



A TALE OF MANY CITIES

*Whether visiting an emerging metropolis or an established capital, city breaks are all about expecting the unexpected, as **Paul Rubio** discovers*

Rewind to October 1988 when my parents and I took a weekend trip to New York City in honor of my ninth birthday. I vividly recall the sensory overload: the sway of gravity-defying skyscrapers, the honks of countless yellow taxicabs, the heavily perfumed, well-dressed ladies exiting fancy shops on Fifth Avenue, the dazzling, blinding lights of Times Square, and, of course, the delight of FAO Schwarz, where I danced on the illuminated keyboard immortalized in my favorite movie, *Big*. The possibilities seemed infinite – and indeed they were.

Therein began my love affair with the Big Apple and cities in general. Some 30 years later, I still visit New York City at least twice a year. Each time, the excitement remains palpable. Of course, my travel style has changed: I've stopped couch-surfing with relatives; I avoid Times Square (and traditional taxicabs); and I no longer want to eat pizza slices for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I now make a beeline to SoHo and check in to my favorite skyline-view suite at

No two visits are the same. That extraordinary ambush of the senses – it's just as strong as the first time

The Dominick (where I'll often treat myself to a spa treatment – or two – and lounge by the pool on sunny days). I book in advance at the hottest Michelin-starred restaurants, and I make it a point to ascend to the latest rooftop bar crowning the city. For good measure, I'll allot some downtime outdoors, people watching on the High Line, the city's elevated park along former railroad tracks.

True, there's a degree of predictability to my city jaunts these days, but in a New York minute, that can all change. I can throw away the map and end up in the captivating chaos of Little Italy or Chinatown. I can walk outside my hotel and stumble upon a new apex of modern design, and continue down a side street to unearth other secrets of the city. On impulse, I can Uber to a hipster-fueled bar in Brooklyn or a fashionista-frequented lounge uptown. I can ditch the dinner reservations and discover a no-name hole in the wall with the ultimate Thai food in America.

With so many choices, no two visits are the same. That extraordinary ambush of the senses – it's just as strong as the first time.

Stranger in a strange land

Maybe that's why I am so eager to explore the extremes of Earth's other great cities. No city break has been more life affirming than a recent trip to Tokyo, Japan, where I ventured far beyond my comfort zone – and loved every second of it.



Left: The sun reflects off the spectacular New York skyline

Above: Everything from art and gastronomy, to high-end shopping and luxury hotels





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Daily life in Tokyo is a fascinating balance of tradition and modernity. On the one hand, there are the electrifying neon lights of Shinjuku and futuristic high-design buildings of Roppongi. Yet nearby are ancient Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and lost-in-time neighborhoods like Asakusa, which hails from times of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Meals were my favorite moments of discovery in Tokyo. Around town, I'd do my best to figure out the contents of that delicious *maki* I had just devoured and wondered how to correctly cook a tabletop *shabu shabu* dinner (I don't think I ever quite figured it out). At the restaurant in my hotel, **The Capitol Hotel Tokyu**, my server walked me through every ingredient of a traditional *kaiseki* dinner so I could fully appreciate this art of Japanese dining.

I was hard-pressed to meet anyone outside the hotel who could speak a word of English (or any of the romance languages), but that was part of the experience. When

I felt completely out of place during the live tuna auction at Tsukiji Fish Market, there was still an overwhelming sense of welcome. Even the busyness of subway crowds and packed streets melted away with interactions that superseded language barriers.

There's both challenge and elation in learning about and exploring a foreign land – so much so, that upon leaving Tokyo, I opted for a sequel just across the Sea of Japan in Seoul, South Korea. The capital of the “Land of the Morning Calm” hasn't made it front and center on the world tourist map, but that's a good thing. With its amalgam of glass monoliths, flashy lights, futuristic technologies, historic grand palaces, multistory teahouses, and K-pop-crazed culture, Seoul is an enchanting city still rife with authentic experiences.

New generation

As much as I enjoy visiting tried-and-true big cities, there's something extra special about checking out emerging cities. With few rules and precedents to follow, options for ingenuity are boundless. Watching a new city gain an identity is a sight to behold.

In the past few years, I've witnessed the transformation of Miami from a beach town into a veritable metropolis with some of the world's most striking modernist architecture. Thanks to the likes of the billion-dollar Brickell City Centre shopping and lifestyle complex and uber-cool hotels such as **EAST, Miami** and **SLS Hotel & Residences Brickell**, all attention has shifted from the beach's turquoise waters to the delights of downtown.

I've also seen Lima, Peru, emerge as a capital of gastronomy, warranting long-distance travel anchored solely by the prospect of incredible food. To say Lima's food scene is great wouldn't be doing it justice; it's downright phenomenal. This foodie revolution has also catalyzed a citywide renaissance that's branded Lima a true destination, not just a layover en route to Cusco and the Sacred Valley.



Above: Modern Tokyo features futuristic architecture. Left: Previously off the tourist trail, Seoul promises enchantment and authentic experiences

GETTY

With few rules and precedents to follow in emerging cities, options for ingenuity are boundless



Above: Miami has transformed from a beach town into a veritable metropolis. Right: The SLS Hotel & Residences Brickell is among Miami's uber-cool hotels



Similarly, Mexico City has blossomed. Today, the former business-centered capital city is a vast melting pot of the romance, passion, colors, and flavors of Mexico's 31 diverse states. There's so much to see in this bustling city, I hardly spend time at my hotel. So here, it's all about location. The value-conscious **Galeria Plaza Reforma** is right on the city's pulse in the trendsetting La Zona Rosa neighborhood, but also a stone's throw away from Chapultepec, Mexico City's equivalent of Central Park.

Though city breaks may not provide the relaxation of a beach holiday, the rewards are many. I quickly figured out at age nine that a city is more than a place; it's a state of mind, it's an energy. It's where people go in search of dreams and to create new ones, where creativity converges and diversity flourishes. It's where ideas materialize and where niches are born. For mere transient visitors, it's an extraordinary place to feed into wanderlust, to feel inspired, to make memories, and to expect the unexpected. ➔

city breaks

FIVE GREAT CITY HOTELS

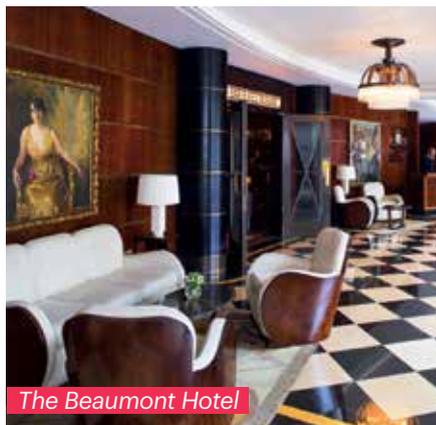
IMMERSE YOURSELF IN CITY LIFE BEFORE RETREATING TO ONE OF THESE HIDEAWAYS

Pulitzer Amsterdam The Netherlands

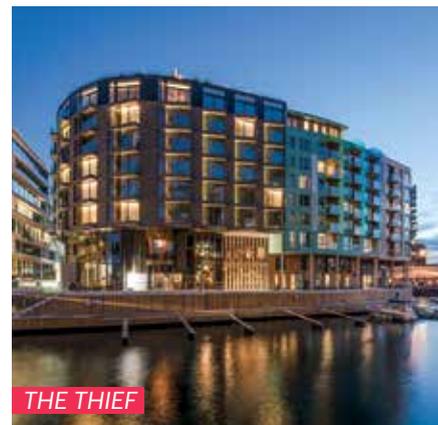
Experience Dutch elegance at Pulitzer Amsterdam, a collection of 25 Golden Age canal houses. Hidden within the space are rooms and suites that are all unique and which reflect the heritage of the original houses. Meanwhile, the exquisite art collection and beautifully crafted cuisine at Restaurant Jansz firmly cement Pulitzer Amsterdam's reputation as an exceptional destination.

The Imperial New Delhi India

Experience tranquility and style in the heart of this bustling, exciting city at The Imperial New Delhi. The Colonial-style architecture and expansive grounds enclose a myriad of luxuries: elegant guestrooms and suites, the indulgence of The Imperial Spa &



The Beaumont Hotel



THE THIEF



The Fullerton Hotel Singapore



The Imperial New Delhi

The Fullerton Hotel Singapore is synonymous with a haven of luxury for Singaporeans and visitors alike

Salon, and heavenly Asian flavors at hotel restaurant The Spice Route.

The Beaumont Hotel London, U.K.

Located in a fine Art Deco building on a quiet Mayfair square, The Beaumont Hotel offers an intimate boutique hotel experience, overlaid with Old World luxury and *joie de vivre*. Just steps from the boutiques, galleries, and museums of Mayfair, St. James's, and the West End, the hotel also has plenty to keep you from leaving its doors, including one of London's most glamorous restaurants, and a refined spa and gym.

The Fullerton Hotel Singapore

A neoclassical landmark, The Fullerton Hotel Singapore is synonymous with a haven of luxury for Singaporeans and visitors alike. Its waterfront position in the Central Business District makes it an excellent base for exploring the city, or you can just relax by the expansive pool, taking in the magnificent architecture and the city skyline.

THE THIEF Oslo, Norway

Situated in the dynamic Aker Brygge waterfront district, THE THIEF is a delightful hideaway in Norway's capital city. Here, contemporary style and modern amenities are showcased, while the hotel's stunning permanent contemporary art collection – Koons, Opie, Hirst, Gormley, and many more – can be discovered at every turn.



Pulitzer Amsterdam

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