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(FREE) The creme de la creme

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December 2008

How the world's wealthiest travel in China

The door softly beeps and you turn the brass handle to enter. As you walk inside, dim lamp lighting fades on and a piano waltz begins playing from the living room. Tossing your briefcase and coat on a chair, you loosen your tie and phone your personal chef to the room to prepare dinner. By 7pm, glass of wine in hand and smells from the kitchen wafting by, you are relaxing on a leather easy chair near the window. The lights of neighboring Jinmao Tower flicker on beyond the glass, with the rest of downtown Shanghai spreading out in all directions.

Welcome to the Park Hyatt Shanghai's Chairman Suite. From the 88th floor of the Shanghai World Financial Center, you are looking down from the world's highest hotel.

At US\$12,000 per night, a stay at the Chairman Suite is not within the bounds of most business travelers' budgets. But for the upper echelon of executives, Shanghai is fast catching up with cities like New York, London and Tokyo in being able to offer sumptuous luxury to those travelers who can afford it.

CEOs, celebrities and wealthy vacationers are all common guests at Park Hyatt's suites but their expectations and priorities tend to differ, according to the hotel's director of rooms Samuel Dabinett. "For high-end business people, it's about efficiency," he said.

To that end, each suite guest has a butler, chef, and car and driver at their disposal 24 hours a day. The hotel will also pack and unpack your luggage for you. The Park Hyatt will even research future guests' preferences - information gleaned from previous hotel stays - two weeks before arrival to supply the suite with food, beverages and music to the guests' liking.

"One key for us is not over-servicing," Dabinett said. "Everyone thinks guests pay this high rate and want caviar and French champagne, but it's not always about that. Today, luxury is all about things being personalized and easy, and about having a choice."

For Park Hyatt customers with leisure time, having use of a private car and guide to the city is a bonus of staying in a suite. Dabinett notes that leisure travelers and celebrities tend to demand more from the hotel, with requests ranging from architecture tours around city to last-minute ice cream parties for their children.

Francine Martin, whose company East of the Sun leads personalized shopping excursions around Shanghai, said most of her customers stay in five-star and boutique hotels and are combining work with a holiday. Shopping requests from high-end clients include hand-painted wallpaper, antique furniture, designer clothing, silk-bound gift items and jewelry. Clients have spent as much as US\$40,000 in a single six-hour outing.

Do not disturb

Privacy is another top priority for leisure and high-end business travelers alike. Chauffeured limousine transport to and from the airport is included for most high-end guests. Dubai-based hotel management company Jumeirah, which will open a five-star property in Shanghai's Xintiandi area next year, will go even further to provide exclusivity. It will offer a private elevator, private workout area, a spa treatment area, two tea houses and personal swimming pool for guests staying at its top suite, the Chairman Spa Villa.

The Chairman Spa Villa will be 1,300 square meters, about four times as large as the average five-star suite and about seven times larger than the Park Hyatt's 180-sqm Chairman Suite.

Wendy Xu, director of communications for Jumeirah Hantang Xintiandi, said she expects CEOs, particularly from Dubai, to stay in the Chairman Spa Villa Suite as well as the hotel's 13 other smaller suites. Some of the suites will include an outdoor terrace with a hot tub overlooking the shops and restaurants of Xintiandi.

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Xu said Jumeirah has not yet set prices for the hotel's suites, but basic rooms will be priced at around US\$600 per night, comparable to the Park Hyatt's standard rooms at the city's top end.

And while China's hospitality industry will face greater economic uncertainty in the coming months, Park Hyatt's Dabinett expects suite occupancy levels to hold up well.

"At this level, you don't see as much of a downturn. If you're paying US\$12,000 a night, you probably already have a lot of money."

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