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THE KITANO NEW YORK: *Japanese Luxury at its Finest*

By W.A. Muller

One of New York's most estimable qualities is its ability to absorb influence from all cultures. In this regard, there is no city greater. Immigrants, businesses and ideas all flow to our shore because as it has been poetically said before: "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere". And so it holds true for the hospitality and hotel industry. There are some great names in the hotel business here in New York, that have originated from other places - places that may or may not have similar tastes or concepts of luxury and/or service. Yet, there is one property that comes to mind when one thinks of a hotel that is foreign-owned and yet is perched at the height of exclusivity and refinement - The Kitano New York.

Housed in a 19th century building that held historical significance in New York because of its ownership by the Rockefellers, it was purchased in 1973 by the Kitano Group and opened as the first Japanese owned hotel in New York City. With its stunning views, prime location, exemplary service, beautiful rooms and excellent restaurant, The Kitano Hotel stands apart from a crowded field as a property that must be cherished and experienced. The revitalization of the hotel and its unique concept of hospitality have allowed The Kitano New York to position itself on the cutting edge of the city's hospitality industry. The hotel's commitment to excellence, singular service and rare blend of the traditional East and modern West, make it the choice of the most distinguished traveler.

With its 149 luxurious rooms, including five Executive Suites, three Townhouse Suites and ten Junior Suites, there is a level of comfort and luxury to suit all needs. The hotel has gone further by individually appointing each Executive Suite - each one boasting a different personality. And what's most remarkable is that The Kitano New York features Manhattan's only authentic Japanese Tatami Suite. And I had the opportunity and pleasure to experience one of the Executive Suites and to view the quite interesting Japanese Tatami Suite. I have not had as an enjoyable stay in Manhattan as I had at The Kitano New York.

I was quite fortunate to stay in the Executive Suite 4. Located on the 17th floor, with a 696 square foot one king-sized bedroom suite, it features a living room with couch, armchairs, coffee table and wet bar. Louvered French doors open onto the bedroom and a massive walk-in closet accompanies the suite. The spacious bathroom with Jacuzzi tub, separate shower, and double vanity provides true comfort and luxury. The suite offers an impressive view of the Empire State Building and it connects to Junior Suite 3 to make up a two-bedroom accommodation that is truly impressive.

Having arrived shortly before I was supposed to dine, I unpacked in the lovely room, freshened up and headed down to the hotel's restaurant where I had an unexpectedly wonderful meal. Hakubai Japanese Restaurant serves traditional Japanese favorites at lunch and dinner. The distinctive

Kaiseki cuisine is noted for exquisite presentation as well as its delicate taste. Having previously been described as rarefied and excellent by professionals more esteemed than I, the restaurant does not fail to satisfy. Its charter and reason for being is to highlight and promote a cuisine whose roots are in Zen Buddhism and traditional Japanese service. In this, Hakubai has few rivals. I found all dishes to be thoughtful and delicious. But special mention should be made to the Kobe Shabu Shabu. A style of cooking, which allows the diner to participate in the cooking by placing sliced beef into boiling water, we found the restaurant's interpretation of this dish to be beyond fault. With seating for 44, five counter seats, and 3 private tatami rooms - the restaurant is a jewel in the New York City dining scene.

A garden cafe and lounge that often has Jazz nights with live performers are also part of the package at The Kitano New York. It's become my top destination in New York City for escaping the outside world. Here you feel as if you are in a cocoon of luxury. Pampered by your surroundings and the staff, The Kitano New York must be (rightly) considered at the forefront of hotels.

<http://www.kitano.com/>
66 Park Ave
New York, NY 10016
(212) 835-7000

