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The World's Greatest Hotels

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Introduction

The concept of a "great" hotel transcends mere accommodation; it encompasses an experience, a destination in itself, and a testament to the highest echelons of hospitality, design, and service. The world's greatest hotels are institutions, often with rich histories, that have perfected the art of welcoming and indulging their guests. They are characterized by their unwavering commitment to excellence, attention to every conceivable detail, and an almost intuitive understanding of their patrons' desires. From iconic city landmarks that have hosted royalty and celebrities for generations to secluded resorts offering unparalleled tranquility and unique experiences, these establishments set the global standard for luxury and guest satisfaction. This book delves into a selection of these legendary properties, exploring the facets that elevate them to the status of the world's greatest. Factors considered include their historical significance, architectural grandeur, exceptional service standards, world-class amenities, critical acclaim, and the unique, unforgettable experiences they offer.

Great hotels share more than just a reputation for luxury; they embody the values and aspirations of their era while influencing future benchmarks in hospitality. For some, greatness is built on legacies of innovation—pioneering service that anticipates every guest's need. For others, it is rooted in a devotion to timeless elegance and the preservation of cultural heritage. In all cases, it is the passionate commitment of hoteliers, designers, chefs, and staff that transforms each stay into something singular and extraordinary.

What sets the world's greatest hotels apart is not only their physical grandeur or the fame of their address but also the subtle elements that create an enduring sense of place. From a perfectly brewed morning coffee on a Parisian terrace to a serene sunset by a remote lagoon, these moments are meticulously curated for comfort and delight. The interiors often merge classic artistry with contemporary innovation, integrating regional flavors, artisan craftsmanship, and cutting-edge technology, all in the service of providing guests with a seamless, memorable experience.

Moreover, these hotels serve as vibrant crossroads of society and culture. They have been the backdrops to historical events, inspirational gatherings, and the birth of new artistic movements. The walls of some of these grand properties can tell tales of famous writers, world leaders, legendary romances, and even defining political decisions, highlighting the vital role the greatest hotels play in the narrative of our shared global history.

As travel evolves and expectations rise, so too does the idea of what makes a hotel

"great." Today's icons remain relevant not just by preserving cherished traditions, but by adapting with sustainability initiatives, technological enhancements, and an ever deeper focus on wellness and authenticity. Each chapter of this book is devoted to a single, remarkable hotel, offering a portrait of its character and exploring the reasons it has earned its place among the world's elite.

Ultimately, the world's greatest hotels are not simply places to rest one's head—they are destinations that enrich, enchant, and inspire. They shape our journeys, create magical memories, and linger in the imagination long after the last suitcase is packed. In these pages, we invite you to explore twenty-five truly extraordinary hotels that represent the height of hospitality, each a testament to the enduring wonder and possibility of travel.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Ritz Paris, France

Standing sentinel on the majestic Place Vendôme, a square synonymous with Parisian grandeur and high fashion, is a name that instantly conjures images of unparalleled luxury: The Ritz Paris. More than just a hotel, it is an institution, a living legend that has defined opulent hospitality for over a century. When César Ritz, the Swiss hotelier often credited as the "king of hoteliers and hotelier to kings," opened its doors in 1898, his vision was clear: to create the most luxurious hotel in the world, offering unprecedented levels of comfort and service that catered to the most discerning clientele. It was a daring concept at the time, bringing features like en-suite bathrooms, telephones, and electricity to every room, amenities unheard of in most hotels of the era.

César Ritz, partnering with the famed chef Auguste Escoffier, envisioned a place where aristocracy, artists, and the newly wealthy could mingle in an atmosphere of exquisite taste and impeccable service. He chose the stunning 18th-century mansion, Hôtel de Gramont, on the Place Vendôme, commissioning architect Charles Mewès to transform it into his masterpiece. The location was strategic – nestled between the Tuileries Garden, the Champs-Élysées, and the Opéra Garnier, it was at the very heart of Parisian elegance and activity. From day one, the Ritz set a benchmark, not just for Paris, but for the entire world, influencing hotel design and service for generations to come.

Over its illustrious history, The Ritz Paris has played host to a dazzling array of personalities, becoming a favoured address for everyone from crowned heads to cultural icons. Its guest list reads like a who's who of the 20th century. Marcel Proust found inspiration within its walls, using it as a setting in his monumental work. Coco Chanel famously made The Ritz her home for over three decades, occupying a luxurious suite overlooking the Place Vendôme – a testament to the comfort and discretion the hotel offered its long-term residents. Her presence cemented the hotel's ties to the world of fashion and enduring style.

Perhaps one of the most colourful anecdotes involves Ernest Hemingway, a frequent patron of the hotel's bar. Legend has it that upon the liberation of Paris in August 1944, Hemingway, then a war correspondent, arrived at the Ritz leading a small group of irregulars, declaring he had come to "liberate" the bar. The Bar Hemingway remains a pilgrimage site for literary enthusiasts and cocktail aficionados alike, holding onto the spirit of its famous patron. These stories are not mere historical footnotes; they are woven into the very fabric of the hotel, contributing to its unique aura and sense of place.

Maintaining its status as one of the world's greatest hotels requires continuous evolution, and The Ritz Paris embarked on a monumental four-year renovation project, reopening in 2016. This was not merely a facelift but a deep and meticulous restoration and modernization aimed at preserving its historical soul while seamlessly integrating cutting-edge technology and contemporary comforts. Led by architect Thierry W. Despont, the project delicately balanced reverence for the past with an eye towards the future, ensuring the hotel remained relevant and luxurious for the next century.

The result of the renovation is a triumph. The hotel features 71 exquisite rooms and 71 equally stunning suites, each a sanctuary of comfort and style. The room count, consciously kept modest for a hotel of this scale, underscores the commitment to exclusivity and personalized service. Walking into a room at The Ritz feels like stepping into a private Parisian apartment, albeit one curated with an unparalleled level of luxury and attention to detail. The decor is a harmonious blend of Louis XV and Louis XVI styles, featuring museum-quality antiques, rich fabrics in soft, elegant hues, and bespoke furnishings.

Each room and suite tells a story, often through the objects within it – a perfectly placed antique desk, a gilded mirror reflecting the light from tall windows, or intricate moulding that speaks of the building's heritage. The bathrooms are opulent affairs, often featuring pristine marble, spacious soaking tubs, and signature amenities, transforming the daily routine into a pampering ritual. Modern technology, from sophisticated lighting systems to integrated entertainment, is present but discreetly hidden, maintaining the timeless aesthetic.

The Prestige Suites are particularly legendary, each named after a famous guest who resided or significantly featured at The Ritz. The Coco Chanel Suite, naturally, reflects her iconic style, a sophisticated blend of black, white, and beige, featuring her beloved coromandel screens and portraits. The F. Scott Fitzgerald Suite evokes the glamour of the Jazz Age, a nod to the writer who captured the spirit of 1920s Paris. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor Suite offers a palatial space filled with elegant furnishings and artwork, befitting the royal couple who spent their final years in Paris. Staying in one of these suites is not just booking accommodation; it's immersing oneself in a piece of history and a particular facet of the Ritz legend.

Beyond the private quarters, the public spaces of The Ritz Paris are equally enchanting. The lobby, though not vast, exudes an air of sophisticated calm, a place where guests glide effortlessly and staff anticipate needs with quiet efficiency. The long corridor known as the Galerie boasts a collection of high-end boutiques, inviting a leisurely browse through Parisian haute couture and jewellery without ever leaving the building – a true reflection of its location in the heart of luxury shopping.

Dining at The Ritz Paris is an experience designed to delight the senses and cater to every mood and occasion. L'Espadon, the hotel's gastronomic restaurant, is a temple of French cuisine. While its Michelin stars have fluctuated over the years, its reputation for excellence, under celebrated chefs, remains undisputed. The setting itself is magnificent, often featuring views of the serene Grand Jardin, providing a tranquil backdrop for an unforgettable meal celebrating seasonal ingredients and classic techniques executed with modern finesse.

For a taste of classic Parisian brasserie life, albeit with a luxurious Ritz twist, there is Bar Vendôme. Located under a stunning retractable glass roof, it offers a light-filled space perfect for breakfast, a casual lunch, or an elegant dinner. The atmosphere is lively yet refined, a favourite spot for Parisians and hotel guests alike, offering a glimpse into the city's social rhythm without the bustle of the streets outside. The retractable roof allows for an open-air experience on pleasant days, blurring the lines between indoor elegance and the Parisian environment.

Perhaps the most quintessentially Ritz experience can be found in the Salon Proust. This elegant room, named in honour of the writer who frequented the hotel, is dedicated to the ritual of afternoon tea. Unlike the English tradition served with savouries, the Salon Proust focuses on a lavish spread of French pastries, cakes, and delicate finger sandwiches, accompanied by an extensive selection of teas. The atmosphere is hushed and refined, a perfect setting for quiet conversation or solitary contemplation, surrounded by plush velvet chairs and towering bookshelves. It feels like stepping back in time to an era of leisurely elegance.

And then there is Bar Hemingway, a small, intimate space tucked away towards the back of the hotel. It's a legendary spot, not just for its association with the writer, but for its exceptional cocktails crafted by world-renowned bartenders. The room is filled with memorabilia, from Hemingway's old fishing rods to framed photographs, creating a cozy, club-like atmosphere. It's a place where stories are told, classic drinks are perfected, and the spirit of Paris's literary past feels tangible. Securing one of the few seats here is an achievement in itself.

Beyond the culinary delights, The Ritz Paris offers an array of world-class amenities designed to pamper and rejuvenate. The CHANEL au Ritz Paris spa is a groundbreaking concept – the world's first spa dedicated entirely to the universe of Chanel skincare. Located in a serene part of the hotel, it offers bespoke treatments inspired by Coco Chanel's philosophy of simplicity and elegance. The design is predictably chic, minimalist yet luxurious, providing a tranquil escape from the city's energy.

Adjacent to the spa is the famous indoor swimming pool, a true architectural marvel. Designed in a neoclassical style reminiscent of ancient Roman baths, the pool is spacious, beautifully lit, and surrounded by elegant columns and mosaics. It is widely

regarded as one of the most beautiful hotel pools in the world and offers a peaceful environment for swimming or simply relaxing by the water's edge. The pool area is part of The Ritz Club Paris, which also includes a state-of-the-art fitness center, ensuring guests can maintain their wellness routines in a luxurious setting.

The Ritz's commitment to excellence extends even to education. The École Ritz Escoffier, named after the legendary chef, offers cooking and pastry classes for both amateur enthusiasts and aspiring professionals. Located in the hotel's kitchens, it provides a unique opportunity to learn classic French culinary techniques in the heart of a gastronomic institution. This nod to its heritage with Escoffier reinforces the hotel's deep connection to the art of fine dining.

But perhaps the most defining characteristic of The Ritz Paris, the element that truly elevates it to the status of 'greatest', is its service. It is not merely efficient; it is an art form practiced by a dedicated staff who embody professionalism, discretion, and genuine warmth. The staff-to-guest ratio is exceptionally high, allowing for anticipatory service where needs are often met before they are even voiced. From the doormen who greet you by name to the concierge who can secure the impossible, and the room attendants who leave your suite immaculate yet personal, every interaction is polished and seamless. This legendary service is the invisible thread that ties together all the lavish elements of the hotel, creating an experience that is both grand and intimate.

The gardens of the Ritz, hidden away from the street, offer a serene counterpoint to the hotel's public grandeur. The Grand Jardin, with its meticulously manicured lawns, sculptures, and shaded pathways, provides a private oasis in the heart of the city. Guests can enjoy a quiet moment here, perhaps a private breakfast or a leisurely stroll, feeling miles away from the Parisian hustle while being just steps from the Place Vendôme. These private green spaces are a rare luxury in central Paris and contribute significantly to the hotel's resort-like feel within an urban setting.

Even the smallest details contribute to the overall experience. The signature scent of the hotel, subtly present in the lobby and corridors, becomes an olfactory memory associated with Parisian elegance. The quality of the linens, the design of the stationery, the thoughtful placement of fresh flowers – all these elements are carefully considered and executed with precision. It is this unwavering commitment to detail, combined with its rich history, stunning architecture, world-class amenities, and legendary service, that firmly establishes The Ritz Paris as a beacon of luxury hospitality and one of the world's truly greatest hotels. It is a place that doesn't just offer a stay; it offers an immersion into a world of timeless glamour, where every moment is crafted to perfection.

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