

# Condé Nast Traveler

REVIEW:

## Raffles Boston: First In

*Raffles' splashy North America debut hits all the right notes.*



Courtesy Brandon Barre

### Why book?

A new build, a new brand, a new chapter for Boston's luxury scene: Raffles' splashy North America debut hits all the right notes.

### Set the scene

Raffles has a huge footprint across Asia and Europe, and its first U.S. property delivers that same degree of cosmopolitan glamor. From street level, you're whisked by elevator up to the seventeenth floor, where the soaring three-story Sky Lobby exudes a certain gravitas and scale that no Boston hotel in recent memory has been able to capture. Anchored by a massive, three-story floating staircase, the lobby buzzes with sophisticated energy, and the check-in process inside the Writer's Lounge—a plush sort of living room space, and a signature of Raffles

properties—is pulled off with élan and panache. When you're here, you can't help but feel like a jet setter.

## **The backstory**

The development of 430 Stuart Street has been over a decade in the making, and the Raffles Hotel portion has experienced numerous delays. But now that it's finally here, it feels like an exciting new chapter for Boston: a vote of confidence that this city is truly a major player in the international hospitality, design, and luxury scenes.

## **The rooms**

Modern, but make it Back Bay (read: classic). Stonehill Taylor (The Ned Nomad, TWA Hotel, J.W. Marriott Nashville) designed the rooms here in an old-meets-new, quintessential Boston ethos. Textured wallpapers, wood paneling, marble accent tables and custom glass-front bar cabinets and closets make the rooms here feel less like a hotel, and more like your most glamorous friend's pied-a-terre. Homey touches abound, from fresh orchids on your nightstand to a minibar stocked with locally-sourced snacks and tipples, including maple bourbon pecans from Q's Nuts and pre-mixed negronis from Bully Boy Distillers. The marble bathrooms are stylish and spacious, with deep soaking tubs, dual sinks, and impossibly plush Garnier Thiebault linens. The rooms do feel like Raffles, but they also feel like Boston—a duality that global hotel brands don't always manage to pull off.

## **Food and drink**

There's a lot of F&B to get excited about here. The hotel is still in the process of rolling out its eventual six dining outposts, but two stand out so far. First is the Long Bar and Terrace (a nod to the original Raffles Singapore's Long Bar, and not to be confused with the [OAK Long Bar](#) at the Fairmont Copley Plaza a block away). Even on its second night in operation, the bar and gorgeous outdoor terrace were packed with scenery locals throwing back Boston Slings (a cranberry-tinged update on the Singapore Sling, naturally) and taking in the unobstructed views over the South End. Two nights in, this place is already fabulous.

The other dining hotspot to watch out for is Amar, which will undoubtedly become one of the city's toughest tables to book. Despite being a city with such vibrant Portuguese communities, Portuguese cuisine has never really been represented in Boston's fine dining—until now, thanks to chef George Mendes, whom foodies may recall from NYC's Michelin-starred Aldea. The menu skews towards seafood and vegetables, doing so with authenticity and flair. The aromatic, delicately flavored *arroz* for two came with heaps of perfectly cooked shellfish, at once homey and exciting. It was Portuguese, it was Boston, it was decadent—and it felt like an exciting new addition to this city's food scene.

## **The neighborhood/area**

Tucked away on Stuart Street between Clarendon and Dartmouth Streets, the location is extremely central without being smack-dab in the Theater District's pandemonium. Everything you'd want to experience in the Back Bay—the Boston Public Library on Copley Square, shopping on Newbury Street, promenading down the Commonwealth Avenue mall—is just steps away.

### **The service**

Raffles's signature butler service makes the hotel's steep price tag worth it, for the right customer. Friendly, personalized service is never more than a phone call or text message away, and beautifully walks that fine line of being accessible yet never overbearing.

### **For families**

With all the glitz and glam—not to mention the pricetag—Raffles definitely skews towards a more grown-up clientele.

### **Accessibility**

As part of a brand new building, Raffles is fully accessible, with regulation door frames, elevator access everywhere you go, and assistive devices at the (soon to be opened) swimming pool.

### **Anything left to mention?**

There are a number of pending spaces at this hotel that we weren't able to experience as of September 2023. They are slated to open over the coming weeks and months, including: the Guerlain Spa and twenty-meter indoor swimming pool; a ground floor patisserie Café Pastel; and an Italian fine dining concept La Pedrona from James Beard Award-winning chef Jody Adams. But if the hotel's numerous overarching delays and sumptuous debut are any indication, some things are worth waiting for.