

The Boston Globe

Staying power: Boston is in the midst of a luxury hotel boom

By [Christopher Muther](#) Globe Staff, October 15, 2019, 7:40 p.m.

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The Langham, built in 1922, will feature a new look, with a more residential feel to the rooms (a rendering above).

Behind the locked doors of the [Langham Hotel](#) in Post Office Square, a \$150 million transformation is well underway. When the last of the sawdust is swept away next summer, the hotel will reopen with a fresh, light look and an emphasis on the city's heritage and history. More importantly, the

once-fraying property will finally meet the standards of the Langham's five-star portfolio.

While the Langham's investment is significant, it's just one part of Boston's current luxury hotel boom. The opulent Singapore-based [Raffles](#) hotel broke ground on a 33-story, \$400 million building last month that will house a hotel, residences, and six bars and restaurants. The Back Bay high-rise is Raffles' first mixed use property in North America. Two new luxury hotels — the [Whitney](#) and a second [Four Seasons](#) — opened this summer. Three more new or newly renovated hotels are coming by 2022.

When all the construction, renovation, painting, and polishing are complete, the number of luxury hotel rooms in Boston will have doubled.

This will come as good news for those who don't mind paying more to spend their nights sleeping in sheets with a high thread count. According to Sebastian Colella, vice president of the Pinnacle Advisory Group, the luxury boom is being fueled by a shortage of posh hotel rooms, which currently make up just 5 percent of the city's hotel inventory.



A rendering of Raffles, a 33-story hotel in Back Bay set to open in 2022. HANDOUT

Prior to 2019, the last luxury hotel to open in Boston was the Mandarin Oriental, and that was 11 years ago. Now, like its tony counterparts, the Mandarin is also gearing up for a refresh.

According to Colella, room revenue at luxury hotels in Boston is outpacing room revenue in all other hotel categories. This could explain why the Four

Seasons opened a second Boston location at One Dalton. Rooms at the property start at upwards of \$1,000 a night. The 65-room boutique hotel the Whitney also opened this year and is bringing in guests despite prices that start between \$500 to \$600 a night.

There's no set definition of a luxury hotel, but these four and five star properties are often renowned for excellent service, beautiful decor, high-end amenities, and their location. If you're wondering who's filling these pricey rooms, look no further than the traffic at Logan Airport.

"We're an international destination with almost 60 nonstop international flights, including connections to high-spend emerging markets across the Middle East and Asia," said David O'Donnell, director of communications for the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau. "I think Boston is truly becoming a global, cosmopolitan city and the luxury hotel development underscores this movement."

While Boston is booming, it is by no means unique when it comes to the growth of the luxury sector.

"It's certainly happening at the national level, and an international level," said Rahim Kanani, an author who specializes in luxury hospitality. "Despite so many luxury hotels already in existence, the market keeps expanding."



The exterior of the Langham Boston. The hotel is currently under renovation and will reopen in summer 2020.HANDOUT

Back at the Langham, the design team is working to combine the building's starched shirt history with a creamy, light, and elegant new look. The lobby and rooms will be bright and filled with natural materials. A new bar will architecturally connect the inward looking, fortress-like former bank to the outside neighborhood.

"We've got this beautiful heritage building, which obviously most of the other hotels don't have," said Fiona Thompson, principal at Richmond International, the hospitality firm overseeing the renovation. "This isn't some big shiny new tower. We have a great space to play with and a location that is unique."

The Langham, built in 1922 and previously home to the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, was named a landmark in 1978. Le Meridien Hotels took over the space in 1981. It became a Langham Hotel in 2003. But while the Hong Kong-based Langham chain grew into a true luxury brand, the Boston hotel started looking a little ragged around the edges.

"Boston just didn't fit with the look and feel of what we did in Chicago, New York, or what we just did in Sydney," said Bob van den Oord, regional vice president of operations for the chain.

The changes aren't solely intended for guests. He said the bar will aim to draw locals and Financial District employees during the evening and on weekends.

"This needs to be a neighborhood bar where you can have a beer, have a glass of wine, or a gin and tonic and some great snacks," van den Oord said. "This cannot be the least bit pretentious. It needs to be playful, it needs to be fun."



The Raffles hotel, which will be located at the corner of Stuart Street and Trinity Place, will house 147 guest rooms, 146 residences, an indoor pool, and a rooftop terrace and lounge. HANDOUT

While the bar gets playful, Thompson said, the look of the rooms will become more residential, reflecting how people live. Hardwood floors in a chevron pattern with area rugs replace wall-to-wall carpets, and bathtubs will become walk-in showers.

“I think people expect something to feel and look residential rather than hard wearing,” she said. “They want softer, lighter fabric so that it feels a bit more embracing and comfortable. It’s a room where you actually want to stay, sink into the chair, and relax.”

While we have a good idea of how the new Langham will look, developers of Raffles in Back Bay have yet to release renderings beyond the gleaming glass exterior of the high-rise. The hotel, which will be located at the corner of Stuart Street and Trinity Place, will house 147 guest rooms, 146 residences, an indoor pool, and a rooftop terrace and lounge.

According to Heather McCrory, CEO of Raffles’ parent company, Accor North and Central America, Boston was strategically chosen because the company sees it as a “key market and gateway city” into the United States.

And as for the inside look of the property? It seems we'll have to wait for that.

“Each Raffles is iconic in its own right, with its own story to tell and its own sense of place,” said McCrory in an e-mail. “Raffles Boston Back Bay Hotel & Residences will be no different.”