

The Leading Hotels of the World[®]

EVERY QUEST HAS A BEGINNING.



SCHLOSSHOTEL HUGENPOET

Palaces with a Place in History

While many hotels may have the word “palace” in their names, there are several members of The Leading Hotels of the World that really did start out as palaces or castles – and not as hotels. And the stories they can tell!! What follows is just a sampling...



ONCE UPON A TIME IN PARIS...

Hotel de Crillon

Commissioned by Louis XV, Hotel de Crillon was built in 1758 by noted architect Jacques-Ange Gabriel for Louis Francois Trouard. For a time, he rented it to the Duke d'Aumont, before it passed to the Crillon family, who retained ownership until 1907. In 1909 it began its illustrious era as a hotel. From its beginnings, the Crillon has played a part in French history: Marie Antoinette took piano lessons in one of the large, first-floor suites, now named the Marie Antoinette Suite; all of the meetings leading up to the formation of the League of Nations in 1919 took place at the hotel; it served as Allied headquarters in World War I, and as the residence for the commanders of the French and British forces in World War II. After the Liberation in 1944, it became the base for American military commanders and diplomats on missions to Paris. Hints of its aristocratic past can still be seen in the Wedgwood porcelain medallions in the ceiling of the Salon des Aigles; and in Les Ambassadeurs restaurant – once the ballroom of the home – with its crystal chandeliers and marble floor.

ON A HILLSIDE IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE...

Chateau Hotel de la Messardière

Built in the 19th century, the Château was given to Henri Brisson de la Messardière, an outstanding cavalry officer, and Louise Dupuy d'Anjac, and young artist and musician, for their wedding. Following Henri's untimely death, Louise was faced with poverty, but the determined young widow decided to take the Château's fate into her own hands by using it as lodgings for prestigious guests. Later, during the roaring twenties, the lounges of La Messardière were the stage for extravagant receptions and parties. Sadly, Louise's poor management skills slowly but surely led the Château into decline. After passing through the hands of a series of owners, the Château was once again faced with ruin. Standing alone on the hillside, exposed to the four winds (and pillagers), it was widely believed to be haunted.

Finally, in 1989, the Château was restored and extended under the supervision of the chief architect of historical monuments, J.C. Rochette, and opened in 1990 as a hotel. Yet the memory of the ancient Messardière family is still honored, with works of art by the last descendant, Victoire de la Messardière, adorning the Château walls.

UP FROM THE ASHES

Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski Dresden

In 1705 the Taschenbergpalais was built by the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland August the Strong, for his favorite mistress, Anna Constantia, Countess of Cosel. After the two quarrelled in 1713, the palace was used variously as a residence for the heir apparent, Saxon Electors and the Wettin Crown Princes. Always considered to be one of the most beautiful baroque buildings in the capital city of Saxony, the palace played an integral part in Dresden life and culture, with a number of different tenants, many of whom helped shape the region's history. The original palace survived until February 1945, when it was destroyed during the bombing of Dresden. Half a century later, it was lovingly rebuilt, at a cost of EUR 130 million. Historic parts of the palace were skilfully connected with modern structures which resulted in a magnificent period reincarnation. Different sculptures and figures made from sandstone were excavated from the ruins of the original palace, to be painstakingly restored and they now decorate the main entrance of the Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski Dresden.

NESTLED IN A VALLEY

Schlosshotel Hugenpoet

Schlosshotel Hugenpoet is a moated castle situated in Germany's Ruhr Valley. The first owners were the Barons of Nesselrode, called Hugenpoet. They, like many other knights of their times, were frequently embroiled in feuds and ambushed the heavily armed wagons loaded with merchandise

which passed by. Hugenpoet was not spared either during the troubled times in the Middle Ages. In 1478 the castle was taken by storm and burnt down; only parts of it remained standing until 1756. Interior features of note include the magnificent staircase, carved from the finest black marble, as well as three fireplaces, installed in the early 19th century. Made of Bamberg sandstone, they were created between 1577 and 1578, and are deemed to be among the most splendid works of the Late Renaissance based on paintings of Rafael. After World War II, the ground floor of the castle was leased by the Folkwang Museum whose building had been destroyed by bombs. Part of the museum's renowned collection was displayed there until the museum returned to Essen in 1954. That same year, Düsseldorf hotelier, Kurt Neumann was persuaded to join the project of turning the castle into a hotel, and it opened for Easter in 1955. Over the years, meetings and conferences of political importance have taken place at Hugenpoet; the most important one being the G7 Summit in 1994.

AN EMERALD ISLE GEM

Ashford Castle

Dating back to the 13th century, Ashford Castle was originally built by the Anglo-Norman de Burgos family as a monastery. It later became a home of Lord & Lady Ardilaun, and in 1855, Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness, of the brewing dynasty, purchased the estate and it became the family's country residence. Its rambling structure speaks to its expansion across the years, and today guests will find turrets, massive fireplaces, passageways and cellars. Not surprisingly, no two rooms are alike. The castle is filled with antiques and much of the original architecture is intact. In 1939, hotelier Noel Huggard purchased Ashford Castle and established it as a hotel, catering to guests who wanted to fish, as some of the best brown trout fishing in Europe was found on Lough Corrib. Through its history, Ashford has hosted world leaders, political figures and celebrities including: Prince Edward, George "V" of England, President Ronald Reagan, Senator Edward Kennedy, Prime Ministers Tony Blair and John Major, U2, Rod Stewart, John Travolta, Omar Sharif, Bob Hope, Sharon Stone, Brad Pitt, Barbra Streisand, James Brolin and Pierce Brosnan, who held his 2001 wedding at Ashford. 2009 is Ashford's 70th anniversary and celebratory events and programs will unfold throughout the year.

A LISBON LEGEND

Lapa Palace

Built in 1870, the meticulously restored Lapa Palace, with its sweeping hilltop views of the Tagus River, was once the home of the Count of Valencas. Among the noted artists responsible for the decoration of the palace were Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro, one of the greatest Portuguese ceramists of the 19th century,

who created pieces of furniture and tiles; and Columbano, a famous portrait painter, who painted the walls and ceilings of the original ballroom – today known as the Columbano Room. The fifth floor of today's hotel was the noble floor of the palace, where the dining room, living room and ballroom used to be. Today it is where the Suite Count of Valencas and five other signature rooms are located, each of which has been carefully redecorated with lamps, mirrors and furniture recovered from the original palace. The Tower, now part of the Tower Room, was the dressing room of the Count, who loved to gaze out over the beautiful views while getting ready for his day. The Louis XV room used to be the boudoir, where the ladies would socialize together, following the style of the French court. The Palace remained a private home house until 1992, when it was sold to the Simões de Almeida family, who turned it into a hotel.

IN TSAR PETER'S IMPERIAL CITY

Taleon Imperial Hotel

The Taleon Imperial Hotel in St. Petersburg can trace its roots a late 18th-century palace built as a temporary residence for Elizabeth, the daughter of Tsar Peter the Great. It later passed as a gift from Catherine the Great to Nikolas Chicherin, General of Police. Following his death, it belonged to several significant individuals in St. Petersburg society: Duke Kurakin, the merchants Perets and Kosikovskiy, and the banker Stepan Eliseev. It passed out of private hands to become everything from a choreographic institute, to the Marxism-Leninism University to a cinema, reopening as a hotel in 2003. Vestiges of its illustrious past: the Eliseev suite – with original furnishings and restored wall paintings ~ was the master bedroom of the Eliseevs; the Taleon restaurant – decorated in Empire and Louis XVI styles ~ was the waiting room and former study; the casino was the ballroom; the cigar lounge was used as a dining room, and the Eliseev family library still exists, although the original ceiling was lost.



Italy - an Embarrassment of Riches

Villa d'Este

The villa was originally built in 1568 as the summer residence for Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio, and was passed, after his death, to his nephew Tolomeo, Duke of Alvito. By 1784, it was in the hands of Marquis Bartolomeo Calderara and his ballerina wife Vittoria. Following the death of the Marquis, the still-young Donna Vittoria remarried a Napoleonic general. To ward off his nostalgia for battle, she had a series of simulated fortresses and towers – which can still be seen today – built on the slopes overlooking the gardens. The general was so delighted with the results that he recruited a group of cadets to stage mock battles for him. Between 1815 and 1820 Caroline of Brunswick, Princess of Wales and estranged wife of King George IV of England, lived on the property, and more than 30 years later a pavilion was built in her honor by the then-owner, Baron Ippolito Ciani, and is today known as the Queen's Pavilion. In 1868, Empress Maria Feodorovna of Russia rented the villa for two months... and stayed for two years. Milanese businessmen transformed the property into a luxury hotel in 1873. With its beautiful location near Lake Como, Villa d'Este is surrounded by a beautiful park, at the center of which is the famous mosaic wall that was erected by Pellegrino Pellegrini, who was also the architect of the main villa.

Castello del Nero

Castello del Nero traces its origins to the 12th century when it became the country residence of the Florentine noble family whose coat of arms can still be seen, along with frescoes that were painted during various periods of the hotel's history. Among its other distinctive features are a clock tower, three huge fireplaces, secret doors, passageways, and two different family crests. The private chapel, dedicated to San Michele and San Filippo Neri, was built in the late 1700s, at about the time that the mechanism in the clock tower was installed. After the Del Nero family line died out, the estate was taken over by the Torrigiani family. Carlo Torrigiani put great efforts into increasing the activities of the estate farm, and his American wife Anna Frey, was so devoted to the Castello, that she requested to be buried in the chapel following her death in 1917. In 2006, the property reopened as a hotel, and proudly displays a number of artifacts from the castle days: furniture, lamps, paintings, and a library of accounting registers from the 18th century pertaining to the estate's farm land.

Hotel Caruso

The Hotel Caruso in Ravello was built in the 11th century by a patrician Roman family. The original palace was largely destroyed by the Republic of Pisa, and lay deserted until the mid-1500s, when a period of reconstruction began. The present

palace was completed in the 1600s. A further period of neglect followed, until 1893 when Pantaleone Caruso and his wife Emilia Cicalese, rented five rooms in one of the wings of the palace. They opened as the Pensione Belvedere, referencing the splendid view of the hanging garden plunging down the mountainside to the sea. In 1903 a *New York Times* journalist visited, and his article inspired many wealthy Americans wintering on the European Rivas to visit. The hotel came to occupy the entire palazzo, and was renamed Hotel Caruso Belvedere. During Caruso's restructuring, traces of 18th-century frescoes were revealed, and the paintings were uncovered and restored. Of particular interest is the ceiling in the hall, which has a pair of griffins facing each other, almost as if guarding four frescoes depicting Ravello. There is also a chapel, which has a stone altar in baroque style, painted with a marbled tempera and decorated with a stucco relief. Both sides of the chapel above the altar have stucco relief carvings, with images of saints in prayer.

Grand Hotel Continental

Built by orders of Pope Alexander VII in the 17th century for his niece on her marriage, Palazzo Gori Pannilini in Siena evolved in the early 20th century to become a hotel called the Continental, today – Grand Hotel Continental. The majestic façade features a great portal crowned with the Gori coat of arms. In the hall, guests can admire the high frescoed ceilings of the palazzo, lit now with 18th-century style lantern-shaped lamps. The magnificent Salone delle Feste is frescoed throughout with monochromatic 18th-century trompe l'oeil decorations of pastoral landscapes and imaginary architectural views, culminating in the crest of the Gori Pannilini family. Other points of interest include the two-room San Cristoforo suite featuring a 15th-century wall painting of the Siennese school depicting St. Christopher, which was discovered and restored during the renovation work, while the five rooms overlooking Via dei Termini on the opposite side have ceilings decorated by the 18th-century Siennese painter Giovanni Battista Marchetti.



VILLA D'ESTE



ON THE SHORES OF THE BOSPHORUS

Ciragan Palace

The colorful past of the Ciragan Palace reaches back to the 17th-century Kazancıoğlu Gardens which stretched from Besiktas to Ortakoy. The first waterside villa was built in these gardens in 1719 by Grand Vizier İbrahim Pasha of Nevşehir for his wife Fatma Sultan. In 1834, Sultan Mahmut II decided to tear down the villa and replace it with an entirely new palace. This structure was destroyed in 1857 by Sultan Abdülmecid in preparation for a yet another new palace, but he died in 1861 without completing the project. His brother, Sultan Abdülaziz, continued his brother's dream of expansion, and the construction of the Ciragan Palace, which began in 1863, was completed in 1871. The Palace remained a royal residence until the early 1900s. In 1909, it was selected as the site for a meeting of the Turkish Parliament. Shortly after the conclusion of the meeting in January 1910, a fire started in the attic, and destroyed the interior of the Palace including significant antiques, artworks and books. At the end of World War I, during the occupation of Istanbul, the ruined Palace was used as “Bizo Barrack” by the French military field corps engineers. In 1987, restoration was begun, as was the construction of an adjacent hotel, which opened in 1990.

JEWELS IN THE CROWN

Rambagh Palace

Once the residence of Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II and his beautiful queen, Rajmata Gayatri Devi, Rambagh Palace is a living legend of Rajputana history. Built in 1835 on a modest scale for the queen's favorite handmaiden, and later refurbished as a royal guesthouse, the mansion was renamed Rambagh, after the then-reigning Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II. His grandson, prince Sawai Man Singh II, was brought here on his accession in 1910. He later went to England to finish his studies. While there he dreamt of making Rambagh his official residence. On his return to India, he began actualizing his dream, and in 1925, Rambagh Palace became the permanent residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur. It remained the home of Rajasthan's royalty until 1957, when it was first converted into a luxury hotel run by the royal family. In 1972, the palace's management was handed over to Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces.

The Suryavanshi Suite was part of the personal chambers of the royal family, and Suvarna Mahal, the original renaissance-style banquet hall, is now the fine dining room.

Umaid Bhawan Palace

Perched high above the capital of Jodhpur, Umaid Bhawan Palace, the last of India's great palaces, was also one of the largest royal residences in the world when it opened its doors in 1943. Built entirely in golden yellow sandstone, it was designed by Edwardian architect, Henry Vaughan Lanchester. The sumptuous interiors were done in Art Deco that was then the rage in Europe and America. Sixty years on, with the public areas and the Regal and Vice-Regal Suites essentially untouched, the palace is perhaps one of the largest and best-preserved showcases of the Art Deco style. Set amidst 26 acres of land, Umaid Bhawan Palace was converted into a hotel in 1977, its suites and rooms retaining the original Art Deco interiors. The spectacular Central Rotunda, whose cupola rises to a 105 feet; an oval staircase hall, flanked by the impressive Ballroom and Banquet Hall on either side; and the Throne Room with its exquisite Ramayana murals reaffirm the grandeur of this remarkable palace. The present Maharaja of Jodhpur, His Highness Maharaja Gaj Singh and the royal family continue to reside in what was formerly the Zenana, a private wing for the ladies of the royal household.

Taj Lake Palace

Built in 1754 by Maharana Jagat Singh II, the Taj Lake Palace in Udaipur is his most notable achievement. It is said that the Maharana took umbrage at his father's refusal to allow him to have moonlit picnics with the ladies of his Zenana (women's quarters) at the neighboring island palace, Jag Mandir. As soon as he assumed the throne, he commissioned the construction of the Lake Palace, which remained the summer residence of the rulers of Mewar for two hundred years. The Sajjan Niwas Suite, built around 1880 by Maharana Sajjan Singhji, retains an old-world charm with traditional cloth fans, intricate mirror-work on the doors and fine glass mosaic inlay; while the stylish Amrit Sagar Bar was once the private audience hall of the Maharana. While staying at the hotel, guests can learn the ancient Rajasthani art of miniature painting, take cooking lessons and participate in live demonstrations in the Palace kitchens.

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