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Great Hotels Of The World

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Introduction

The concept of "great hotels" evokes images of elegance, opulence, and unforgettable experiences. Yet the journey from humble inns to the dazzling icons we know today is an extraordinary story of innovation, adaptation, and human ambition. Throughout history, exceptional hotels have not only provided travelers with shelter but also redefined the boundaries of comfort, luxury, and hospitality. They have become temples of taste, arenas of cultural exchange, and even emblems of their cities or nations.

As travel became more accessible, and expectations grew, the very best hotels responded by continually setting new benchmarks. From the palatial grandeur of nineteenth-century European icons such as The Ritz Paris or the Savoy in London, to the futuristic marvel of the Burj Al Arab, each era has produced its own masterpieces—properties that combine timeless appeal with innovative amenities. What distinguishes these hotels is neither mere expense nor superficial splendor, but an intricate combination of location, service, history, and a unique sense of place.

Behind the immaculate facades are stories of famed architects and visionary hoteliers, of celebrated guests and legendary events. Great hotels have witnessed treaties negotiated in grand ballrooms, literary classics penned in quiet suites, and cultural movements sparked over cocktails in gilded lounges. These hotels are at once stage and actor, shaping and reflecting the zeitgeist of their times, all while weaving individual memories for millions of travelers.

In today's world, the definition of greatness continues to evolve. Modern travelers seek not just indulgence but meaning: five-star comfort paired with authentic local experiences, culinary innovation aligned with sustainability, rejuvenation of body and soul, and seamless technology that anticipates their every need. The finest hotels blend history and future, heritage and innovation, creating sanctuaries where the pleasures of discovery never end.

This book is a journey to twenty-five of the greatest hotels on earth. Each chapter explores a singular property—some ancient, some modern, all exceptional—not only through their luxurious offerings but through the stories, characters, and ideas that make them so iconic. From palaces on the Grand Canal to eco-resorts at the edge of the world, from fountains of old-world elegance to beacons of contemporary design, these hotels define what it means to be truly great.

Whether you are a traveler seeking inspiration, a hospitality professional in pursuit of excellence, or simply an admirer of beauty and culture, "Great Hotels Of The World"

invites you to explore these legendary destinations. May their stories kindle your curiosity, broaden your horizons, and perhaps even inspire your next unforgettable journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Ritz Paris: Royal Refinement in the City of Light

Stepping onto Place Vendôme in Paris, one cannot help but be drawn to the elegant facade of the Hôtel Ritz. Behind its eighteenth-century townhouse exterior, designed by royal architect Jules Hardouin-Mansart, lies a legend of luxury, a beacon of Parisian chic that has captivated royalty, artists, writers, and discerning travelers for over a century. Opened on June 1, 1898, by the visionary Swiss hotelier César Ritz in collaboration with the renowned French chef Auguste Escoffier, the Ritz Paris was not merely a hotel; it was a revolution in hospitality, setting an entirely new standard for opulence, comfort, and service.

César Ritz, born into a family of poor peasants in Switzerland, began his career in hospitality at the age of fifteen. His early experiences, though humble, ignited a dream: to create the ideal hotel where the world's elite would feel completely at home. He envisioned a place where every detail was meticulously orchestrated for comfort and sophistication, a concept that would later become known as the "Ritz style." Before opening his eponymous hotel, Ritz, alongside Escoffier, had already made a significant impact at the Savoy Hotel in London, attracting a distinguished clientele that included the Prince of Wales. This partnership proved to be exceptionally fruitful, elevating French cuisine to international acclaim and establishing a reputation for unparalleled service.

When the Ritz Paris finally opened its doors, it was nothing short of a marvel. It was among the first hotels in Europe, and arguably the world, to offer en suite bathrooms, electricity, and telephones in every room – features that were virtually unheard of at the time. This commitment to modern conveniences, seamlessly integrated into a setting of classic elegance, immediately established its reputation for luxury and attracted a clientele that reads like a who's who of the 20th century.

The hotel quickly became a favorite of Parisian socialites and an essential hub for the creative arts. It was a sanctuary for writers like Marcel Proust, who not only attended its glittering reception on opening day but also found inspiration within its elegant walls, even reportedly asking for cold beer from the Ritz on his deathbed. Ernest Hemingway, another frequent guest, famously claimed that "When I dream of the afterlife in heaven, the action always takes place in the Paris Ritz." His favored haunt, the hotel's intimate bar, now bears his name, a tribute to his enduring presence.

Beyond the literary giants, the Ritz Paris was also home to fashion icon Coco Chanel, who resided in a suite at the hotel for over 30 years, furnishing it herself to her

exacting standards. Her suite, along with others named after illustrious former guests such as Marcel Proust, Maria Callas, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, continues to honor the hotel's storied past and its deep connection to cultural luminaries. Sarah Bernhardt, Jean Cocteau, Elsa Schiaparelli, Gianni Versace, Audrey Hepburn, and Maria Callas are just a few more of the celebrated figures who frequented its halls.

The interior design of the Ritz Paris is a masterclass in French heritage, seamlessly blending various historical styles, including Louis XIV, Regency, Louis XV, Louis XVI, Directoire, Empire, and Art Nouveau. Rich woodwork, exquisite marble, intricate moldings, and opulent chandeliers create an ambiance of timeless elegance. Sumptuous fabrics like silk and velvet, alongside contributions from renowned French brands like Christofle, Baccarat, and Haviland, further enhance the sensory experience, enveloping guests in a world of refined luxury. The hotel's original features, such as the peach-colored towels (said to flatter a woman's complexion) and the iconic gold swan faucets in the bathrooms, are enduring testaments to César Ritz's meticulous attention to detail and his dedication to guest comfort.

Beyond the lavish rooms and suites, the Ritz Paris offers a complete experience of Parisian luxury. Its culinary offerings include the Michelin-starred L'Espadon, a world-renowned restaurant that attracts aspiring chefs to its nearby Ritz-Escoffier School of French Gastronomy. The Bar Vendôme provides a more casual yet equally elegant dining experience with its red velvet banquettes and a light-filled courtyard featuring a retractable glass roof. For those seeking a moment of quiet reflection or a sophisticated afternoon tea, the wood-paneled Salon Proust offers a serene atmosphere.

The Ritz Club & Spa provides a leading wellness and beauty destination in the French capital. Open to members and hotel guests, it boasts state-of-the-art facilities, including a fitness center, a hammam, and a mosaic-lined pool with soothing underwater music and a ceiling painted to resemble the sky. The hotel has also expanded over the years to incorporate adjacent townhouses and a tranquil garden, providing a peaceful escape in the heart of the bustling city.

Despite undergoing several major renovations throughout its history, including a significant four-year restoration from 2012 to 2016, the Ritz Paris has meticulously preserved its historic charm and timeless elegance. The goal of these renovations has consistently been to seamlessly blend the hotel's rich heritage with modern luxury, ensuring that its revered look, character, and spirit remain intact for future generations of discerning travelers. This commitment to maintaining its unique identity, while embracing advancements, is a testament to its enduring legacy.

From its very inception, the Ritz Paris has been more than just a place to stay; it has been a symbol of high society and luxury, frequently featuring in notable works of fiction, including F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* and Ernest Hemingway's *The*

Sun Also Rises. It has witnessed countless grand receptions, costume balls, and the effervescence of the Roaring Twenties. Even during the Second World War, it served as the local headquarters for the German Luftwaffe in Paris, though it was famously "liberated" by Ernest Hemingway himself in 1944, who, according to legend, celebrated by ordering champagne for everyone in the bar.

The Ritz Paris continues to embody the French "art of living"—a blend of majestic decor, attentive yet discreet service, and a cosmopolitan elegance that feels both grand and welcoming. It is a place where history intertwines with contemporary comforts, where every corner tells a story, and where guests are invited to write their own unforgettable chapters. Situated on the iconic Place Vendôme, surrounded by exclusive boutiques, the Ritz Paris remains, as César Ritz envisioned, a destination that evokes dreams of royal refinement in the very heart of the City of Light.

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