



THE PORTLAND

London is effortlessly cool: magnificent parks and historic squares, monuments aplenty, museums amassed with regal plunder, galleries where art both appeases and amazes – and it showcases theatres hottest talent.

THE KENSINGTON, LONDON

Set in the heart of all this, in one of London's most desirable and manicured neighbourhoods, along the elegant, tree-lined Queen's Gate boulevard, is The Kensington – a magnificent Regency townhouse mansion hotel. It's brilliant white façade is characteristic of the affluent 19th Century district, which is home to London's world-famous Harrods and Harvey Nichols, numerous museums, a concert hall and Lamborghini London. The green spaces of Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park are nearby too, making it great for morning walks.

Following a year long, £20-million renovation, few hotels can now hold a candle to the Kensington for its sheer sense of occasion. It's been arranged in an effortless air of refinement, to feel like an understated private residence and disguises its size well. From the outside you'd never guess its proportions – 126 rooms and 24 suites which sprawls across four enormous Victorian townhouses. Yet inside it's intimate and engaging which may be why it's a favourite amongst financiers and aristocrats.

All the action happens in the three inter-connecting light-infused drawing rooms – a buzzing bubble of daytime meetings and attentive serving staff. The high ceilings, tear-drop chandeliers, open fireplaces

and large bay windows provide a tranquil ambiance reminiscent of an exclusive members' club, complete with a hidden whisky bar and a carefully curated library. It's a graceful blend of heritage and style, evoking a sense of Victorian grandeur.

For a treat have yourself a gluten-free Afternoon Tea of sandwiches, savouries, cakes, scones and a choice of exotic teas – or a freshly made smoothie from The Juicery (try their Hollywood – consisting of carrot, orange, turmeric and mint).

The stylish 'Town House' restaurant (which has its own discreet entrance from the street on Manson Place) is busy at breakfast and lunch then quiets down at dinner. The à la carte menus focus on fresh, seasonal, locally-sourced modern English cuisine with an accent on healthy options.

Their pumpkin soup, served with sourdough bread, is especially delicious. So too is their Dorset crab on toast with watercress and apple. The tiger prawns in harissa and lime is definitely something to write home about. The hand-picked wine list makes for interesting reading too. Take a look at the huge brass doors leading into the Town House – they've been taken from Dublin's General Post Office and the scene of the infamous 1916 Easter Rising. Can you spot the bullet holes?

At night, the chic K-Bar comes >>





» alive. Its masculine, dark tones, leather wingback chairs, tartan, teal and violet accents combined with heritage sports memorabilia, wooden book shelves housing distressed books, give it the feel of a members' club. Their dazzling cocktail menu has signature recipes alongside timeless classics – try the Hemingway Daiquiri, expertly crafted by award-winning bartender Ben Manchester.

There's no such thing as a bad room at The Kensington, but cream of the crop is the beautifully appointed 753ft² luxurious Brompton Suite. It imparts the feel of an exquisite luxury apartment in a majestic historic building and has the look of an art curators London apartment with signature details like oak herringbone flooring, a 1960s table lamp, window dressings designed to allow maximum natural light to flood in and exceptional views over South Kensington's rooftops.

It oozes period charm, sleek contemporary style and delivers all the modern-day trappings 21st living requires. It reflects the essence of refined luxury and timeless glamour in the generous bedroom, with floor-to-ceiling windows, an uber-luxurious four poster bed and a large flat-screen TV. In the large ornate marble bathroom is a twin-basin, a generous walk-in shower, an extra deep roll-top bath, bespoke toiletries and its own TV with tiled



surrounds. The separate full-sized sitting area has an iPod dock, DVD player and flat-screen TV, a well-stocked mini-bar and a small library of books. The cherry on top is the complimentary bottle of wine, fresh fruit and huge arrangement of fragrant flowers.

Finding this gem of a hotel is as easy as taking the Tube to South Kensington station, a few minutes' walk down Brompton and you're there. Ask after their blue Pashley

vintage bikes as an alternative to exploring the neighbourhood – be sure to ask after the packed picnic hamper option.

Places to go

The Royal Albert Hall, the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum and the wonderful V&A, as well as Kensington Palace and Hyde Park are all within walking distance. There's swanky shopping galore with Knightsbridge and Kensington High Street nearby. Should you want to catch a West End show, it's only a short Tube ride into the centre of London. Whilst you're there explore Covent Garden's boutiques and markets.

Eat & Drink

For great oysters try South Kensington's Bumpkin (102 Old Brompton Rd), or the mozzarella bar at Obica's (96 Draycott Ave); just a little further along Draycott, at 112, is Daphne's authentic Italian fare – have a look at their black-truffle-infused set menu. For British comfort food head to Tom's Kitchen (Cale St) for eggs and bacon and gourmet platters. If you're in the mood for some trendy Thai, there's Patara (181 Fulham Rd). For a good pint there's the Admiral Codrington (17 Mossop St) – a cosy boozier with velvet private booths. They have excellent burgers on the food menu. [AC](#)

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