

hot spots Hyatt Regency Century Plaza, Los Angeles



Where is it? Located in the Century City area of Los Angeles, less than 3km from Rodeo Drive, the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza stands amid three well-landscaped hectares, making it a true urban resort.

What's the style? Thanks to a US\$30 million facelift, the hotel, which draws lots of corporate types, proves that business doesn't have to be boring. Clean and contemporary yet traditional in style, this crescent-shaped property was dubbed the world's most beautiful hotel when it opened in 1966.

Who goes there? It is known as the Western White House because every US president from Lyndon Johnson to George W. Bush has bunked here. Ronald Reagan held his 1980 and 1984 victory parties in the ballrooms. Other overnight guests have included British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. With behemoth Hollywood talent agencies CAA and ICM across

the street, don't be surprised to spot a celebrity or two enjoying lunch or drinks.

What about the rooms? Santa Monica-based Design 360 dreamed up the rooms, which are decorated in soothing neutral tones with ebony and sage accents. Residential furnishings include sumptuous Hyatt Grand Beds, granite countertops and desktops, textured window coverings, oversized flat-screen LCD high-definition TVs and iPod docking stations. Every room features a private balcony and marble bath.

What's new? The new X Bar (above) is sure to become popular courtesy of its imaginative cocktails and outdoor fire pits, a necessity on chilly LA evenings. Also, VIPs, celebrities and chief executives love the newly opened Regency Club, which offers a private entrance with its own reception desk and concierge service, DVD library and continuous honour bar and gourmet snacks.

What's on the menu? Breeze, the hotel's only full-service restaurant, advertises itself as specialising in sushi, but southern California is full of better establishments. However, the Belgian waffles melt in your mouth and the oversized hamburgers served poolside are delicious.

Is there a spa? Of course. Equinox Fitness Clubs, voted best gyms in America by *Fitness Magazine*, have a spectacular workout area plus 20 treatment rooms and a manicure and pedicure suite.

Anything else we should know? Starbucks addicts don't have to wander far: there's an outpost on site.

And the bottom line? Rates start at US\$219 a night and soar to US\$3,850.

The Hyatt Regency Century Plaza is located at 2025 Avenue of the Stars, Los Angeles, California, United States, tel: 1 310 228 1234; www.centuryplaza.hyatt.com.

Kelly Carter

spree Camden Town, London

Every year, more than 10 million people are said to visit Camden. It shows. The district has the kind of bustle you associate with Mong Kok. Only the people are different: the high street (below left) is normally crawling with black-clad, pierced Goths and eccentrics of all denominations – watch out for fire-eaters, stilt walkers and jugglers when you visit the north London suburb.

Many of the shops reflect the area's bohemian identity. Look no further than **Escapade** (150 Camden High Street, tel: 44 207 485 7384; www.escapade.co.uk). An Aladdin's cave of the bizarre, the fancy-dress shop enables you to pretend to be almost anyone you like, mythical or modern. A Scarecrow (*The Wizard of Oz*) costume will set you back £44/HK\$680, an Elvis costume £55 and a Vladimir Putin mask £19.

If you just want to look like a local, head for the piercing boutique **Cold Steel** (238 Camden High Street). Among other adornments you can buy a bright purple Demon Tail (£45), a purple-blue

spinal ring (£25) and a Flower Jewel navel barbell (£45). For a consultation call 44 20 726 77970.

If you want to go the whole hog and really fit in, visit **Odd Balls** (unit 200B, Camden Lock Market, tel: 44 207 284 4488). Odd Balls sells everything from "thuds", standard juggling balls (£2.95 each), to an array of unicycles, each of which will set you back about £100.

Should you prefer to keep your feet planted firmly on the ground, pop into **British Boot Company** (5 Kentish Town Road, tel: 44 207 485 8505), which sells that tough, bouncy footwear that has become a British institution, the Doc Marten. No longer all about thuggery, DMs are worn by the likes of doctors and judges. The choice is surprisingly wide and includes the Stable boot (£95), the Unisex Grinder (£85) and the original Doc Marten (£60).

Once you take off your boots, lie down on one of the strange and upmarket relaxation aids supplied by **Beanbag Shop** (unit 83, Stables Market, Chalk Farm

Road; tel: 44 207 485 8006). All are inexpensive and full of beans: a medium cotton beanbag is £40, while a large cotton sofa costs just £100, although you will, of course, pay more for leather.

If you are more concerned with what you cover your own body in, clothes shops are everywhere. **Coconut Hut** (unit 41G, Stables Market, Chalk Farm Road, tel: 44 7720 056 799) sells sexy psychedelic gear cheaply. Jazz yourself up in a Zig Zag bikini (£25), one of many psychedelic sarongs (£9) or a pretty turquoise bracelet (£3).

Another saucy store, the divinely named **FairyGothMother** (8 East Yard, Camden Lock Market, tel: 44 208 464 6702) promises "authentic corsets and corset dresses suitable for waist training, ballgowns, lingerie and vamp-inspired fashions". Flaunt it in a Cutie skirt with thong (£22), a full-length silk lace nightgown with sumptuous flared skirt (£225) or maybe a handcrafted Austrian crystal necklace (£175).

David Wilson



trial run 1st Class Sleeper

What is it? The 1st Class Sleeper is a cushion that provides extra comfort and support for your upper body and head while you are in economy-class airline seating.

How does it work? The heavy-duty nylon Sleeper has an extended inflation tube into which you blow 10 or so breaths. Drape the Sleeper over the back of the seat and settle down to allow the air inside to move about, creating a comfortable cushion shaped to your body. If you can ignore the laughs from nearby passengers, the Sleeper may also be inflated using the airline's overhead air vent. To deflate, release the inflation tube valve and gently push the air out. It can then be folded up to the size of a travel umbrella. Instructions are printed on the Sleeper and an enclosed illustrated card. A five-minute demonstration video is available at www.1stclass sleeper.com.

Why do I need one? Because the Sleeper is a cheap and convenient way of transforming the economy-class experience. Suitable for most body sizes, it is light (about 450 grams) and compact, making it easy to pack into hand luggage. The non-sweat nylon cushion has robust seams and provides a hygienic seat cover. It may be used for lumbar support alone by blowing in three to four breaths and folding the Sleeper in half.

Anything else? The cushioned air is said to act as a shock absorber during turbulence. The product is suitable for use on a train or bus or in a car (but not on the driver's seat) or on regular chairs. It's also a boon for the elderly and those with lower-back pain because it offers gentle support. It comes with a drawstring storage bag.

And the downside? There is no way to avoid feeling conspicuous inflating your own seat on a plane. Once you've recovered from the initial embarrassment, however, it is worth having achieved geek status for the significant comfort advantage. By the end of my in-flight trial everyone sitting near me had asked to try the cushion.

Where can I find one? The 1st Class Sleeper comes with a 90-day money-back guarantee and a one-year warranty. It costs US\$63.95, which includes delivery to Hong Kong, and can be ordered at the website above.

Catherine Shaw

