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New York's Boutique Hotel Plaza Athénée Delivers Chinese Flavor To Upper East Side

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The exterior of the Hotel Plaza Athénée on New York's Upper East Side. (Hotel Plaza Athénée)

A favorite spot for celebrities such as fashion designer Marc Jacobs and actress Sarah Jessica Parker, New York's Hotel Plaza Athénée serves as an intimate Upper East Side retreat for well-heeled clients searching for a niche luxury abode. Increasingly joining this contingent of high-profile visitors are wealthy Chinese travelers, who are now enjoying China-specific amenities at small boutique hotels in addition to major chains as they head abroad in record numbers.

Like many big luxury hotel brands across the world, the Plaza Athénée has introduced services geared toward China's rapidly growing numbers of outbound travelers including in-room tea kettles, Chinese fashion magazines and shopping guides, Chinese-language newspapers, Chinese breakfast, and the acceptance of UnionPay as a payment method after seeing a rising number of Chinese guests. Its website is also available in both English and Chinese for easy online booking from China, and its team frequently travels to China for market research.

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The Chinese breakfast, which was introduced two years ago when the hotel noticed an uptick in demand, features items such as congee, dim sum, tea eggs, and Chinese tea. Sanjay Mahajan, the hotel's director of food and beverage, said that the service was designed to give Chinese visitors a familiar breakfast option during their stay, stating, "Our Chinese base has multiplied over the past two years." He says that the kitchen works with a chef in Chinatown who supplies high-end Chinese breakfast items to a growing number of hotels providing the service.



The dining room of the Plaza Athénée in New York. (Hotel Plaza Athénée)

Going beyond the basics, the hotel's concierge service also helps wealthy Chinese guests with shopping for real estate—a major reason for visits from China to New York. "Our team is readily prepared to arrange for this service and include a Mandarin-speaking guide to accompany the family on their search," said Hotel Plaza Athénée General Manager Anne-Juliette Maurice. Since luxury shopping is also a top priority for Chinese guests, the hotel arranges pre-opening visits to shops such as David Yurman, Hermès, Vacheron Constantin, and Chanel. In addition, the Plaza Athénée offers a "jetlag" spa treatment geared toward international travelers arriving from a distant time zone.

As China's wealthy tourists head abroad in growing numbers, their demand for these types of unique services is on the rise. A recent survey by Small Luxury Hotels of the World found that "personal experiences" and "character and charm" were the top two most important categories for Chinese travelers when choosing a boutique hotel. The Plaza Athénée expects to benefit from these trends in the years to come—it saw a 4 percent increase in its number of visitors from Asia in the past year and expects the rate to rise thanks to its increased efforts to cater to a discerning Chinese clientele.

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