

HOSPITALITY



CAPITAL COMFORT

Beijing's newest luxury hotel offers the best of both worlds for discerning travellers.

By Gwyneth Roberts



The Oriental Plaza development along East Chang'an Avenue may not be Beijing's most famous landmark but it is rapidly becoming one of the most popular. Just a few minutes walk from the Forbidden City, the prestigious complex adds a physical dimension to this historic capital that reflects China's emergence as an economic global powerhouse.

Developed by a Hutchison-led consortium, Oriental Plaza is a modern retail, office and residential complex of epic proportions. In fact, it is the largest in Mainland China, covering a million square feet of land.

The development is made up of The Malls, featuring five themed shopping arcades with more than 200 brand-name stores, a six-theatre multiplex, and a central plaza with a musical fountain and landscaped gardens — all serviced by an enormous indoor car park. The Towers consists of eight commercial buildings that are the Mainland headquarters of many global companies, and four blocks of luxury serviced apartments. The five-star Grand Hyatt Beijing hotel is the resplendent centrepiece.

When the developers of the Oriental Plaza were looking for a company to manage their luxury hotel property, they turned to the Grand Hyatt.

The Chicago-based Hyatt Hotels Group needed a site in the Chinese capital to complement its network of deluxe properties in prestigious locations around the world. Talks began in August 2001 and in October that year the Grand Hyatt Beijing opened to the public.



"It was an opportunity for both Hyatt and the developers," says Mr Foued EL Mabrouk, Director of Marketing for the Grand Hyatt Beijing. "It presented value on both sides."

Hyatt now has seven hotels in Greater China, with properties in Shanghai, Tianjin, Xian, Taipei, Hong Kong and Macau.

The Grand Hyatt Beijing's opening had its challenges: doors opened within weeks of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York, which brought business traffic out of the United States and many other parts of the world to a grinding halt. The SARS outbreak last year was another heavy blow for the Asian hotel industry. Yet the Grand Hyatt Beijing has already made an indelible mark on the city's budding hotel scene.

"We are positioned as the leading hotel in the city," says Mr EL Mabrouk. "We have had a good start for a new hotel."

Last year, Grand Hyatt Beijing achieved the No.1 ranking in terms of revenue per available room in the city. Corporate and business travellers make up 90% of the guest mix, mostly top-level executives from multinational companies.

The hotel is also known as the city's premier high-end meeting venue. It hosted the World Economic Forum's China Summit last April and November, which draws top-level decision-makers and strategists from around the world.

Part of the success of Grand Hyatt Beijing is its artful blend of old and new. It combines ultra-modern facilities and contemporary design with the rich and diverse history of which the city is so proud.

In a metropolis that is developing at hel-

ter-skelter pace, the hotel is firmly embedded in a powerful cultural heritage. It is built using the quadrangular principles of ancient Chinese architecture. Fountains at the entrance initiate a water theme based on *fengshui* principles, guiding the visitor into

the grand foyer illuminated by sweeping floor-to-ceiling windows that allow plenty of natural light.

On the south side, the hotel looks on to the busy East Chang'an Avenue, ten minutes' walk from Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City and the Great Hall of the People and close to the popular Wangfujing shopping area. To the north it overlooks traditional Chinese buildings believed to have housed the emperor's tutor in years gone by, and now part of a teaching hospital.

The hotel's contemporary architecture is enhanced by the understated luxury of natural wood, glass, stainless steel and marble finishes. Its permanent art collection includes the work of leading Chinese artists put together by Hong Kong-based contemporary art expert Alice King, who owns the Alisan Fine Arts Gallery. The works of renowned painters and sculptors — including Wang Dalin, Jiang Je and Long Xiang — are combined with a tasteful collection of Chinese ceramics and furniture, fine silks and fresh floral arrangements, which enhance private rooms and public areas alike.

Throughout the hotel, the emphasis is on privacy and discretion. It has 582 rooms and suites, full conference and business centre facilities and boasts state-of-the-art communications systems and a resort-style gym that meet the needs of any high-end corporate or leisure traveller. Food and beverage outlets

SENSATIONAL SERVICE

The 582-room Grand Hyatt Beijing employs close to 900 staff, ranging from cleaners and concierges to masseurs, sales staff and even an Italian chef.

The management team is led by Christopher Koehler, who has recently relocated from his post as Resident Manager at Grand Hyatt Shanghai. Mr Koehler is switching roles with Peter Chau, who has been at the helm since the hotel opened in 2001.

"At Hyatt we believe that fresh eyes can look at a hotel in a different way," says Director of Marketing Foued EL Mabrouk. "It is part of our philosophy of constantly seeking to improve and strengthen the brand in all locations."

Staff training is a continual process, with the hotel's dedicated training divi-

sion tailor-making a year-round calendar based on the needs of each department. On any given day the hotel's three training rooms are filled with Hyatt students learning anything from English to hygiene and presentation.

"Ongoing training is part of our positioning," says Mr EL Mabrouk. "We want to be different and we have our own unique style and way of delivering. Beijing is a competitive market and we also need to compete on an international level."

Training in the hotel complements a group-wide programme whereby Hyatt aims to maintain its global brand promise.

"We always respect the local culture of the place in which we operate," says Mr EL Mabrouk. "And we need the level of service and delivery of that service to be the same wherever we are."



SOUND BUSINESS SENSE

If the walls of the Grand Hyatt Beijing could only talk they would have a few interesting tales to tell. Deals are done every day, and often late into the night, in the top hotel of the capital of the world's fastest growing economy.

"All business starts in Beijing," says Director of Marketing Mr EL Mabrouk. "You may want to operate in Guangzhou but you first need to come to the capital to obtain the necessary approval and licensing."

Most of the hotel's bookings are made from the US, followed by Hong Kong and Mainland China. The majority of guests are employed in multinational companies in major industries such as finance, IT and telecommunications.

Many corporate guests make use of the hotel's Grand Club facilities, incorporating four floors of exclusive accommodation on the upper floors.

On arrival by chauffeur-driven limousine or taxi (just less than an hour from Beijing Capital International Airport) guests are whisked discreetly up to the 17th floor Grand Club lounge where they enjoy a pri-

vate check-in and a welcome drink before being escorted to their rooms.

Busy executives can easily stay in touch with the world at large as well as the office, wherever it may be. Rooms and suites offer seamless communication systems with computer dataports, free broadband access, dual-line or direct-line telephones and televisions with a selection of international channels.

The business centre provides confidential services, fax, copying and computer facilities as well as an information library.

The Grand Club lounge serves complimentary continental breakfasts and evening cocktails and canapés, offering business travellers just the right environment to prepare for the day or relax and recharge in the company of colleagues and like-minded travellers.

Thanks to its prime location, the hotel allows corporate travellers a unique combination of business and pleasure.

"We've had guests who say they've been to Beijing half a dozen times and have never seen the Forbidden City," says Mr EL Mabrouk. "Our location means guests can

see the sights when they have a bit of free time and still get on with their work."

The hotel's health and fitness complex known as Club Oasis, built on a Balinese theme, offers a restorative retreat from the hustle and bustle of downtown Beijing. Guests can use the resort-style 50-metre pool while immersed in tropical vegetation and the calming sounds of birdsong, which filters underwater, beneath a vast virtual sky that adjusts according to the time of day. The centre also boasts state-of-the-art gym equipment as well as several Jacuzzis, saunas, steambaths and a solarium. Massage facilities are available in a dedicated area or in the privacy of guest suites.

The hotel offers 1,600 square metres of meeting and function facilities, with all rooms on the same level and equipped with the latest technology to handle anything from a global conference to an annual general meeting, cocktail party, product launch or private board meeting.

The in-house Convention Service Department offers a one-stop shop for clients who deal with a dedicated skilled meeting planner when organising an event.



are among the best in the city. All restaurants have private dining areas and VIP rooms catering to guests' distinctive needs.

Guests can dine at the Grand Café on the mezzanine level, which offers French, Italian and home-style Beijing cooking 24 hours a day. An interactive show kitchen allows diners to watch skilled chefs prepare meals with the freshest ingredients. Within the Grand Café is Da Giorgio, a fine boutique restaurant offering classic Italian food.

The hotel's newest dining experience, Made In China, offers Northern Chinese cuisine in another compelling mix of old and new. Here again diners can enjoy an interactive experience with traditional and modern dishes prepared before their eyes, as well as an impressive wine cellar and a dedicated Chinese tearoom.

Noble Court serves Cantonese cuisine prepared by master chefs from Hong Kong in an elegant setting resembling the home of a Chinese nobleman. The hotel also has its own patisserie, which prepares Hyatt-style desserts, pastries, cakes and chocolates made from the freshest ingredients. The Fountain Lounge offers afternoon teas and evening drinks.

Grand Hyatt Beijing's latest venue is the Redmoon bar and restaurant, which has caused a stir among the city's new up-and-coming set since opening late last year. Created by renowned Japanese interior

designers Super Potato together with Hong Kong graphic designer Alan Chan, it offers a trendy private club experience perfect for pre-dinner drinks or late-night cocktails. The venue includes a sushi bar and cigar bar, while a four-piece female band Moon Mood performs modern music on traditional Chinese instruments.

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With its innovative concepts, superior service and twin commitment to heritage and progress, the Grand Hyatt Beijing offers a distinctive experience for visitors to the Chinese capital.

“This hotel in many ways reflects the

changing face of China,” says Mr EL Mabrouk, a Beijing veteran of 20 years. “There’s been a complete change in this country. The standards of living have improved enormously. Here we are positioned in a deluxe hotel on the footsteps of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square alongside an advanced entertainment and shopping complex that puts Beijing on a par with any advanced city in the region. The progress has been enormous.”

The hotel's commitment to excellence has certainly paid off. It has twice been named the best hotel in Beijing by *Business Traveller* magazine and in March was voted the best hotel in Beijing by *Asiamoney* magazine, which polled executives and corporate travellers at top companies in the region.

“At present we are concentrating on growing our market share and growing profits for the owning companies,” says Mr EL Mabrouk.

With two new F&B outlets added last year and a full range of services and facilities, the young hotel has already distinguished itself as a dynamic presence.

As the city gears up for the 2008 Olympic Games and consolidates its position as one of the world's major business and tourism centres, the Grand Hyatt Beijing is comfortably positioned at the forefront of Oriental opulence. 

