

# The heat is on

## HOTEL OF THE WEEK

BY MATTHEW DEVONPORT



### Sea Containers, London

#### WHERE AND WHY

Imagine cruising down the Thames, watching the world go by as London scurries about its daily business. Then as the sun sets, the captain drops anchor and you take in breathtaking views of the capital's skyline while sipping a cocktail.

Sadly, not many cruise ships make their way past Tower Bridge so the next best thing is riverside boutique hotel Sea Containers on the South Bank which has a design reminiscent of a 1920s liner with nautical decor and even staff uniforms.

The spacious rooms also help to give you the impression that you are in a luxury cruise cabin. Our suite came with a marble rainfall shower and freestanding bath as well as an additional bathroom.

The separate living area featured bespoke furniture, a TV and amply stocked minibar to make our stay plain sailing. Below us, also in cruise-like fashion, was the Aqua Spa and gym and a 56-seat Curzon Cinema.

But for us even these delights could not beat gazing out of the windows upon St Paul's Cathedral and the City of London.

#### ON THE MENU

Sea Containers has a welcoming restaurant with riverside views serving up fresh, seasonal dishes and boasting two cocktail bars.

Instead of the rooftop 12th Knot bar, we opted for pre-dinner drinks at the Lyanes, me sipping a Faux Fruit Sour containing peated parsnip while my wife went for a non-alcoholic Recipe Ramos involving smoked coconut.

With an American-British inspired menu designed for sharing, Sea Containers Restaurant's dishes are seasonal with a touch of British quirk.

Naturally, there's a healthy splash of seafood on the menu - but enough choice to keep both meat and non-meat eaters satisfied. So while I made light work of the mussels, my wife enjoyed their signature cheeseburger. The Pistachio Opera Cake for afters made our taste buds sing.

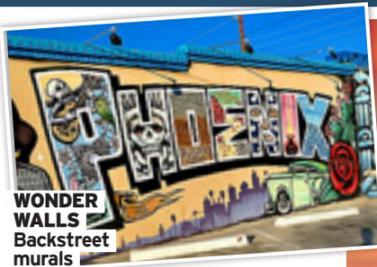
#### WHILE YOU'RE THERE

Situated in the heart of London's cultural and entertainment district, Sea Containers offers access to the city's moist famous landmarks and attractions.

Shakespeare's Globe, the Tate Modern and South Bank Centre are just minutes away and the West End a short ride on a bus or a tube. But if you don't want to embrace the hotel's spirit of travel and exploration, you can simply enjoy Sea Containers spa, cinema and Saturday rooftop DJ sessions. Whatever floats your boat, make it your next port of call.

#### WAKE-UP CALL

A standard double room starts at £275 a night, B&B, [seacontainerslondon.com](http://seacontainerslondon.com)



**WONDER WALLS**  
Backstreet murals



**PRICKLY HEAT**  
Botanical Garden



**FIRED UP**  
Hall of Flame



**RAWSOME**  
Tuna tostada



**TOP FORM**  
Chris on Camelback Mountain



**ROYAL RETREAT**  
King suite

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the climate that makes Phoenix a hotspot for North American tourists for the rest of the year.

International visitors, though, often overlook the city as they head out to explore Arizona's more famous natural wonders, but it's a cool city (not literally!) worth exploring for a few days.

I stayed in the heart of Downtown, in the high and wide Sheraton hotel that dominates the skyline. My room was on the 29th floor, with an expansive view even better than the King Suite.

Upon arrival, all of Phoenix was laid out before me, the city lights countering the night flooding in, the mountain-lined horizon stained gold by the dying day. What a welcome.

Downtown is where the sports arenas, theatres, music venues and convention centre are all clustered. There, brightly lit mainstream bars, restaurants and sports joints dominate the scene, and I was surprised to stumble upon a trophy parade of Phoenix Rising FC (in the US footy second tier). Drunk and happy fans sang and danced in the rain. It felt like home.

The following morning, the weather was back to normal, with the sun out and blazing, the only respite coming from the occasional wandering cloud.

I wandered to the northern side of Downtown to the Roosevelt Row Arts District, the hipster hood with more alternative bars, cafes and boutiques. I had breakfast at the Kahvi Coffee and Cafe, a former art

gallery, then explored backroads daubed in vibrant murals, their colours popping against the blue-sky backdrop.

Phoenix has many interesting attractions, but they're spaced out and public transport isn't great, so it's best to hire a car. The giant Rental Car Center near the airport is the size of one of its terminals. I was given a "little car". A little big, more like - a Chevy Malibu saloon that'd be hard to park back home but was on the small side for an American motor.

Driving is easy as the roads are wide, straight, and not busy. Plus parking is free and plentiful, and unlike in the UK, there are very few cameras waiting to charge you for a minor infraction. I enjoyed driving for the first time in years.

My first stop was the Musical Instrument Museum, 25 miles away, and incredibly still on the outskirts of town. But the drive there along the freeways was easy, and I was inside having a self-guided tour in no time.

The massive museum celebrates music from around the world, with hundreds of instruments from all continents and cultures. Well worth a visit.

For lunch, I moseyed on over to the relatively close Tia Carmen restaurant where I tried the local southwest cuisine for the first time. It's excellent. A fusion of Native

American, Mexican, and US foods that's suitably light for the hot weather, yet packed with interesting flavours.

I had a raw tuna tostada laced with guacamole, herbs and fresh chilli. Dessert was a vanilla flan topped with tequila caramel and manchego cheese, all washed down with prickly pear cactus ice tea. Que bueno.

I then drove back down to the southeastern side of the city to Papago Park, where the Sonoran meets the city, and where several attractions reside including Phoenix Zoo and the Desert Botanical Garden. The latter is home to thousands of species of desert flora. Its meandering footpaths take you - and hordes of selfie-taking visitors - past amazing giant cacti with a backdrop of surreal rocky red hills. It felt like I was on the set of a Wild West movie. Apart from the hordes, that is.

The afternoon was suitably ablaze when I arrived at my next stop, the nearby Hall of Flame, the largest

historical firefighting museum in the world. It has a fascinating collection of about 200 restored trucks and apparatus from around the globe, dating back to 1725. Excellent and informative tours are available by phoning beforehand.

I then headed over to the aforementioned surreal red hills, the most famous of which is the Hole in the Rock. As the name suggests, it is a giant hole in a giant rock - and it is one of Phoenix's most famous sunset spots, with a short and easy trail up to it. Facing west, crowds gather to watch the sun sink gloriously behind the skyline in the distance, the evening light painting the landscape even redder.

For dinner, I visited the First & Last restaurant back in the Arts District. The venue and the food were great; high-ceilinged industrial chic offset by masses of plant life and low-lighting. The fare was also fusion, but this time Italian with a local twist. The cocktails were great too. Hic.

As I was drinking, I couldn't drive, but rather than call an Uber, I decided to try something very different - a Waymo self-driving taxi. The Jaguar SUV pulled



**FUTURISTIC**  
Waymo taxi



**COCKTAIL HOUR**  
First & Last restaurant

### GET THERE

British Airways flies from Heathrow to Phoenix Sky Harbor starting at £594 return. [ba.com](http://ba.com)

### BOOK IT

Rooms at the Sheraton Phoenix Downtown hotel start at £150 a night. [marriott.com](http://marriott.com)

### MORE INFO

[visitphoenix.com](http://visitphoenix.com)  
[visitarizona.com](http://visitarizona.com)

and shops are on the west side of North Scottsdale Road, while on the east is a riot of neon and noise, with tides of drunken young folk spilling in and out of cheesy clubs galore. It felt like I was back in my native Essex.

If you want a more healthy pursuit, Phoenix is surrounded by gnarly mountains with many great hikes available.

The most popular is Camelback Mountain - Phoenix's highest - which I climbed the following morning.

It only takes up to an hour and a half at most, yet it's steep and tough, and must be quite a lung-buster during the hotter months.

But it was well worth the strain. From its 2,706ft peak I got a magnificent panoramic view of the city and the desert beyond.

I sat in the sunshine and surveyed the vast expanse before me.

Picking out all the places I'd been, I came to a realisation - Phoenix was indeed a great winter getaway.

**SKYLINE**  
Stunning Downtown Phoenix

**DOMINANT**  
The Sheraton Downtown hotel