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Choosing The Right Boutique Hotel For You

By Chic Retreats

Whether you enjoy city breaks or extended holidays in the sun, you can always improve your travel experiences by staying in a small, charming hotel, where the atmosphere is welcoming and friendly and the service is fabulous. There are hundreds of hotels that are self-styled "boutique" places to stay, but not all of them fall into the traditional definition of boutique, which includes:

· Small number of rooms · Design-led throughout · Exceptional service · Freshly-prepared cuisine · Individuality of accommodation and facilities

It doesn't matter if you're staying in Florence or Fiji, you can find a hotel that suits you from one of the categories below.

Truly luxurious

These hotels are designed and run to ensure that you want for nothing during your stay. From chauffeur-driven airport transport in anything from a Bentley to a seaplane, to breakfast prepared to your exact instructions, the sole purpose of these hotels is to immerse you in luxury from start to finish. Although prices for some of these hotels can be high, particularly when they are set in exotic locations, the standards of design, décor, furnishings, facilities and service make every penny count.

City chic

Eclectic furnishings, complementary textile and ethnic accessories; or modern designer sofas, white walls and exclusive dining - city boutique hotels can either be an oasis of calm amid the hustle and bustle of a 24-hour metropolis or they can put you right in the heart of the action. These hotels are often the best way to experience a new city, because the staff can help with maps, directions, tickets, dining and anything else you need in order to make the most of your stay.

Rural retreat

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Using wonderful buildings such as old chateaux, mills and castles, and taking advantage of acres of vineyards or olive groves, or fabulous views across the countryside, a rural retreat hotel could be exactly what you need to turn your trip to Tuscany into a delight of the senses. Design always complements the surroundings and these boutique hotels offer peace and solitude, with activities and visits never far away for those who want to explore.

Chic Retreats is a collection of small, individual hotels around the world that offer the traveller a true taste of luxury and service. Visit our website now by clicking on

<http://www.chicretreats.com>

What Makes A Hotel "Boutique"?

By Chic Retreats

The term "boutique hotel" has been widely used in recent years, but what does it mean and why should you stay in one?

There are lots of companies that claim to specialise in boutique hotels. For many, a boutique hotel is simply one that's not part of a national or international chain and that distinguishes itself by its design, location or additional features. Many hotels aspire to be a boutique hotel without actually achieving it. Overall, there are four main elements to the true boutique hotel:

Size

Large hotels can be cool, trendy and chic, but they can't be boutique. Just as the word is used to describe small, design-led specialist shops, so it applies to hotels. Hotels that apply the term "boutique" to themselves or have it ascribed to them are usually small - certainly less than 50 rooms and in some cases with only one or two. Their size contributes to the atmosphere and service that characterises a hotel with a difference. Whilst size might count in terms of the number of rooms, it doesn't follow that those rooms must also be small. In fact, a hotel that could easily accommodate 20 rooms might choose instead to create just ten, but make them spacious and luxurious, catering to the boutique market.

Design

When the first boutique hotel was opened in New York in 1984, by hotel entrepreneurs Ian Schrager and Steve Rubell, it was praised for its original design and quirky nature. Designed for those who really wanted to participate in their travel rather than passively take it all in, Morgans, and those that followed it, challenged the way we thought about hotels. Although Schrager would not now describe his hotels as boutique, the name has been applied to those hotel who followed in his footsteps as far as design is concerned. From clean and contemporary to themed rooms and classic elegance, a boutique hotel must have a clear design theme and attention to detail.

Service

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The hallmark of an excellent boutique hotel is its service. Whether the hotel chooses to assign a personal butler to each guest, or just hires and trains staff to anticipate your every need, the service at a boutique hotel is really what it should be at any hotel: ensuring that your stay goes without a hitch, that you can get transport, opera tickets or excellent meals when you want them and making you feel at home rather than feeling like you're a nuisance.

Location

Boutique hotels are scattered all over the world, from 24-hour cities like New York, London and Rio De Janeiro to island havens in the Indian or Pacific Oceans. What often sets them apart are the buildings that contain them. From former plantation houses to old textile mills, towers and palazzos, the type of building often forms the basis of the design and it is the blend of architecture, design and service that turns what could be just another hotel into a boutique one.

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