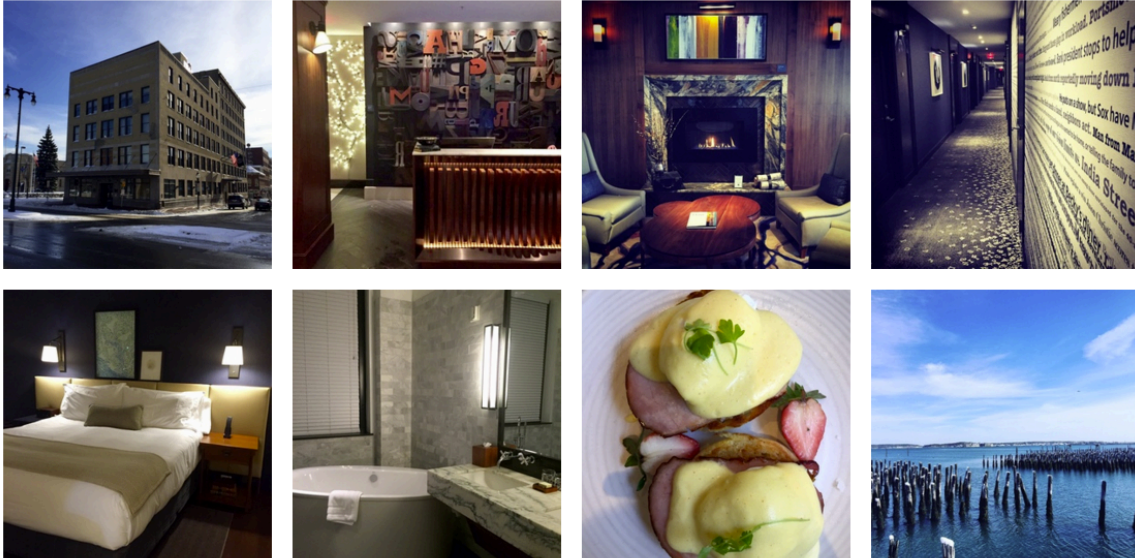


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A WEEKEND AT THE PRESS HOTEL, PORTLAND, MAINE

FEBRUARY 08, 2016

I love weekends away, they are these treasured escapes that make you feel like you're on vacation without taking any serious amount of time off. My most recent trip was to Portland, Maine. In all fairness, I was attending the wedding of a close friend, so Portland wasn't really on my travel list as such and a flight to the States would usually command a longer vacation.

Nevertheless, I made it to Portland via Boston. The drive from Boston International is a good 2.5 hours, so it was a rather long trip for a couple of days.

Portland did not disappoint, it is a sleepy little town in Maine, bordering on the Fore River. It's one of those places you instinctively know will be up and coming at some point, so you want to keep them a secret as long as possible. The town centre is full of lovely little restaurants, boutiques and interior design stores, making it easy to spend an afternoon hopping from shop to shop between coffee breaks.

My hotel of choice was the Press Hotel, a beautifully converted printing plant for the Portland Press Herald, the largest newspaper in the region. The building was revitalised and now houses this delightful boutique hotel with just 110 bedrooms. The welcome was friendly and relaxed, a cool vibe, but not too cool to put you off. Isabelle kindly upgraded me to an Executive King Room, which could have easily been a Junior Suite in size. The bedroom took inspiration from a 1920's writer's office and had a rustic yet modern charm with large windows letting in floods of light. In particular I loved the marble clad bathroom with huge bathtub, his and her's sink and walk in shower. Throughout the building you could find design elements reminiscent of the building's former use. Typewriters on walls, letters on wallpaper, the detail was everywhere, but not in a way that made in gimmicky, which is a tricky job to achieve for any interior designer.

Rooms had everything you would expect from a five-star luxury hotel and the bed was ultra inviting with its 'Frette' bed linens after my long journey. I also loved the welcome amenities (chocolates) and the overall attention to detail.

The hotel housed the Inkwell Bar and Union Restaurant - both places that seemed more a chic neighborhood spot rather than hotel facilities. I had breakfast twice at the Union Restaurant, which could keep up with any sought-after eatery in New York or London. The best part however was the service; genuine, friendly and with personality, which is not something you encounter every day. My waitress Elise was a young student who was fun to talk to and a great advocate for Portland and the Press Hotel.

One hot dining recommendation whilst staying in Portland was *Fore Street Restaurant*, which seemed like one of the best places to go to in town. Food was modern American with an international twist and simply delicious. The open plan concept displayed the kitchen and fireplace, creating a real buzz. While it wasn't a cheap eat for European standards, it was certainly worthwhile and a fantastic night out.

While Portland may be a bit far as a weekend break from Europe, it should certainly be a pit-stop when travelling the beautiful states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, even if it's for the Press Hotel alone. A cool find that should stay a secret for a little while longer.