant and ambitious of the three is not those named with royal titles, it's the Gentlemen's Canal. The Dylan Hotel is located on one of the city's most famous canals.

RENE BORNMAN
General Manager

The Amstel Hotel is located in the oldest part of Amsterdam on one of the most beautiful canals. And that area is called The Nine Little Streets, The Neche Strasse, which is very famous for shopping, design shops, and good restaurants. So it's a very quiet residential area.



It is a very hidden, small little boutique hotel with only 41 rooms. So we have 16 rooms in the new wing. And I would say the new wing is from 1880 and the remainder of the rooms are here in the old part.

The combination of history, you know like the beams here, and the brick floor, and in the combination with the furniture and the nowadays technology, that makes it a very nice blend.

It's a small restaurant with only 10 tables there. We do serve breakfast, lunch and dinner. But trying really to make a destination restaurant. I brought in a new chef and a completely new cuisine which we thought needs to be imbedded in the Amsterdam market.



What I like very much are the attic rooms. We see the beams and the structure of the roof, and the view is very nice. And then the new building we have that is very minimalistic.

Whitish, Japanese sort of rooms, which is so contrary to the rooms in the old building.

The Ariana room which is exactly the site of where the first theater was. This is a room we just rebuilt one and a half years ago and it's now a function room that holds up to 80 people. But it's a very dramatic look. It has very nice designed wall with different light scenarios, so it makes the room very

suitable for social events: wedding or meetings, presentations, whatever. Then in combination with a courtyard combining both buildings, is a fantastic location.

We have a very old antique saloon boat built in 1930. We have an exclusive contract with the owner. Whenever we have guests who would like to see Amsterdam from the waterside – which, by the way, is the nicest way to explore Amsterdam - we call him up and then we have a little small boat landing in the front of the hotel and then we do tours.



What we are trying to do is to tailor make a package for them. Whatever they would like to do and whenever they would like to go, we offer them full catering onboard even with a waiter and a cook. We have a small cooking facility onboard. So we can do small little dishes, appetizers and of course, celebrate a party for up to 12 people onboard.



And next to that we have 10 Johnny Loco designed bicycles in front of the hotel. And all types of guests they love exploring the city and the best way to do that – next to the boat – is

riding a bicycle.

The nice thing about the bar which used to be a sort of private dining room, we transformed it into a bar and it's very nice for locals after work coming in for drink.

We have two beers— the local beer is Heineken of course. And we have the Brand beer that comes from the south of Holland which is a little bit more of an upscale beer and we'll try one today.

Amsterdam's Dylan Hotel is modern, elegant, very fashionable and totally responsive to the needs of its guests.

FOUR SEASONS RESORT PROVENCE AT TERRE BLANCHE

This is Provence in the south-east corner of France. It's a region that runs for 180 miles between the Riviera on the Mediterranean Sea and the mountains that



rise up into the Alps.

The fields are covered with flowers, olive groves that produce some of the world's finest olive oil, vineyards that produce the light and pleasant wines associated with the area, and hills topped with picturesque villages that have been around for over a thousand years.



One of my favorite villages is Fayence. Jean-Jacques Yormet is the chief concierge at The Four Seasons Resort in Provence and he took me on a tour of excellent little restaurants, outdoor cafes, and a small but interesting open market filled with things I like: Spice cakes, nougat, and cheese. No shopping until the tasting is complete, it's a tough act.

You'll also find the town of Grasse which is the world epicenter for the perfume industry.

Provence is an ideal place to relax and get in touch with the natural rhythms of the world around us. But if you are into a more cosmopolitan life style, you have the beaches of St. Tropez. It's also the glamour of Cannes, which was a small fishing village until the 1830s when it was transformed into the chic town that hosts the world's most important film festival. And, about an hour to the east, the excitement of Monte Carlo.



I came to this part of France to spend a few days at the Four Seasons Resort at Terre Blanche which is an unusual property. One hundred and fifteen villas built on a hillside.

Each has a bedroom and a living room with French doors that open onto a private terrace with expansive views of the mountain range. Olympic size bath tubs in elegant bathrooms. Well defined work areas, should you feel the need to work. But they are thinking about hiring a psychologist to help you suppress the feeling that you need to work. Some of the villas have their own private hot tubs.



They have a Michelin-starred restaurant for serious eaters. There's an intimate bar that specializes in local drinks. The drink most associated with this part of France is

Pastis which has a licorice flavor. There is also an older and stronger version called Absinthe. And the hotel serves it in the traditional way, known as an Absinthe drip. The Absinthe goes into a glass. A cube of sugar is placed into the funnel. The funnel is filled with ice and water is slowly dripped through, into the glass, which dissolves the sugar cube into the liquor. The Absinthe turns cloudy white when it's mixed with the water.



During the late 1800's Absinthe was the drink of choice amongst artists and writers— people like Oscar Wilde, Vincent Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec-- they were Absinthe drinkers. Then in 1908, for reasons nobody understands, the government decided it was dangerous and they banned its manufacture and you couldn't get an Absinthe drink for almost 100 years. Then in 2006, for more reasons we don't understand, the government said it was okay to have Absinthe and its being manufactured again. So here's looking at you.

Across from the bar is an informal restaurant with both indoor and outdoor areas. A grill next to the outdoor pool.

And a restaurant attached to the spa that specializes in light and healthful dishes.



And there is the spa. Treatment rooms where you can treat yourself to a bit of pampering. Fitness facilities if you feel the need to be a bit more fit. Fantastic pools both inside and out. And

everything you would expect in a world class spa. The resort also has a series of special programs for children. There were lots of kids at the resort when I was there and some of us attended a special cooking class.

But I also came here to celebrate my birthday. There are two ideas being celebrated at a birthday. The first is all about measuring. How old are you? How far have you come? The second is the concept of initiation into something new. Make a wish for your future.

The centerpiece is the birthday cake. The person blowing out the candles is saying, "The years of my life represented by the candles are over and gone. But! I still have the breath of life in me. I am in control. I can blow them away and start anew." The flame on the candle is a symbol of life, but the candle, like life itself, only lasts for a limited time.

Everybody joins in the appreciation of the birthday

person. And there is a traditional song.

The music for "Happy Birthday To You" was written in 1893 by two sisters -- Mildred and Patty Hill who lived in Louisville, Kentucky.



And actually held the first copyright.

The words were added in 1924 and nobody knows who wrote it. But the song is now the most commonly sung song in the Anglo-Saxon world. And I hope to hear it being sung to me for many, many years into the future. And all things being equal, I wouldn't mind hearing them sung here at Terre Blanche.

TO LEARN MORE . . .

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