



41 HOTEL

London's Best Kept Secret

Like Carl and Ellie Fredricksen in Disney's UP, we longed for an adventure of our own. Visiting London has been on our bucket list since we were married 15 years ago. Finally, in celebration of our 40th birthdays, it was our time for an adventure across the pond. So as we ascended the stairs at Victoria Station, blurry eyed from the 8-hour trip in coach, onto the streets during the early morning rush hour, we were full of anticipation and excitement about our impending adventures. And while the Brits were on their way to work, school and a host of other mandatory engagements, we traded smiles for the simple fact that we were in jolly ole' England for the very first time.

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The first stop on this grandest of adventures was a two night stay at our hotel. London's best kept secret is also its smallest five-star boutique hotel, 41. Most hotels have mammoth rotating doors that spit you out into a hectic lobby packed with people. 41, with its discreet private entrance, shields you from the noise and tussle of a busy city and the hurried ways of the crowd. Instead, you are greeted at the door by name and chauffeured to an executive lounge on the top floor. The building was originally built to accommodate debutantes who were attending parties at Buckingham Palace. The WWII headquarters of the Free State Polish Army, turned tranquil environment of English charm after a 1999 renovation, welcome her guests with mahogany-paneled walls carved by the history of the old country. At a modest five stories, with the hotel inhabiting only the top floor, guests gain a peek into the courtyard of the Queen's Royal Mews. 41 blends old world charm and urban chic with all 30 rooms decorated in a black and white pattern theme that would make Coco Chanel envious. The modern bathrooms were all pre-built in Scandinavia and were hoisted by crane to the fifth floor of the building.



Handmade bed linens and a turn down service complete with a hot water bottle for the achy weary traveler ensure guests receive a good nights rest.

41 is an oasis of privacy and white-glove yet authentic service. The hotel staff treats all guests like royalty, attending to their needs every moment of the day. Guests discover soft music, a warm fire, cozy couches and deep winged chairs in the lounge where only the glass conservatory roof tells of the outside weather. Guests can greet the day with the complimentary continental breakfast; tea, spirits and appetizers revitalize visitors in the afternoon and even those returning from a night on the town are welcomed with a warm smile and necessary refreshments. Every conceivable need was satisfied even before we arrived as the staff secured dinner reservations at swanky restaurants and theatre tickets to “War Horse” weeks before our arrival. They seem to intuitively understand our needs and match those well with available resources. 41 sets the bar on hotel experience so high, I dare say we could never stay elsewhere in London for fear of being dearly disappointed.

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(BUT THE GRANDEUR AND BEAUTY
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We’ve seen the palace and English pomp and circumstance on TV but the grandeur and beauty is hard to take in when seeing it live. Our journey took us to the splendid grounds of Buckingham Palace, including tours of the Royal Mews and the Queens Gallery. The Royal Mews is a stunning collection of the State ornate carriages, including the Gold State Coach, used for coronations, State Visits, royal weddings, the State Opening of Parliament and official engagements. And the Queens Gallery, on the periphery of the palace grounds, chronicles England’s dedication to exploration and details the adventurous nature of their people. The gallery displayed the photography exhibition of The Heart of the Great Alone: Scott, Shackleton and Anartic Photography. The photographs of George Herbert Ponting and Frank Hurley captured the heartache and tragedy suffered by the members of Captain Scott’s South Pole expedition, serving as a stark reminder that man’s will is no match for the forces of nature.



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Our fondest memories of this trip will undoubtedly lie on the cobblestone streets of Windsor during our day trip to the medieval Windsor Castle. Windsor Castle, high atop a hill overlooking the Thames Valley, is one of the oldest working royal residences in the world. The castle was built by William the Conqueror after the Norman Conquest of 1066 and has been handed down to thirty-nine monarchs through such lively royal personalities as King Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II. We had never been in the presence of such history. As Americans we sometimes scoff at a monarchy. We even blundered when we casually asked a castle employee, where the Queen “hangs out.” Aghast he responded, “Her Majesty the Queen, does not hang out.” He was gracious and we recovered and left with a better understanding of the importance and value of the monarchy to their identity and way of life.

The majestic natural beauty of Windsor Castle speaks for itself as its stone-walls, beautiful gardens and natural views intersect to create a beautiful canvass, but it is the interior of the castle that displays the true royal treasures of England’s monarchal history. The Print Room contains different works assembled over five hundred years, including works from Michelangelo, Raphael and Holbein. The Royal Library holds an astonishing collection of nearly six hundred drawings by Leonardo da Vinci. And a personal favorite, St. George’s Hall, contains the coats of arms of all the Knights of the Garter since the foundation of the Order in 1348. Windsor Castle is truly an amazing achievement where the majesty, wealth and opulence of the English Monarchy are on full display for all in the world to see and enjoy.

Opportunities to explore and experience the history and pleasures of London are endless and we barely scratched the surface. So for our next visit, the only thing that would top the stay at 41 would be to “hang out” with the Queen!

