



# HIP HOUSTON

BY JAILLAN YEHIA

I begin my weekend in Houston like any average tourist, writes Jaillan Yehia, I know this city has been singled-out by its history of space exploration, that it's the very definition of a sprawling American metropolis, and that it's long been famous for oil and gas.

Fast forward 48 hours and I'm wearing my H-Town T-shirt with pride, clutching a NASA fridge magnet and nursing a hangover which reminds me that Houston's reputation for energy has a real double meaning.

I discover all this while a tornado rages in Texas, but it doesn't stop me having a whirlwind romance with the place Hurricane Katrina survivors nicknamed The Big Heart.

**HERE'S HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT WEEKEND IN THE TEXAN H-TOWN**

**SATURDAY: SKYSCRAPERS, SCULPTURE, SIESTAS & SAKE**

**Hang Out Above Houston**

First things first when in a new city: get your bearings, along with a touch of vertigo, while seeing the view from above.

Despite Houston' iconic skyline there's only one candidate when it comes to hanging out and looking down and that's the South facing observation deck on the 60th floor of the 75-story-high Chase Tower. This is Houston's highest building as well as one of the top 10 tallest skyscrapers.

And before you even get inside you'll be treated to a great view; the largest Miro sculpture in the USA marks the entrance to this 1.7 million square-foot structure in the heart of downtown's sweetly named Skyline district.

Best of all Houston's Chase Tower Observation Deck is free.

[VisitHouston.com](http://VisitHouston.com)

**Discover The Art of Houston**

Houston is home to a surprisingly large selection of museums and galleries but if you have time for only one museum while you're in H-Town make it the collection of 64,000 works housed at the Museum of Fine Arts, one of the largest museums in America.



There's an amazing array of Ancient Egyptian artefacts, oodles of oil paintings and a selection of sculptures - and you can take photos freely which let's face it makes it a lot more fun. Visit with the Houston City Pass and the \$15 admission price is waived.

[MFAH.org](http://MFAH.org) & [Citypass.com/Houston](http://Citypass.com/Houston)



**Charcuterie & Siestas**

JW Marriott's Main Kitchen has made the cut as one of Houstonia Magazine's Top 10 New restaurants of 2015, so make your way back to this remarkably trendy hotel for a mid-afternoon snack.

The Artisan Charcuterie & Cheese Board will do an able job of putting you in a Spanish frame of mind - in other words ready for a siesta in the world's most comfortable bed before tackling a big night out on the Houston town.

[Marriott.com](http://Marriott.com)



**A night on the H-Town**

Time to pay a visit to one of Houston's newest night time venues, Tarakaan, where despite an achingly trendy appearance the welcome is as warm as the beaches of Thailand, from where the menu draws its inspiration.

The Buddha-beautiful bar and dining room gives way to a DJ as the evening unfolds and what starts out as an appetizer and an aperitivo can easily turn into an entire Asian-inspired food marathon accompanied by one too many shots of superior sake.

I'm told that London's Hakkasan is the inspiration for the venue but this Houston version appears to retain all the right oriental flavours while it jettisons the pretention.

[Tarakaan.com](http://Tarakaan.com)

**SUNDAY: SPACE CENTRE, SEAFOOD & SKYLINES**

**Serious Space Exploration**

The official first word uttered by man from the surface of the moon was 'Houston' - though like most space-era facts there's a conspiracy theory



about this - but how many cities can lay claim to being name-checked from another planet?

Houston's Space Centre is one of 10 NASA field centres, and probably the most internationally recognized. The main building, Exhibit Plaza, is a family-oriented affair offering science and technology shows, demos and interactive fun, and there's also a Tram Tour which will take you on a little outdoor space exploration of your own: through some of the 1,600 acres of Johnson Space Centre to be exact.

You'll spy deer running around and even cows grazing in fields, so large is the area -and the scale of the operation here can't be denied.

But the most fascinating part of the tour is the chance to the gawp at the testing area for space vehicles designed to be used at the International Space Station.

15 nations work together on the ISS doing things like building robot astronauts or 'Robonauts' who are so sophisticated they can turn pages of books, use tools and even type on their iPhones.



Some of the facts you learn here really resonate - like the notion that astronauts travel so fast they see sunrise and sunset 16 times a day from space, or that space suits on the ISS take a full 2 hours to put on but research right here means new ones will take just 10 minutes.

That's one giant leap for getting dressed in a hurry - I can't help but wonder if we women of planet earth could harness the same research.

[SpaceCentre.org](http://SpaceCentre.org)



**A Texan Shrimp Supper**

Normally I wouldn't recommend seeking out a chain restaurant on a trip, particularly for a seafood supper, but after a few days in Houston it becomes obvious that the Pappas restaurant empire – which includes 8 different options for everything from Tex-Mex to Burgers and BBQ – is an undeniable part of the fabric of the southern culinary scene.

Pappas is to Houston what Starbucks is to Seattle, so a pilgrimage to one of the 4th generation of family restaurateurs' 80 outposts, all headquartered right here in Houston, is a must.

After much deliberation (because everything on the menu really does sound amazing, and because space exploration sure works up an appetite) I decide to try a new dish; as this is as close as I've ever come to New Orleans I plump for the creole-inspired Shrimp Etouffee, such a success that I've already found a recipe to recreate it at home.

Pappadeux.com

**Gaze at the Houston Skyline & Say Goodnight**

The Derek is one of those city boutique hotels that makes you jump up and down and squeal with excitement – there's the rooftop pool projecting classic movies, a free happy hour, an in-house Starbucks and craft beer tastings, a gigantic wall-mounted scrabble board and a private balcony with ridiculous views of the Houston skyline.

It's the sort of place that almost makes you grumpy that there's a city out there at all and one capable of distracting your attention and drawing you away from all these toys.

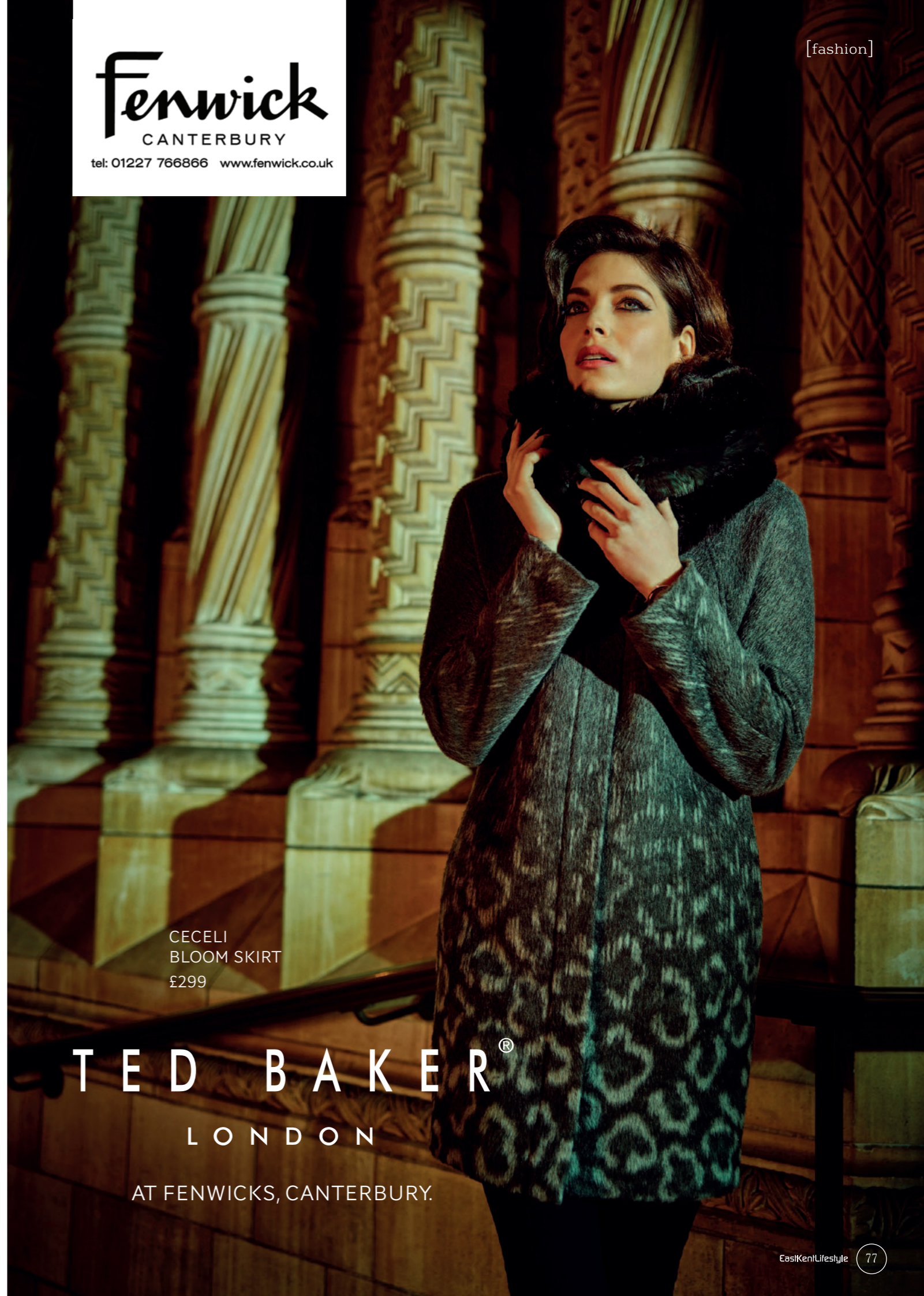
So the best advice I can give if you want to actually see Houston is absolutely not to stay at the Hotel Derek – you'll be hard pushed to leave the lobby.

HotelDerek.com



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