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GOLDEN MOMENTS

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The Last Word: Thanks to a partnership with Air China (which owns the building), the Renaissance is offering packages to attract tourists. Business travelers aren't going to want to give it up.

Total Score: 93/100
Rob Rogers

Renaissance Beijing Hotel
36 Xiaoyun Lu Chaoyang District
Beijing, China 100027
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fax 86 10 6468 9913

Continental BusinessFirst, Newark (EWR) to Beijing (PEK)

On the Ground: My connecting flight from Boston (BOS) arrived in Newark on time, giving me about an hour to spare before my flight to Beijing. This would be no ordinary flight: it was the inaugural of Continental's direct nonstop service connecting Newark and Beijing. The balloon-festooned gate area was packed with revelers — passengers, press, Continental spokes-persons and executives — snapping photographs, listening to speeches and indulging in a festive buffet. Since the gate was directly across from the elevator to Continental's second-floor lounge, I headed upstairs to get a bird's-eye view of the celebration, and also to enjoy a bagel and cup of tea while making a few last-minute phone calls. When boarding was called, I made my way back to the gate and maneuvered through the throngs of lingering celebrants to the jetway entrance, where costumed greeters handed me a Chinese good-luck token as I passed by. (19/20)

On Board: Continental's Boeing 777s feature spacious BusinessFirst cabins with



The Kitano New York

Arrival/Check-in: We arrived in New York City on the heels of one of the worst winter storms the Northeast had experienced in years. With our Amtrak train canceled, we opted to drive the distance between Boston and New York. It seemed like a good decision, putting us on FDR Drive en route to the city with plenty of time to spare before the start of a business event. Then we hit traffic — lots of traffic — which cost us about an hour as we crawled slowly toward the hotel. By the time we arrived, we were frazzled, frustrated and worried about being late. The bellman, valet and front desk clerk were incredible — unloading our luggage, parking the car and getting us settled in record time. We were pleased to discover we had been assigned a suite with a large sitting area, ample bedroom, spacious bath and separate dressing area. (20/20)

Guest Quarters: Since we were running late, we were in and out of our room in less than a half-hour. It wasn't until we returned later that evening that we noticed the unique art placed carefully throughout our suite, giving it a homey feel. We learned that the paintings and sculptures were the work of artists, many of whom live in the New York area, commissioned to create pieces for display in the hotel. Other amenities included soundproofed windows that could be opened or closed, two dual-line speaker phones with data port and voicemail, high-speed Internet access, fax/printer/copier, Shiseido bath products and a Japanese green-tea service. (13/15)

Services/Amenities: Located on Park Avenue in midtown Manhattan, the 147-room (plus 18 suites) Kitano is fully equipped to meet the needs of business travelers. Guest services and amenities include complimentary shuttle to Wall Street on weekdays, daily newspaper, passes to the New York Sports Club, several dining venues and same-day laundry service. Members of the multilingual staff speak

English, Japanese, German, French and Spanish. Originally owned by the Rockefeller family, the Kitano operated as the Murray Hill Hotel until 1973, when it was purchased by the Kitano Group of Japan. **(42/45)**

The Experience: Though we were stressed when we arrived at the Kitano, we were feeling balanced and back on track within minutes. I surmise that the change in attitude had something to do with the hotel's serene ambience, in addition to its dedicated and thoughtful staff. While our visit was short — just one night — the Kitano left a lasting positive impression. **(19/20)**

The Last Word: A serene retreat in the middle of frenzied midtown Manhattan.

Total Score: 94/100 Lisa Matte

The Kitano New York

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www.kitano.com

Radisson SAS Plaza Hotel

Arrival/Check-In: The SAS Plaza doesn't put its best foot forward. The entrance and check-in counter are located far to one side of what turns out to be a beautiful lobby, with marble floors, modern leather furniture, a grand staircase and floor-to-ceiling windows that offer views of a city park. Check-in was swift, but I could have used some help getting to my room — there were two banks of elevators, and I needed the room keycard to operate them, which was initially confusing. **(15/20)**

Guest Quarters: One of the tallest buildings in Oslo, this hotel offers fabulous views. It was an absolute joy to open the curtains in the morning and see the whole city laid out before me, right up to the forested hills. Although small by American standards, the recently renovated room was contemporary-chic and equipped with the requisite business amenities — dual-line phones, high-speed Internet — plus flat-screen TV, coffee and tea, and those typical Norwegian amenities, a heated floor and towel-rack in the bathroom. **(13/20)**

Services/Amenities: The largest hotel in Norway, the Radisson SAS Plaza just completed renovations to all its 673 guestrooms, equipping them with wall-mounted LCD TV screens and wireless LAN. Wireless Internet access is available throughout the hotel, and the conference facilities are first-rate. The hotel offers a choice of more than 30 meeting rooms, including a ballroom for up to 1,200 people. There are two very attractive, modern bars — one in the lobby and one with a view on the 34th floor — along with one uninspiring pub and one decent Mediterranean restaurant, plus a shop on-site. The fitness facility is a bit lacking, but the small indoor pool is in a room with a view, which helps. **(42/45)**

The Experience: Although centrally located, this hotel is uncomfortably close to the bus and train stations — not the most beautiful area of the city. Inside, however, the views from the guestrooms and from the upper-floor meeting rooms and restaurant create a stunning atmosphere. Rooms also come with a sumptuous buffet breakfast, so you can start the day off right. **(17/20)**

The Last Word: A business hotel that's all business, the Radisson SAS Plaza gets points for trying to provide the best for its guests. There's just no escaping the problem of location, location, location.

Total Score: 87/100 Kathryn O'Neill

Radisson SAS Plaza Hotel

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plenty of stowage. I found my seat, organized my gear and accepted a pre-flight glass of champagne while perusing the dinner menu. The flight crew — including pilots and flight attendants — were in high spirits, socializing with passengers and answering questions about the route of the 12^{1/2}-hour flight that would take us within a few hundred miles of the North Pole en route to Beijing. Before departure, a flight attendant took my dinner order: chilled lobster half with Du Barry sauce, followed by red oak leaves and romaine lettuce with fresh asparagus, roma tomatoes, kalamata olives and feta cheese, and herbed breast of chicken. I passed on the fruit-and-cheese course and dessert (vanilla ice cream with choice of topping), opting instead to recline my seat into its lie-flat position and get a few hours of sleep. I woke in time for a quick breakfast about an hour before our arrival. **(38/40)**

The Experience: It was kind of exciting to be among the first passengers to experience Continental's direct nonstop service to Beijing. While I didn't take advantage of the in-flight entertainment options, including a wide assortment of movies offered via personal video screens, I enjoyed a great flight, tasty meal and decent night's sleep, and arrived in Beijing feeling more refreshed than I would have thought possible. **(38/40)**

The Last Word: Until someone finds a way to "beam me" to Beijing, Continental's direct nonstop service is the way to go.

Total Score: 95/100 Lisa Matte