

information

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MANDARIN ORIENTAL HYDE PARK, LONDON - THE HISTORY

One of the city's most iconic hotels, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London is located in the heart of Knightsbridge and on the edge of Hyde Park. The hotel has 117-years of exciting history and is a place that continues to welcome guests from all over the world, including royalty, dignitaries, celebrities and VIPs.

Below are some of historical facts about this storied hotel:

- **Tallest building in London** - Originally known as Hyde Park Court, plans to build a 'residential club' with 500 residential chambers were announced in August 1887. Planning was initially delayed due to endless disagreements over the proposed height, which at 100 feet was set to be one of the tallest buildings in London. Outraged local residents feared a shadow would be cast over the Serpentine and asked Parliament to restrict the height to 60 feet. Their wishes were, however, refused as it was felt that the building would add to the 'architectural dignity' of the West End.
- **A Gentleman's Club** – In 1889 Hyde Park Court and Club opened its doors as an exclusive apartment block including 138 bachelor flats and its own Hyde Park Club for gentlemen. The contractor stated that it was 'designed to meet the requirements of a large section of the upper classes, being men of first-class social standing, whose means may have not have permitted them to go to the great expense in housekeeping'. Rooms started at £100 per annum with no guest accepted without suitable references.
- **From Club to Hotel** - In 1898, Hyde Park Court and Club was sold by administrators to Herbert Bennett, a director of Harrods who began the formal process of changing the building from a residential mansion block to The Hyde Park Hotel Ltd.

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- **Hyde Park Hotel opens its doors** - In 1902, Hyde Park Hotel opened as London's newest and grandest 268-room hotel. From its opening, the hotel became the destination of choice for aristocrats, diplomats, celebrities and socialites, who used it as their home-away-from home for London stays and events.
- **Why does the hotel have a Royal Entrance** - The main entrance of the hotel had to be moved from the park side to the Knightsbridge side, as His Majesty, King George V refused to allow any advertising, including the large gilt lettering of the hotel's name, overlooking the park. The postal address also changed from Albert Gate to 66 Knightsbridge. The original entrance was then kept for the sole use of the Royal Family. Today permission is still needed to allow the hotel to open this entrance for VIPs and wedding couples.
- **First World War** – During this devastating war, as well as being one of the most important meeting places, the hotel also played home to soldiers on leave, who were invited to stay in the ballroom, which was set up as a dormitory to accommodate those who had nowhere else to go – Queen Mary regularly visited them there.
- **Deportment Darling** - To celebrate the end of the war in 1918, society dance teacher Madame Vacani hosted exclusive dance classes in the Hyde Park Hotel's ballroom, teaching grooming, deportment and protocol to children of the aristocracy. Her pupils included Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Margaret who were exhorted to 'hold their darling little heads up'.
- **Goats are warmly welcomed** - It was said that in the 1920s the entire upper floors of the hotel were occupied by Eastern potentates, with their bodyguards manning the stairs and flocks of goats left to roam on the landings. In 1929, the Sultan of Zanzibar

arrived at the hotel with 12 goats, and when Mahatma Ghandi stayed, a goat was milked daily for him.

- **Swinging Twenties** – The Twenties saw many visitors but ironically none noisier than the arrival of the idol of the silent screen, Rudolph Valentino. Whilst staying at the hotel the Knightsbridge traffic ground to a halt as Valentino stepped out on to the balcony to acknowledge the adoration of some 20,000 screaming and fainting women below.
- **The wicked delights Of Evelyn Waugh** - The irascible Evelyn Waugh stayed and visited the hotel on a regular basis between 1942 and 1964 and enjoyed nothing more than playing pranks, such as mixing up the shoes left outside the bedroom doors or satirising fellow guests in his novels. He once sent Basil Bennett, owner of the hotel, a postcard ‘from Adolf Hitler’ requesting a room, but signing it off, ‘I am a respectable Spanish gentleman’!
- **Sir Winston Churchill** - Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill was a frequent guest and there are many interesting stories of his time spent in the hotel. One day, on returning from the House of Commons at 5am, he felt ravenously hungry, so he walked down the service stairs to find the Chef and offered him two cigars in exchange for an early breakfast. One evening Sir Winston was caught in the fog and decided to spend the night at the hotel. The following morning his secretary, who was summoned to take dictation, recalled: ‘I went there in the morning and found him in bed. He spent the day there. He rather enjoyed it.’
- **Second World War** – While many guests moved out and left the hotel throughout the war, several moved in as they believed it would safely withstand any bombs - these

included Sir Winston Churchill, Lord Beaverbrook and even one guest who made the hotel his home for over 20 years. Ironically, after the war, an unexploded bomb was discovered and safely defused only feet from the hotel.

- **SAS Head Quarters** – When the SAS was due to be disbanded in 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Brian Franks, along with Sir Winston Churchill, Yuri Galitzin (a Russian Prince) and Major Bill Barkworth (SAS), formed the SAS War Crime Investigating team known as the ‘Secret Hunters’ from a suite in the hotel between 1945 and 1948. From their office, they went on to bring over 100 Nazi war criminals to justice. Brian Franks returned to the hotel as Managing Director from 1959 to 1972.
- **The Hokey-Cokey** – Lady Vyner hired the hotel in 1948 to celebrate her silver wedding party with guests of honour King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Due to the recent war, the hotel needed to borrow supplies and even Persian carpets from Harvey Nichols to cover the holes in the carpet. The celebrations were fantastic and the King was seen rolling back the carpets for dancing, including to the royal favourite – The Hokey-Cokey. The party ended at 5am with a riotous conga.
- **Balaclava Ball** - This glamorous period reached its peak on the 26th November 1954 when the hotel hosted the Battle of Balaclava Ball to commemorate the anniversary of the Charge of the Light Brigade. The guests included Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip and The Queen Mother.
- **Marbled walls** – The Forte family took over the hotel in 1968 and whilst refurbishing the hotel in 1979, the team started to scrape away layers of paint and wallpaper from the lobby only to reveal different marbles from eight different countries that you can see today. Curiously, the same hands that had obliterated the marble had painted false

marbling on the mahogany reception desk. As work continued, more delightful features continued to be unearthed, including a floor of Italian mosaics discovered under the carpet of the Ballroom veranda. Guests can admire these today in the Butterfly Terrace.

- **The Three Tenors** - Whilst all the Three Tenors stayed at the hotel for their 1996 performance at Wembley Stadium, Luciano Pavarotti was a regular visitor and the Royal Suite was altered specifically for him. His stays included the sellout performance of Pavarotti in the Park in 1991 and the VE Day Concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 1995.
- **The Fantastic Years** - In November 1996 Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group purchased the Hyde Park Hotel for £86 million, renaming it Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London. In October 1999 the hotel once again closed its doors to commence a £57 million, 7-month renovation encompassing the entire hotel. On the 18 May 2000, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London opened its doors to reclaim its position as the city's premier address and Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group's European flagship.
- **China & Hong Kong Dignitaries** - Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London played host to a grand dinner with Margaret Thatcher and the Chinese Ambassador, Madame Fu Ying to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong in 2007. Over the years, the hotel has been honoured to welcome many other Chinese dignitaries including President Xi Jinping when he met with Sir Henry Keswick in 2015, President Hu Jing Tao, President Jiang Zemin, Premier Wen Jiabao and Wang Qishan.

- **Royal returns** – Since re-opening as Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London, the hotel has been honoured to welcome Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II back to the hotel on several occasions. These have included when Baroness Margaret Thatcher celebrated her 80th birthday in the hotel in 2005 and on the 29th April 2011 when the hotel hosted the pre-wedding celebration of Their Royal Highnesses, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge at which 142 royals attended.
- **The largest renovation in the hotel’s history** – In September 2016, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London embarked on the most comprehensive multimillion-pound renovation in its history, designed to confirm this historic hotel’s position as one of the best in the world.
- **We’ve been inspired** – International designer Joyce Wang took her inspiration from the building’s Edwardian heritage, the hotel’s peaceful parkside location and the glamour of the 20th century’s Golden Age of travel when transforming the hotel’s luxurious rooms, suites and public areas. British fashion designer, Jenny Packham, used these elements when designing the hotel’s new fan and Leah Wood, daughter of Ronnie Wood, hand-painted English butterflies to surround the hotel’s Butterfly Terrace. The stunning re-imagining of The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, London along with the hotel’s destination restaurants and Mandarin Bar, were directed by esteemed New York designer Adam D Tihany.
- **‘Our Fans’ cover the Hotel** - The ‘Godfather of British Pop Art’ Sir Peter Blake created a special piece of art to cover the entire façade of the hotel throughout the first phase of the comprehensive renovation. Measuring 65 metres wide by 24 metres tall, the poster featured 100 Fans of the hotel including Dame Judi Dench and even reunited the Beatles with Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr.

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- **London, We're Fans** – A fire in June 2018 interrupted the renovations and planned reopening of the property and as a result the hotel was closed for six months. All colleagues remained however, and during the closure donated over 40,000 working hours to London charities. These included the London Fire Brigade, The Passage, The Felix Project and Oxfam. A further 10,000 hours has been pledged throughout 2019 with many colleagues continuing to support and give back to London.
- **Reinvented and reimagined** – Reinvented and reimagined, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London fully re-opened on 15 April 2019. Sitting on the edge of Hyde Park and in the heart of Knightsbridge, this iconic hotel features all new guestrooms and suites, award-winning restaurants and spa, and impeccable, kind and gracious service. 2019 sees the start of a new chapter in this iconic hotel's life and a new history begins.

To celebrate the 2019 re-opening of the hotel and the illustrious 117-year history a series of special packages and promotions were created for guests to enjoy. These include a Stay Like Sir Winston Churchill accommodation package, a curated 'If Walls Could Talk' gallery, a 1920s Afternoon Tea and a series of special cocktails in the Mandarin Bar that pay homage to memorable individuals or historic events that have taken place in the hotel.

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