

The Peech Hotel

BEING a self-confessed travel snob, I usually turn up my nose at anything less than a five-star property in South Africa (obviously this luxury doesn't apply when travelling overseas). While others love adventure and new experiences – even if it means staying at a campsite with no electricity – for me, a holiday is more about basking in luxury. I'd rather stay home than rough it elsewhere. You can imagine my dismay when I arrived at the Peech, which I'd neglected to Google beforehand, and saw a four-star plaque mounted on the wall.

The friendly faces at reception and the cosy brick-walled lobby area, really more a library lounge, added to the appeal of the spot, so we decided to check out our room before making a judgement call. The Peech started out as a private residence and was converted to a small hotel with only six rooms in 2004. It now has 16 – spread out between the garden and the house, the house rooms being the original bedrooms of the property.

After a brisk walk through the leafy estate, we climbed a flight of stairs and found ourselves in a garden suite; a modern, inviting space which really felt more like a studio apartment than a hotel room. Bathrooms are oversized, and the room has luxury touches which are hard to come by in even five-star hotels, such as heated towel rails, an electric blanket, iPod dock and premium Gilchrist & Soames bathroom amenities. The high ceilings added a feeling of airiness and space, and after a member of staff showed us around the room, we immediately nestled into the fluffy couch and decided we'd be staying.

Hotel restaurants are notoriously underwhelming, so I planned in advance and made a dinner reservation at Melrose Arch, a stone's throw from the hotel. As we were getting ready to leave, I had a look at the Peech's Bistro menu, which impressed me enough to cancel my booking. It's always a bonus



The Peech, a four-star establishment, is situated on a beautiful leafy estate.

to be able to indulge in a glass (or bottle) of wine and not have to worry about driving home. True to the traditional Parisian definition of a bistro, a small restaurant serving simple meals, the Peech's bistro menu is simple, laid back and chic – reflecting the Peech's general vibe.

To start I had a fragrant prawn salad, while my partner opted for a butternut and feta tartlet – both light and delicious. For mains, my chicken schnitzel served on mash, with beetroot puree drizzled across the plate, was particularly memorable. Instead of simply being dunked in oil, the crumb on the schnitzel was perfectly flavoured, with hints of black pepper and herbs. My husband went for lamb on baby veg, which he, too, enjoyed thoroughly. Dessert was chocolate tart, and we opted to share. This may just be in my top three desserts



The garden suite felt like a stylish and comfortable studio apartment.

of all time. Made mostly of dark chocolate and cream, each silky bite was pure decadence. What the bistro lacks in ambiance (we were

one of only two occupied tables), it makes up for in food. We enjoyed our meal so much, that I actually requested a reservation a week or

two after I reviewed the hotel, only to find out that bistro caters for in-house guests only.

In the morning, I huddled up with a cup of hot chocolate and a magazine while my husband braved the cold and popped next door to the Planet Fitness gym at the Wanderers Club – the hotel offers free gym passes to guests.

It's great to feel as though you're making a difference to the environment simply by your choice of hotel. The Peech prides itself on its sustainability policy centred on recycling, energy conservation and green design. A range of initiatives have been implemented, some high impact, such as solar water heating, others lower impact, such as the use of rechargeable batteries. Recycling is a priority, with recycling bins for paper, glass and tin, and an on-site probiotic waste facility ensure that minimal waste leaves the premises for landfills.

Although I have a terrible habit of overpacking, I do often plan to "travel light and return heavy" when travelling to shopping destinations like New York or Paris, so I was thrilled to hear about the "Pack for a Purpose" initiative, which the Peech is a part of. This creative system encourages international travellers to positively impact communities around the world by taking meaningful contributions to the destinations they visit. By setting aside as little as 2kg in your luggage, you can make a huge difference. The Peech supports Little Eden Children's Home, and encourages visitors to drop off new or used children's clothing, underwear and shoes, bed linen, toiletries and blankets. The rate per room is approximately R2 000 for two adults sharing, including breakfast. For more details, visit www.thepeech.co.za

The Peech is located at 61 North Street, Melrose. Call 011 537 9797. – **Hasmata Nair**

● *All writers were hosted by the hotels for the purposes of writing these reviews*

Melrose Arch hotel

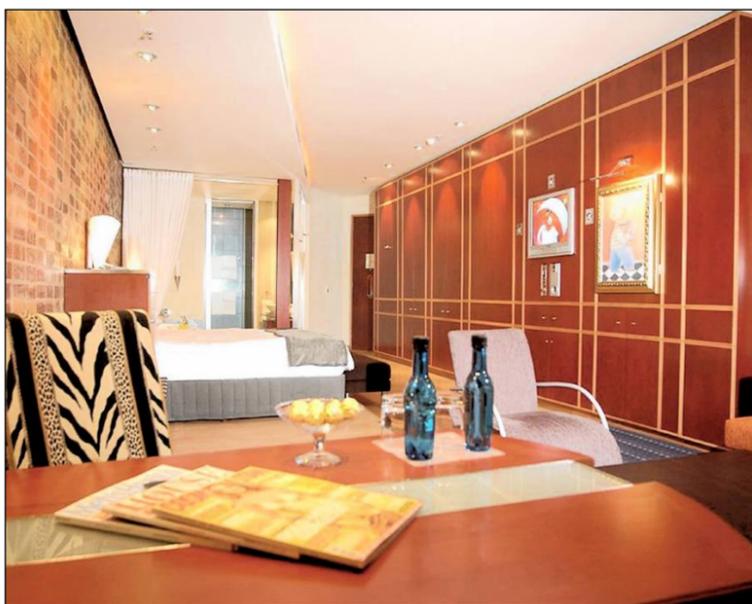
WE FELT as if we'd stepped into a European city on our recent stay at the Melrose Arch Hotel. As late afternoon turned to a wintry dusk, we took a stroll around the streets of the precinct.

It felt as though we were far away from Jozi's crime-ridden streets where you dare not venture out except with extreme vigilance.

The lights were starting to go on in the precinct as the blue dusk took hold and we wandered through, past Moyos with its scattering of tables looking on to a square, browsing in shops such as Tiger of Sweden, salivating at the Häagen-Dazs, which again made us feel as if we were far away from home.

Melrose Arch Hotel's setting is a major plus. While some decry the precinct as artificially man-made instead of a natural city creation, there's no denying Jojoburgers crave that authentic city experience – of just walking the city streets in safety. It's what makes staying in this hotel so pleasurable. Admittedly, most guests would be coming from overseas or from other places in the country – to this end, the hotel offers a complimentary shuttle, Mondays to Fridays to and from the Sandton Gautrain station, which makes getting here for foreigners easy.

Foreigners we weren't, but as I said, we felt as though we had been transported far away, an experi-



A superior room at Melrose Arch hotel – simplicity and softened with minimalistic decor accents.

ence that began with taking the lifts up from the parking lot.

Psychedelic colours change from blue to red as you ascend and, after checking in and taking the lift to the room, we stepped into a lift whose inky interior was lit by starry lights on the walls. Walking the corridor to our room along blue-lit corridors was like walking through the Starship Enterprise as my Trekkie companion noted.

The theme continues in the rooms which are ultra-modern and yet stylishly comfortable with none

of the hard edges that true minimalism can impart. Brick walls complement the wooden cupboards with an accent wall and a floor-length mirror on another.

A small work desk with two chairs completed our room with king-size bed. The bathroom is the new fashioned open-plan, but there are stylish bathroom curtains you can draw to maximise privacy.

The bathroom and shower stall are lit by ambient green light – another futuristic feature which adds to a sense of child's play.



Dip your toes in the pool while dining at Melrose Arch hotel in the summer months.

We dined in the signature March restaurant. Our starters of snoek pâté and carpaccio were tasty enough. I enjoyed my salmon with Asian-style vegetables and noodles, but my companion was less than impressed with roast duck which was dry and overdone. We ended our meals with a twist on a milk tart, encased in phyllo pastry and lemon mille-feuille. Breakfast the next morning was again taken into the March dining-room with its Alice in Wonderland oversized chairs and potplants, and a medley of music that ranged from soothing familiar sounds to more cosmopolitan numbers.

The full fare is offered – from bacon and eggs to continental offerings, as well as quiches, a nice addition to the usual breakfast menu.

I was keen to try the ostrich bacon – as I've enjoyed burgers and fillets – but it was a huge disappointment. Rather stick to the more traditional pork if you're a fan. I didn't try the duck egg, but full marks for introducing a bit of variety into the traditional morning menus. Special mention too of the yoghurts available at the hotel – courtesy of Deneys Swiss Dairy, a local farm in the Free State. The yoghurts are delightfully retro and come in glass containers, but the taste is the real deal, rich and creamy, as yoghurts are meant to be.

Before leaving we took another quick stroll around the pool and the grounds. While it was too cold for us South Africans to take off our togs, a couple of overseas visitors had stripped to bikinis and were taking advantage of the 20°C winter weather. Nice touch to see the jars of sunscreen available at the pool. I loved seeing the chairs and tables sitting in the actual pool itself, a wonderful way to cool off if it were actual summer.

Melrose Arch looked lovely that sunny wintry Sunday morning as we took another walk, adding to a feeling that we'd flown far away, and yet that quick overnight stay had refreshed us in a way that only holidays and getting away from routine can provide.

Melrose Arch Hotel: 1 Melrose Square, Melrose Arch, Joburg. Call 011 214 6666 or e-mail: info@melrosearchhotel.com to book. – **Arja Salafranca**