

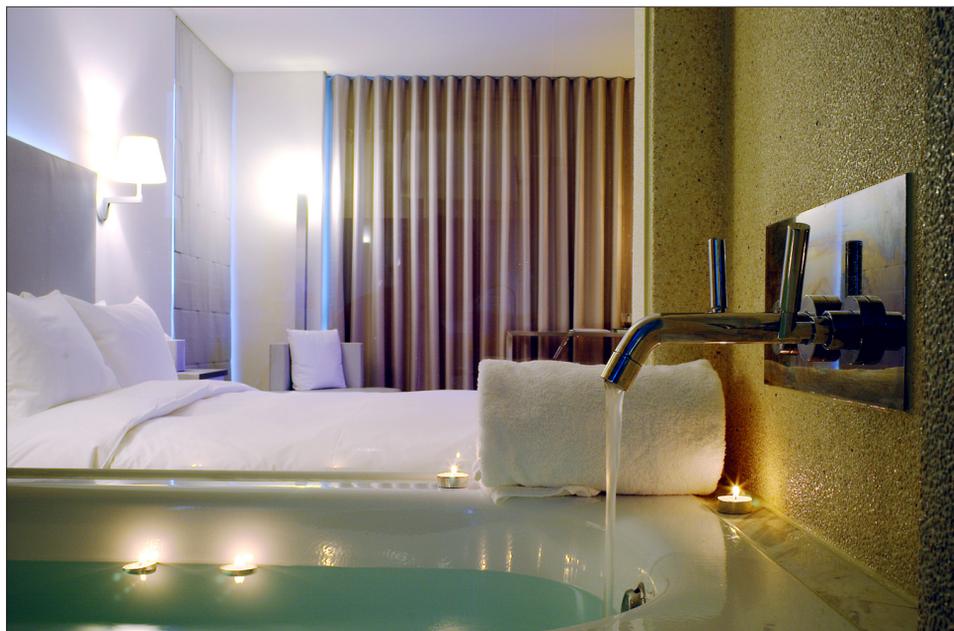
TRAVEL

16

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 2009

Below and right: Les Suites Taipei Da-an caters to weary business travelers, with classic home furnishings tinged with modern European flair.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LES SUITES DA-AN TAIPEI

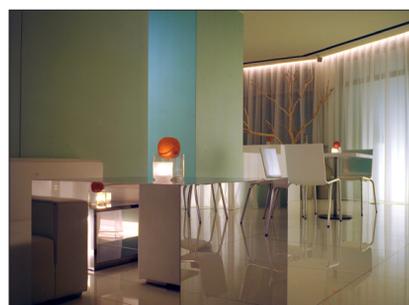


Luxury inside:

business boutique and style on the cheap

In this final installment of a three-part series on luxury hotels, the 'Taipei Times' checks out a boutique hotel aimed at business travelers and a couple of mid-to-low priced options for travelers looking for style that doesn't break the bank

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER



Above: Art and design students from Shih Chien University are given free rein to decorate some of the rooms at Hotel 73.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

Left and far left: Frosty whites dominate at Ambience Hotel, a mid-priced boutique hotel.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AMBIENCE HOTEL

Slurping on a hotel in Taipei used to mean a night at the Grand Hotel (圓山) or the Grand Hyatt. But today the choices have grown for pampered and swanky overnight stays in the city. In the last of a three-part series on luxury accommodations in Taipei, we look at a boutique hotel geared toward business travelers, and a couple of mid-to-low priced hotels aimed at young and hip travelers.

LES SUITES TAIPEI DA-AN: BUSINESS BOUTIQUE

Regarded as one of Taiwan's first "boutique" hotels, Les Suites Taipei Da-an aims to woo business travelers who have seen it all when it comes to hotel living. With cozy rooms and suites filled with designer furnishings, Les Suites Taipei offers a touch of home for the business trip experience.

What is immediately striking about Les Suites Da-an, located just a few blocks from Sogo Department Store on Zhongxiao East Road (忠孝東路), is the low-key, quiet reception area. Instead of a large, imposing counter with chattering clerks and service staff scurrying about, one finds a small desk manned by only one or two persons in a small lobby with polished marble floors and walls. It feels more like an entrance to a small museum or a luxury apartment building.

With the decor, Les Suites Da-an takes the less-is-more approach. Stylish simplicity and warmth are the words that best describe the rooms and suites, which cost between NT\$7,000 a night for the 33m² "standard" room to NT\$9,900 for the 55m² "deluxe" suite. Much of the furniture has a modern European flair — lots of clean, straight lines and soothing curves — but Asian influences pop up, too. Bali-style batik upholstery can be found on a few chairs, while many rooms have prints of ink bamboo paintings and Chinese calligraphy. The modern appointments are balanced by earth-tone colors, with lots of browns and warm whites.

The hotel's boutique attitude carries over to the amenities. Beds are fitted with linens from UK brand the White Company, while bathroom toiletries are from another British brand, Molton Brown. Local art and craftsmanship also gets a nod as guests find ceramic teaware from Yingge (鶯歌) in the rooms. Flat-screen TVs and stereo systems are standard in all rooms.

Business travelers might be lured by the home-away-from-home comforts, but the hotel remembers to cater to guests who need to get work done. All rooms have cable Internet and the two meeting rooms, furnished much like the guest rooms, accommodate up to 20 people. Business

center services are available, including fax machines and A/V equipment for presentations. Wi-Fi is also available for free in the first-floor lounges.

Guests can surf the Internet on hotel-provided laptops in the library or browse coffee-table books on design and architecture. The adjacent lounge feels more like a home living room, at least in comparison to the typically sterile hotel lobby — there is a display of black-and-white photographs of Taipei, French windows with a view of a tropical garden and a table with coffee, chilled beer and soft drinks.

One unusual but useful perk: Les Suites Da-an provides each room with a mobile phone with a local number. Guests have to pay for their own calls but can receive calls placed through the hotel for free. For example, if you're out exploring Taipei and a colleague calls the hotel looking for you, the hotel transfers your colleague directly to your mobile. The phone could also come in handy for international visitors — hotel staff say they are prepared to help with communication challenges, whether it's giving directions to a taxi driver or figuring out exactly what that shopkeeper is saying.

■ Les Suites Taipei Da-an is located at 135, Da-an Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市大安路一段135號). For more information, visit www.suitespe.com or call (02) 8773-3799.

HOTEL 73: POP HOTEL

Hotel 73 calls itself a "Japanese fashion design style" hotel on its Web site, but it's actually more experimental and forward-looking than it sounds.

The hotel's futuristic lobby doubles as a gallery space that promotes contemporary design culture in Taiwan.

Last year local graffiti artists were commissioned to cover the lobby's bare white walls as part of a rock music theme. This past spring the hotel invited a Swedish artist named Godspeed to build a set of industrial-style furniture using scrap wood collected from the streets of Taipei for an exhibition. One piece, a rough-looking chair built in just 10 minutes with a hammer and nails, was surprisingly comfortable.

Such creative endeavors also extend to the clean, minimalist accommodations. The hotel collaborates with art and design students at Shih Chien University (實踐大學), who are periodically given free rein to decorate a handful of the hotel's 50 rooms.

Elements such as these make Hotel 73 a "pop hotel," said assistant manager George Dai (戴志良). "[It] expresses what we have to offer in Taiwan."

The Taipei Times made a recent visit to some of

rooms decorated by first-year students. A few looked amateurish, but many were impressive. One room sported a gothic look, with butterflies made of black paper strewn about the ceilings and walls. Another room was adorned with geometric De Stijl patterns fashioned into Morse code. One student filled the walls of a room with a dizzying array of letters that flowed in wavy lines, which read like a jumble of voices on the wall.

Hotel 73's penchant for experimentation has an end goal — to help art students find work opportunities in an ultra-competitive market. "We have a platform to show other companies and corporations that there are talented students [in Taiwan] and they are good at what they do," Dai said.

More than half of Hotel 73's clientele are international visitors, with many coming from Hong Kong, according to Dai. The rates, which range from NT\$1,800 for the 3.5-ping "standard" room to NT\$2,400 for the 7.5-ping "superior" room, appeal to youthful travelers who want to spice up their stay in Taipei without breaking the bank.

■ Hotel 73 is located at 73, Xinyi Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市信義路二段73號). For more information, visit www.hotel73.com or call (02) 2395-9009.

AMBIENCE: NORDIC ESCAPE

White, white and more white. Ambience Hotel's decor might sound like a one-trick pony, but it's the finer details observed in person that impress. Smooth granite floors, polished steel beams, tables made of mirrors, soothing soft calf-skin leather couches in the main lounge — everything in the building glows, shines or sparkles.

This "modern, Nordic, minimalist" atmosphere has helped Ambience keep occupancy rates around 90 percent throughout the year, said deputy general manager Diana Dai (戴毓蓉).

In addition to the all-white furnishings, Ambience's rooms boast a few avant-garde items that enhance this icy fantasy: Philippe Stark Louis Ghost armchairs and Ferruccio Laviani Bourgie lamps, both made of a translucent polycarbonate.

But when the hotel opened in 2005, it was perhaps *too much* style. Taiwanese clientele didn't get why they were paying NT\$4,000 a night only to find "plastic chairs" in their room, according to Dai. Ambience eventually shifted its pricing strategy, recasting itself in the "affordable luxury" category with rooms averaging NT\$3,000 a night.

The 60-room hotel is popular with foreign travelers, who make up nearly 80 percent of the guests, Dai said. A few write-ups in the international press, including *Time*

magazine and travel Web sites, have helped Ambience's reputation grow.

The hotel is the flagship of the Taipei Inn Group, which also owns Hotel 73. Like its sister property, which tries to utilize the talents of Taiwanese artists and furnishes its rooms with as many local products of good quality as it can, Ambience has also turned its eye to emphasizing a "Made-in Taiwan" sense of pride," Dai said.

Upcoming projects include working with local artists to redecorate the main lobby and public lounge area, and a "fashion storybook" that celebrates the "chic aspect" of Taipei.

"Even though we're all made in Taiwan, we can still be very hip, very creative and do very well with foreign tourists ... because they love to see what kind of work can be done here locally," Dai said.

Rates range from NT\$2,800 for the 5.5-ping "standard" room to NT\$3,900 for 9-ping "deluxe" room, and include breakfast.

■ Ambience Hotel is located at 64, Changan E Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市長安路一段64號). For more information, visit www.ambiencehotel.com.tw or call (02) 2541-0077.

Other boutique hotels in Taipei:

Les Suites Ching Cheng
Address: 12 Qingcheng Street, Taipei City (台北市慶城街12號)
Telephone: (02) 8712-7589
On the Net: www.hotelsuitesching-cheng.com

Dandy Hotel
Address: 33, Xinyi Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市信義路三段33號)
Telephone: (02) 2358-3500
On the Net: www.dandyhotel.com.tw

The Riveria Hotel
Address: 646 Linsen N Rd, Taipei City (台北市林森北路646號)
Telephone: (02) 2358-3500
On the Net: www.rivierataipei.com

Hotel Eight Zone
Address: 8, Jinshan S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市金山南路一段8號)
Telephone: (02) 2358-3500
On the Net: www.hotel8zone.com

Hotel Sense (伸適商旅)
Address: 477 Linsen N Rd, Taipei City (台北市林森北路477號)
Telephone: (02) 7743-1000
On the Net: www.hotelsense.com.tw