



Rejuvenate at the Pera Istanbul

By Inka Piega

Talk about the royal treatment! If you plan to visit Istanbul and have a few bucks to spare, there is no better place to stay than the emblematic Pera Palace Hotel. You can't beat it for location, atmosphere, luxury and pampering. The hotel was after all first built to cater to the well heeled and famous clientele who, following the fashion of the time, travelled on the Orient Express to the city on the Bosphorus and had nowhere adequate to stay.

Along came the Pera Palace. The art deco marvel opened its doors in 1892 and featured the first electrically operated elevator in Turkey, as well as hot and cold running water. It was also the venue of the first ever fashion show in Istanbul in 1926. Countless celebrities have stayed there, from Hemingway to Orson Welles to Atatürk, Greta Garbo and, of course, Agatha Christie.

Part of the thriller *Murder on the*

Orient Express was written in her favorite room: number 411. A bit the worse for wear, the hotel closed for a while to undergo extensive renovation, which lasted a few years. In September 2010, it opened its doors again, more glamorous than ever before and with the addition of the latest amenities to cater to refined clientele tastes.

Let's take the aforementioned royal treatment step by step. The hotel will collect you from the airport in

a chauffeured limousine and upon arrival, the doorman will step out, open your door and greet you by name even if you have never been a guest before. It's simply a nice touch and makes you feel welcome.

I couldn't get the Agatha Christie suite, now decorated in black and burgundy red, but I had absolutely no complaints of being allocated the Greta Garbo suite. Furnished with antiques, among them a fabulous dresser, no luxuries were missing,

Renovating Pera Palace Istanbul

as-Quischote

Timeless decadence displayed in the Kubbeli Ceilings

neither in the suite nor in the bathroom.

After unpacking, I went downstairs to the famous Orient Bar, where many a writer downed more than a few cocktails and bottles of champagne. With a bit of imagination, I could see Hercule Poirot sitting in a corner, twisting his moustache and pondering his latest case; or Sarah Bernhardt, swishing in a whirl of silk, furs and pearls. The decoration, the ceiling,

the skylights all will do this to you. During refurbishment, a treasure trove of Christoffl silver was discovered hidden away in the cellar, which is now polished and used in the elegant dining room.

Where, you might ask, does the rejuvenating part come in? Well it's the modern spa, which is responsible for that. Located in the lower floor, you enter an oasis of magic blue light, soft music and every imaginable kind of beauty treatment.

You can either swim in the pool, keep fit in the state of the art gym or have a Turkish bath and massage in the hamam. Beauty products used are specially made for the Pera Palace in France.

Once in that blue wonderful world, my worries vanished and I like to think that with them, a few years were shed as well.

As far as sightseeing is concerned, the hotel couldn't be located more

conveniently. Just a few steps from Taksim Square, I took the metro to the historical district of Sultanahmed, where all the famous sites like Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Grand Bazaar and more are located, all within walking distance of each other. Tram and metro are the best way to move around in Istanbul, far better than taxi, because traffic in the city is diabolical at all hours.

Pedestrian areas around Taksim Square are full with shops, if you

fancy a spot of retail therapy and after a full day of enjoying all the marvels of Istanbul. I made my way back to the Pera Palace and slept like an angel in Greta Garbo's bed.

For me, the measure of quality of a hotel is room service. Instead of having breakfast from the buffet, I

decided to have it in my room the next morning. Not only did it arrive in a timely fashion, but my eggs were cooked to perfection and actually hot! So was the coffee in a splendid silver pot, whereas my orange juice was ice cold and freshly squeezed. The Pera Palace is not a large hotel, which I actually like a lot, but it is big

on quality and service.

I whiled a few hours away, just sitting on the outside terrace overlooking the Golden Horn and enjoying a book. They have a quite extensive library with plenty of leather bound books (no cheap paperbacks). Every detail in this hotel is thought out and

breathes luxury.

What else could you desire to rejuvenate?

Pera Palace Hotel Jumeirah
Meşrutiyet Caddesi No: 52
34430 Beyoğlu/Istanbul, Turkey
+90 212 377 4000



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Endless relaxation possibilities at the Spa

