

LAP OF LUXURY IN THE HEART OF CHICAGO



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

The Langham, Chicago, has an instant pedigree. The five-star hotel opened one year ago and rocketed to Chicago's No. 1 choice on Trip Advisor. And the influential blog at forbestravelguide.com called The Langham "undeniably elegant" and "streamlined and chic."

The Langham is prized for its exquisite Chuan Spa, Travelle restaurant, the luxurious understatement of master architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and sleek, stunning interiors by his grandson, Dirk Lohan.

All great points, but perhaps service is paramount. When you arrive, a female greeter sporting a Langham-pink Chanel suit guides you to the front desk. On the elite Club Level, butlers await, decked out in morning coats with pin-striped trousers, like Carson on Downton Abbey. The Langham's concierges are members of the elite Les Clefs d'Or and you can ask away. Go on, test 'em. Lavender pillow or memory foam? Sir, ear plugs for a helicopter ride? And the helicopter, madam?

The Langham, Chicago, occupies the first 13 floors of a 1970s skyscraper that has been recognized by the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. You might be familiar with the work of Mies van der Rohe. He adopted the phrase "less is more" from a song to describe late 20th-century minimalism and he designed the Barcelona chair, as well as scores of buildings, including one in Montreal. Westmount Square on Greene Ave. shares the same black steel and smoked-glass structure as The Langham, as well as the designer's favoured flow-through travertine concourses and colonnaded plazas.

Indoors, The Langham is serene and discreet. There is nothing showy or brassy here. Mellow lounge music sets a quiet mood. Elevators glide silently. And the hotel's glass walls are windows on the vibrant cityscape of Chicago, but they shield pampered guests from the big-city bustle below.

You'll perceive a whisper of England — afternoon tea is served on Wedgwood china — and the doormen sport bowler hats. As well, there is a hint of Asia in the contemporary décor that is



The pool at The Langham, Chicago, is a sanctuary. PHOTOS: THE LANGHAM, CHICAGO

subtly accented with Chinese graphics and screens.

Still, you are in the strongly beating heart of the United States' third-largest city, after New York and Los Angeles. The Langham is within blocks of The Loop business district and Michigan Ave.'s Magnificent Mile, as well as such other landmarks as the 1880s Jewelers' Building, the circular Marina Towers and the John Hancock Center. The Langham overlooks the Chicago River with its popular promenade and tourism cruises, and Lake Michigan beyond.

LUXURIOUS DETAILS

The Langham, Chicago, is a full-service hotel with 316 rooms and suites, among the largest accommodations in the city. The décor throughout is soft neutrals with touches of ebony wood and white leather sofas. The hotel is strong on original art, starting

with a mobile of discs that dangle from the ceiling through two lobby spaces.

Mies van der Rohe also favoured the phrase "God is in the details," and The Langham's technology proves it. The advanced lighting and climate systems have easy-touch controls. And besides Bose sound systems and 55-inch TVs, there is a new experience: The bathroom is enclosed in glass, making the guest room more open, but with the touch of a button, the window turns opaque for privacy. Tradition still counts, though. The desk in each guest room holds a box of fancy writing paper embossed with a gold L logo.

If you stay in an elite Club Room, you'll have lots of extras such as private check-in and access to a lounge with free food and drinks. Carlos Carrera, director of The Langham's butler services, helps VIP guests with

such rarefied perks as unpacking or butler-drawn baths with the brand's signature pink roses.

CULINARY EXPERIENCES

Travelle, The Langham's dining room, is a sleek, open space with cushy leather seats in caramel and chocolate set against industrial-chic bronze accents. The central kitchen is enclosed in glass so guests can see the chefs at work. Light radiates day and night, floor-to-ceiling windows yield views of Chicago's skyscrapers and a wall of wine glows in glass.

The cuisine has a Mediterranean accent interpreted by executive chef Tim Graham. Intriguing lunch dishes include lamb burgers with harissa aioli and feta, and spicy Portuguese chicken wraps. For dinner, Graham suggests squid ink pasta, roasted prawns, squash-coated cod, piri-piri chicken, suckling pig with rhubarb, and tahini-marinated skirt steak. The side dishes are a world of tastes: creamy polenta, kale, forest mushrooms, caramelized turnips with mint and coriander carrot.

SPA LIFE

Chuan has such distinctive relaxation experiences as a bathing ritual of herb-infused steam rooms and saunas, and a Dream Lounge with heated pod chairs that melt tension with aromatherapy (scents), chromatherapy (lights) and soft new-age sounds.

It's all heavenly. If God created the details, she probably rested afterward at the Chuan Spa.

IF YOU GO

Porter flies Montreal to Chicago via Toronto, with prices starting at approximately \$400. Air Canada flies non-stop to Chicago from Montreal and Toronto.

The Langham, Chicago: 312-923-9988, 855-696-6664, chicago.langhamhotels.com; 330 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago. Langham, an emerging brand in North America with head office in Hong Kong, has opened in Chicago, Boston and Pasadena, Calif., as well Toronto's Eaton Chelsea, Canada's largest hotel. Langham's 1865 loyalty club offers benefits and Aeroplan points.

Price: Rooms start at \$395 U.S. per night; suites cost more, including indoor pool and whirlpool, fitness studio. Club rooms add butler service, spa access and lounge with full breakfast, afternoon tea, cocktail hour, clothes pressing, computers, board room.

Travelle: Breakfast, lunch, dinner and bar daily; 312-923-7705, travellechicago.com.

The Pavilion lobby lounge: The Langham Afternoon Tea with Wedgwood; three seatings from 3 p.m., reservations requested. The Parlour at The Pavilion: sundaes, sorbets and floats, from 6 p.m.

Chicago info: www.choos-eichicago.com

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