

## Benson Hotel *Portland, Oregon*

### About your stay

*By Deston S. Nokes, Jetsetter Correspondent*

Since opening in 1913, this 287-room hotel has welcomed celebrities, CEOs and U.S. presidents as guests. This is the kind of old-school place where doormen in top hats offer a stately greeting upon your arrival. But the Benson underwent a room renovation in 2010, and its central location near the waterfront and the trendy Pearl District keeps the hotel firmly in this century. And the property is home to three restaurants — nothing to scoff at in a foodie haven like Portland.



### *What we love*

- Location near trendy Pearl District
- The history — every president since William H. Taft has stayed here
- The city's best Sunday brunch at London Grill
- Newly refurbished rooms and free WiFi
- 3 onsite restaurants with plenty of options

## *What to know*

- A minimum 2-night stay is required
- Better for singles and couples; not great for families
- The old-fashioned, ornate decor can show its age and is not for everyone
- The live weekend jazz at Palm Court can get noisy
- Pets are allowed for a fee
- Reservations suggested at the London Grill and El Gaucho

## *Why to go*

*City • Urban • Food & Wine*

## Jetsetter review

Since opening in 1913, the Benson Hotel has seen celebrities, CEOs and U.S. presidents come through its doors. And the same old-school spirit is apparent to me from the get-go, as doormen in top hats offer a stately greeting as I pass through. Simon Benson, a lumber tycoon, built this hotel as a high-end attraction in downtown Portland. The result was a monument to fine living: towering walls paneled in Circassian walnut (a now-extinct wood acquired from the czar of Russia's imperial forest) and Italian marble floors that still provide a regal, Old World ambience in the lobby nearly a century later.



Right on Broadway, the city's main thoroughfare, the Benson is a quick stroll from theaters, sports facilities and tax-free shopping. All 287 rooms were recently

refurbished with new duvets and flat-screens, a much-needed update. The decor is still traditional, with muted colors, wood furniture and somewhat gaudy window treatments reminiscent of eras long gone. But that's the Benson: charmingly stuck in the past.

In this foodie city, the hotel is no slouch when it comes to restaurant options, with three on-site. The Palm Court, located in the lobby, has an all-day tapas menu and belly-filling comfort food like meat loaf, truffled mac and cheese and Northwest berry crumble, plus live jazz on the weekends. Next door, El Gaucho is the perfect hideaway to enjoy Argentinean-style steaks and nightly flamenco guitar. And the London Grill is not only a local favorite but also nationally renowned — *Gourmet* selected it as one of Portland's "Top Tables." There's a wine collection of more than 6,000 bottles, and the chefs are famous for preparing many signature dishes tableside; I'll never forget the performance involved over a friend's bananas foster.

### *What to do*

**Wine Country.** The soils of neighboring Washington County produce award-winning wines, particularly pinot noirs. Many of the 22 wineries (and one saké maker) warmly welcome visitors for tastings.

**Browse.** The vibrant and trendy Pearl District is within easy walking distance of the Benson and has more than 50 restaurants, coffeehouses, bakeries, martini lounges and wine bars, plus specialty retail and furnishings shops and the famous Powell's City of Books.

**Smell the Roses.** More than 10,000 roses adorn the 4.5-acre Rose Test Garden, which overlooks downtown Portland. It's also next door to the Washington Park Zoo.

**Hit the Slopes.** Just 90 minutes away, Timberline Lodge is Oregon's second-most visited landmark, offering year-round skiing on Mount Hood.

**Stroll Along the Waterfront.** Tom McCall Waterfront Park is a stretch of lawn hugging the Willamette River and is home to a number of fun festivals, like the Oregon Brewers Festival. The park's 3-mile path runs across 2 bridges, providing a wonderful walking or biking loop.

### *How to get there*

Flights are available to Portland International Airport (PDX) from major U.S. cities on a variety of carriers. The hotel does not offer airport transfers. Taxis to/from PDX, which is about 10 miles away, are approximately \$35 per taxi.