

# **fine-dining-guide**



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**51 Buckingham Gate Summer Events Review, June 2011 by Daniel Hill**



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Taj Hotels and Palaces boasts a portfolio of properties as exquisite as the name suggests, and owes its history of success to the entrepreneurial zeal of its founder Jamselji N. Tata , who opened his first hotel, The Taj Mahal Palace, in Bombay over 100 years ago.

The tradition of innovation and excellence that inspired the first property has continued to the present day, including with the chain's London estate, 51 Buckingham Gate and the adjacent Crowne Plaza St. James. The neighbouring properties offer handsome accommodation, both in the conventional setting of the 4\* Crowne Plaza or the luxurious surrounds of the neighbouring suites and residences of 51 Buckingham Gate, which deservingly has been awarded five stars.

The Courtyard at 51 links the two properties, offering a focal point from which to enjoy the Victorian-Edwardian architecture of the former townhouses, designed by engineer Major Charles Pawley.

The courtyard at the centre of Pawley's elegant design is encircled by a beautiful frieze that makes the perfect setting for what might be traditionally described as a summer soiree.

Seizing upon the opportunity presented by this natural arena, and inspired by the tradition of Glyndebourne, the events team at Taj pioneered the concept of 'Opera Al-fresco' in 2010. Despite some inclement weather, this launched to great success, with all four dates attracting a substantial waiting list.

This year the Summer Music Season is back with a varied repertoire, from Classic Arias to contemporary West End Musicals.

Spanning dates from the 1st July until mid-August, there are twelve evenings of music, with four performances each of 'Opera in the Courtyard', 'West End Contemporary', and 'Classic Hits of the West End'.

The artists selected for these performances, from London companies Soprano Bella, The London Quartet and Viva Live Music, are as reliably sourced and accomplished as the dishes on the accompanying menu.

West End Contemporary Musical Theatre, performed by Soprano Bella, predictably packs the punches with a medley of songs from such favourites as Phantom of the Opera and Mamma Mia. Be prepared to join in the choruses and dance to the instantly recognisable tunes.

Cantabile (below) - The London Quartet takes a more traditional tone with Classic Hits from the West End. This includes excerpts from Guys and Dolls and Les Miserables. There is a remarkable, high pitched rendering of "Bring him home," and the show is completed with a clever, if unexpected, rendition of The Lambeth Walk!



Opera in the Courtyard, performed by Viv Live Music, is an altogether different feast, and perhaps feels more appropriate to the elegance of the space. The recitals feature well-known pieces such as Puccini's *Nessun dorma* and the Flower Duet from *Lakme*, with a particularly impressive performance by the lead soprano.

The accompanying menu is fresh, contemporary and Mediterranean in flare. A simple Greek Salad begins proceedings, followed by a yielding and deeply rich Gin-braised Lamb Shank. For vegetarians there is the alternative of a butternut and bean braised aubergine shank, which is equally satisfying. The meal is rounded off by an Iced Honeycomb Parfait with silky smooth Italian meringue, and for those who wish to partake, coffee and mignardise can be enjoyed under the light of the stars.

At £75 per person, including dinner, the Summer Music Season represents good value, particularly as the intimacy of the courtyard offers for a much more exclusive feel to the event than the price alone would intimate.

The full programme is:-

*Friday 1 and Saturday 2 July: Opera performed by Viva Live Music*

*Friday 8 and Saturday 9 July: Classic Hits of the West End by Cantabile – The London Quartet*

*Friday 22 and Saturday 23 July: Contemporary Musical Theatre by Soprano Bella*

*Friday 29 and Saturday 30 July: Opera performed by Viva Live Music*

*Friday 5 and Saturday 6 August: Classic Hits of the West End by Cantabile – The London Quartet*

*Friday 12 and Saturday 13 August: Contemporary Musical Theatre by Soprano Bella*

Outside of the calendar for these special events, the Courtyard can be visited daily from midday until late, where the atmosphere changes like the light of the sun, from a quiet space for afternoon tea, to evening, where it becomes a happening medina of sizzling BBQ's and fragrant Shisha pipes.

Specialising in middle-eastern delicacies and signature cocktails, such as the gin-based '51', the Courtyard is an idyllic space to while away the hours on the type of summer evening that London all too infrequently enjoys.

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