

→ FLIGHT AIR NEW ZEALAND, BUSINESS PREMIER CLASS

THE FLIGHT A ten and a half hour flight (NZ02) from Los Angeles to London Heathrow operated by a B777-300ER. I sat in seat 11B in the business class cabin, set in a 1-2-1 herringbone configuration.

THE CHECK-IN I used the dedicated Business Class check-in desks where an attendant labeled my bags and explained where I would find the lounge.

THE LOUNGE There was a good selection of drinks available as well as an array of cold food and soup. There was complimentary wifi, plenty of seating plus quieter work stations and showers (since my trip a new lounge has opened).

THE SEAT There were 44 seats in the Business Class cabin all with direct aisle access. The 67.5" seat had numerous recline positions down to a fully lie-flat bed. An Ottoman footrest also doubled up as a seat for passengers travelling with companions. The inflight entertainment system was available from gate to gate on the 12.1" inch touchscreen and there were USB, iPod/iPad and power points in the seat.

THE SERVICE Before take-off I was offered drinks and a hot towel, and the crew member also asked what I would like to drink once we were in the air. A novel safety video starring



Bear Grylls certainly got my attention. The meal service comprised a starter and choice of roast chicken, Angus beef burger, cod or creamy mushroom and hazelnut soup. For dessert there was ice cream, mousse or cheeses. After dinner, the crew made up the fully flat bed with added mattress, and I was offered a duvet and two full-sized pillows. A variety of snacks were available during the night via the touchscreen entertainment system. Shortly before our descent, fruit juice, yoghurts, fresh fruit and croissants with a selection of jams were served.

THE VERDICT An extremely comfortable flat bed seat. The added mattress enabled me to sleep very well throughout the flight. The food, beverages and in-flight service were of an extremely high standard. The in-flight entertainment was great, with a superb range of entertainment available.

THE DETAILS Air New Zealand flies daily between London Heathrow and Los Angeles and on to Auckland. Business Premier fares from London Heathrow to Los Angeles return start from £2,950. www.airnewzealand.com

DAVID CLARE

→ HOTEL BRANDS HATCH PLACE HOTEL & SPA

THE HOTEL Part of Handpicked Hotels, this 38-room, four-star Georgian country manor house in Kent is surrounded by 12 acres of parkland and gardens, plus a dozen extra rooms in a mews. Close to J3 of the M25 and J2 of the M20, it has the Brands Hatch motor racing circuit next door.

THE CHECK-IN The small reception area just inside the front door provided a big welcome and the formalities were dealt with quickly.

THE ROOM I had an executive room which including a seating area and small but perfectly kitted-out bathroom with heated towel rail, power shower and good-size toiletries. The neutral décor, mirrored throughout the hotel, gave a nod to country house hotel styling with heavy drapes and dark furnishings. There was a laptop size safe, desk, flatscreen TV and free wifi.

THE BUSINESS There was free wifi throughout the hotel and five meeting rooms, all with natural light. The Terrace Suite has its own entrance - and terrace - and takes up to 160 theatre-style or 90 cabaret. There are four smaller conference rooms for up to 50, including the Garden Room. Day delegate rates are from £40; residential from £148. There was a Business Centre too. Team-building activities such as archery and clay



pigeon shooting take place on the front lawn. **THE FACILITIES** Dining is either at the formal two AA rosette dining room, with private dining area, or the more informal brasserie-style Atrium Lounge inside the spa. A three-course table d'hôte menu is priced £37. The hotel's CSR policy includes measuring food miles, recycling and residential bees. Leisure facilities included tennis and squash courts, treatment rooms, gym and indoor pool, steam room and Jacuzzi. **THE VERDICT** Attentive yet unobtrusive staff made this an enjoyable stay. It's a perfect

venue for residential training for up to a dozen delegates or a boardroom getaway only an hour's drive from London or 30 minutes by train. Petrolheads will love the constant drone of the racing track but I'm not sure others would 9-4.30pm every day. There are plans to fit A/C over the next 18 months and also secondary glazing.

THE DETAILS Brands Hatch Road, Fawkham, Kent DA3 8NQ. Midweek rates from £95 for a standard room inclusive of VAT and breakfast. www.handpickedhotels.co.uk

GILLIAN UPTON

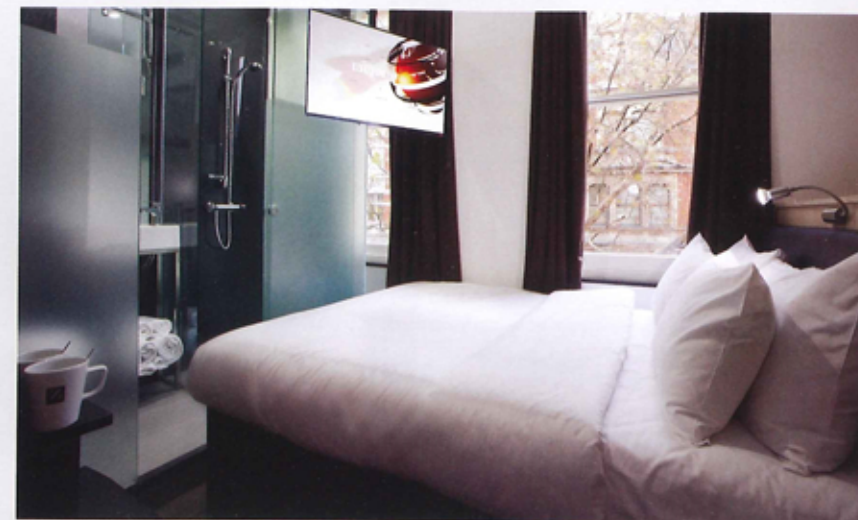
→ HOTEL Z HOTEL PICCADILLY, LONDON

THE HOTEL The Z Hotel Piccadilly is one of five properties - with more to come - in the group, and it's a brand that comfortably fits into the new wave of budget design hotels. This particular property, a former office building, now has 112 bedrooms across seven floors and is located just off Haymarket.

THE CHECK-IN I arrived at the hotel mid-afternoon and stepped into the ground floor all-in-one lobby, café and bar area. The staff were busy attending to a couple of guests so I was invited to take a seat and grab a drink from the refrigerator, though I never quite got my head around the 'help yourself' policy in terms of what was complimentary and what was not.

THE ROOM My fairly compact Queen room was of the variety with windows ('inside rooms' do not have them) and was decked out in simple, clean-cut surfaces in chocolates and browns. It came with a reasonable-size double bed, wall-mounted flatscreen TV with complete Sky package, kettle with tea and coffee, air conditioning, hanging space on the wall and frosted glass cubicle-style bathroom with a good walk-in shower. There was enough space for a desk too, which would have been a useful addition.

THE FACILITIES This is central London on a



(designer) shoestring so there's no meeting rooms or leisure facilities. Wifi access is free and the ground floor Z Café serves as a multipurpose eating, drinking and casual meeting place.

THE VERDICT The Z Hotels group promises 'concentrated style, an out of town price and the city right at your feet' which was certainly all true of my experience. The room was ideal as a quiet and comfortable crash

pad for the night after a day of meetings and events and, in fact, an 'inside room' - ie, one without a window - might even have sufficed. An early evening wine and cheese 'meet and mingle' with the staff and other guests is a nice touch.

THE DETAILS Z Hotel Piccadilly, 2 Orange Street, London, WC2H 7DF. Rooms start from £85 per night. www.thezhotels.com

ANDY HOSKINS

→ HOTEL PULLMAN PARIS TOUR EIFFEL

THE HOTEL On the Left Bank, at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, this four-star hotel completed a major 15-month overhaul in March. The redesign saw the 430-room hotel - a Pullman since 2009 - assume the mantle of flagship property of the Accor group's upscale brand.

THE CHECK-IN In place of the usual registration desk are a number of central 'docking stations' manned by wandering 'Pullman Welcomers' with iPads. I was in my room within 10 minutes of arriving.

THE ROOM I was on the fifth floor, in a Classic room with a super-comfy queen-bed. Features included a marble bathroom with bathtub, free wifi, a 40-inch plasma television and desk. The star turn was Pullman's Quadriga's Personal Media Network technology, which facilitates seamless use of both the hotel's and the guest's technologies, in effect turning the room into an integrated environment where the TV, smartphone and tablet synchronize.

THE BUSINESS Despite its location next to one of Paris's main tourist attractions, this is a hotel geared up for business visitors. There's a plethora of meeting, conference and break-out rooms split between the basement level and the ground floor. Many



of them feature natural light. A rooftop room has a wrap-around balcony, glass roof and in-your-face views of the Eiffel Tower.

THE FACILITIES The expansive lobby features an open 'connectivity lounge' with some super-trendy terminals. Wifi access is offered throughout the hotel. FRAME is a Californian brasserie-style restaurant and bar serving West Coast and French 'classics' like fish tacos with tequila ceviche and barbecued frogs' legs. There's a fitness lounge with cardio machines and weights - and more views of the tower.

THE VERDICT Look past its drab and dated exterior: once in the lobby this is an ultra-contemporary, visually appealing and inviting hotel with plenty of mod-cons that will establish the credibility of the Pullman brand as a genuine player in the high-end hotels sector.

THE DETAILS Pullman Paris Tour Eiffel, 18 Avenue de Suffren, 75015 Paris, France. Rates for a Classic room start from around £270 for a mid-week stay. Pullmanhotels.com or Accorhotels.com

MARTIN STEADY