

Enjoy a stylish staycation in the heart of downtown

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BOUTIQUE HOTEL HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

From the moment you check in to the moment you first open your room door and take in the surroundings, this is a stylish and sophisticated experience, with an art deco vibe mixed in with classic and 21st century room trappings. There is L'Occitane amenities, Egyptian cotton bedding, 24-hour in-room dining and a 50-inch LCD HD television with Crave interactive and free high-speed wireless. It also includes a suite club floor and the Dividend private club lounge offering light breakfast and evening hors-d'oeuvre with bar service. And yes, it's pet friendly.

DOWNTOWN'S A THING AGAIN

Located at the corner of Howe and Pender, it is right in the heart of Vancouver's financial and shopping district, the latter a big selling-point for staycationers who don't get downtown very often. And there is, of course, the buzz around the downtown core on weekends. Restaurants are rocking, the Coal Harbour seawall is teeming with tourists and special events are back on the schedule. On a pre-dinner walk I came across a big see-through cube on Jack Poole Plaza surrounded by makeshift viewing stands. Turns out the Canadian squash championships were in town and this venue was akin to centre court at Wimbledon.

A TASTE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

As with shopping and shows, dining is a draw during a staycation, and in downtown Vancouver the biggest issue is deciding which fantastic restaurant to spend the night at. The good news for EXchange guests who love Greek food, the elevator is all the transportation you'll need. And again, with its second-floor location, you needn't be forgiven if you don't know much about Hydra Vancouver Estiatorio Mediterranean. When I'm asked by someone where should they eat downtown, it's now my first answer.

This is fine-dining Greek food in a bustling atmosphere with an excellent Greek wine list, and an atmosphere reminiscent of an Athens taverna. My well-travelled dining companion proclaimed the calamari among the best she'd ever had, and put the lamb main course on the short list, too. The restaurant also serves as the breakfast location for hotel guests.

SPECIAL AND THEN SOME

Typically, a hotel has a handful of package deals; the EXchange Hotel website has nearly 20 listed, ranging from the classic Romantic, Bubbly Breakfast and Bed & Breakfast to the more eclectic Gas Card Package, Cruise into Comfort and Wine, Dine and Room is Fine packages.

After this staycation, I'll never cross the intersection of Howe and Pender without taking in the EXchange Hotel building — and if I'm not in a rush I might just pop in for another look at the EXchange Hotel Heritage Lobby.



The EXchange Hotel heritage lobby on Howe Street has been restored to its original brilliance as it was on the day the Vancouver Stock Exchange Building opened in 1929. POOYA NABEI

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