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For "Boutique" Read "Fantastic Service"

By Chic Retreats

One of the things that marks out a boutique hotel from others is the high standard of service it offers.

Why do hotel services matter? As long as the bed's comfortable and the food's edible, does it matter how the hotel treats you? For discerning guests, the answer's "yes". A hotel's reputation is often based on its service - from the quality and availability of its food to its ability to handle complicated or sensitive requests. It is this type of service that many travellers believe is lacking in large hotels, which is why boutique hotels have high standards of service at their core.

What is good service?

People often complain about the service at their hotel, but what are they complaining about? Often it's to do with the amount of time they spend waiting; waiting to check-in, waiting for someone to answer the phone, waiting for room service, waiting for food in the dining room. Slow service and lack of grace from staff is usually what causes complaints.

Boutique hotels believe that good service is:

Immediate - there's no question of staff at a boutique hotel forgetting that you've ordered a drink. The service is designed to be almost anticipatory, making sure that you receive everything you ask for and that nothing is left out.

Pleasant and friendly - one of the most common complaints about hotel service is about attitude. No-one wants to be treated badly in a place where they are paying to stay. Boutique hotels ensure that staff are polite and friendly at all times, so that you feel comfortable asking for help.

Memorable - good service is not just about getting the minimum you expect, it's about getting much more - to the point where it is one of the most memorable things about your stay.

Intuitive - it feels good to be greeted personally when you return to a hotel for a further visit. You notice if your favourite drink is available or if they've previously made a note of any allergies or particular likes, so that it almost feels like visiting old friends. Intuitively good service like this makes a real difference to guests.

Hotels shouldn't be blinded by the trend for quirky design or hip accessories and forget the basics of good service. Those that do won't make it into the boutique category of hotels, whereas those hotels that make the service one of the most important aspects of its offering will undoubtedly win fans from guests and travel writers alike.

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

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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