

Y TRAVEL The Dorchester

By **Scott Armstrong**

# A perfect slice of old British style

“Land of hope and glory, mother of the free,” oh, how the words of that stirring anthem about this fair nation seem so far from removed from the recession-hit, depressed land we now live in.

As the pound struggles against the Euro and holiday-makers whinge about paying £6 for a coffee in Greece, I went in search of a slice of inspiration - and a small reminder of what Great Britain used to be.



And where better to look than in the nation's capital, London. Surely here the spirit which created an empire, which built magnificent bridges, which defended the world against tyranny, which made Britain anything but “little”, would still survive?

Absolutely, old boy! And nowhere better was that greatness encapsulated than at my choice of hotel.

The five-star The Dorchester in London's elegant Park Lane had billed itself as “inherently British”, I wondered what that meant in these modern times (hooped earrings and rolled-up tracksuit trousers?).

Within minutes of my arrival I knew I had found the “great” I was looking for, though I thought the owners should perhaps change their slogan to “timelessly British”. This is because in all aspects The Dorchester is a time-capsule of style and service which belongs to brighter age, when adventurers sporting huge moustaches headed off to the sub-continent in search of fame and fortune.

Doormen in top hats, frock coats and epaulettes salute you on your arrival, efficiently relieving weary travellers of their luggage. Then it's a quick spin through the revolving doors into the lobby and the hotel beyond.

## The Promenade

As you sweep into the hotel you are greeted by the breathtaking sight of “The Promenade”, which stretches the length of Nelson's column though the heart of the hotel.

Rich silk draperies and gold-framed mirrors provide a dramatic backdrop to the spacious, high-backed, gold brocatelle-upholstered divans and lush sofas. Here you can take afternoon tea or indulge in a cocktail or two (these average around £16 a go).

It is easy to imagine Hercule Poirot taking tea with his good chum Hastings here; the overwhelming style and elegance of The Promenade is a far cry from the cold minimalism of most contemporary hotels.

As the sun comes up, it is here that the richest of London's businessmen and women come for morning power meetings to discuss their latest product lines over coffee, while guests tuck into fabulous organic full English breakfasts (black and white pudding, gorgeous) served by meticulously polite waiters and waitresses.

Afternoon tea at The Dorchester is famed (award-winning in fact), finger sandwiches, freshly baked scones served with homemade strawberry jam, seasonal jam and clotted cream, plus a selection of specially created French





pastries, all accompanied by tea chosen from extensive tea menu. For those feeling more Wooster than Jeeves, there is a fantastic Champagne version of afternoon tea, too.

## The Rooms

Walking into a suite at The Dorchester is more like walking into a stately home, with ornate bathrooms and luxuriously furnished bedrooms.

The room's triple-glazed windows, which look out over Hyde Park, shut out the noise of the city. The centre point of the room is the four-poster bed, swathed in fabrics and silks that are echoed around the windows.

Paintings adorn the walls, while touches such as hand-embroidered cushions scattered around, and the almost obligatory chaise longue, add to the feeling of opulence and comfort.

Hidden behind the historic veneer are the trappings of the modern world, with wireless internet connectivity and the latest, and large, internet televisions. Of course, at The Dorchester, if you struggle with the technology there is no such thing as "IT support". No, here we have "e-butlers".

The bathrooms are a study in white marble, twin sinks, huge mirrors, power showers and the deepest baths I've ever seen – Hollywood giant Charlton Heston is claimed to have said the baths at this hotel were the only ones big enough in London for him to put his knees under the water.

## The Grill

It's not so much a case of being shown to your seat in The Grill as being shown to your tartan sofa, which makes a change, in this heavily Scottish-themed restaurant.

The décor perhaps takes a moment to get your head around, but soon you find yourself charmed by the cosy and comfortable atmosphere. The lack of pretension is a surprise for a top London eatery, and conversation hums along convivially in this relaxed setting.

What is serious in The Grill though is the standard of service and food.

Before you even start to peruse the menu you are greeted with a choice of champagne (organic, rose etc) from the highly educated sommelier.



Living



TRAVEL The Dorchester

And then to the food. Current highlights include teal with bacon and black pudding for starters, which is a mixture of smoky, woody rich flavours, followed by delicious slow-cooked belly pork.

## The Spa

Well here's what they say: "The Dorchester Spa has reopened after a complete transformation. Exuding 1930s Art Deco glamour combined with a contemporary edge. Unique aspects include a chandelier of south-pacific pearls and an indulgent Spatisserie".

Here's what I say, it's fabulous, providing an interesting modern minimalist chic oasis compared to the opulence of the rest of the hotel. Oh, and a 'Spatisserie' is a little restaurant offering light (diet, organic, non-fattening) fare.

The chandelier they are so proud of is pretty impressive and the surroundings are clearly luxurious, making you feel you are being treated



like a millionaire. My deep-tissue massage was as it should be (on the verge of painful) but my therapist clearly knew her trade, working on a damaged shoulder until it felt good as new.

For the ladies out there, the Dorchester Spa's facials are by internationally renowned Vaishaly and Carol Joy London, while treatments are offered by European skincare brand Kerstin Florian, I hope that means something to you.

## Fact file

In the run-up to the festive season The Dorchester is offering a number of Christmas packages, including the 'Family Time' package, which is priced from £335 and includes a complimentary children's room, available from December 18 to 29 and is subject to availability.

For all reservations or more information on The Dorchester phone 0207 7629 888

Scott travelled from York to London by rail with National Express East Coast: book via [www.nationalexpresseast-coast.com](http://www.nationalexpresseast-coast.com), call 08457 225225 or visit any staffed station.

Adult "flights" on the London Eye cost £17.50, children under four go free, river cruises cost £12 for adults, children under four again free. For full details or to book tickets online see [www.london-eye.com](http://www.london-eye.com)

