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Themed Boutique Hotels

By Chic Retreats

If you really want to stay in a memorable hotel, choose one with a strong design theme. Far more than having room names with a common link, a strong design runs through everything the hotel does, and makes the whole guest experience more interesting. Choosing a definite theme can be a risk though and only those who have planned, researched and marketed properly pull it off.

The theme

A hotel can base its design around any theme, and most of the obvious ones have been done: books, music and artists, for example. Ideas for a theme need to be matched with a market for that theme, to ensure that the hotel can maintain profitable occupancy rates without having to compromise on its design principles. This is easier said than done, and some hotels have to tone down their original designs in order to attract a wider market.

The planning

Once a theme has been settled on, a great deal of planning is required in order to ensure that the design is properly thought through rather than just based on a couple of colours and a few pieces of artwork. Creating an individual hotel through themed design is a challenge and the planning process needs to be organised and well-managed to ensure that the eventual design runs clearly through all the hotel's rooms and spaces.

The execution

Once the design has been approved, the project moves on to execution. This usually includes some architectural and building work as well as decoration, furnishings and fittings. For a themed design to work well, everything has to be from authentic sources, so hotel owners and designers often spend some time finding exactly the right furniture, art and accessories to create the themed look they are looking for. It is this attention to detail and finish that often distinguishes a boutique hotel from a run-of-the-mill hotel.

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The marketing

Once the hotel is nearing completion, the owners need to market it. The best way to do this often depends on the theme, but a target market should have been established at the very beginning and this market now needs to know about the hotel and what it offers. From magazines to online advertising, the hotel needs to use its strong theme to attract attention and from that, to attract bookings.

A strongly-themed hotel usually narrows its market, but if the design and execution are properly planned and managed, the hotel can fill a niche and enjoy high occupancy rates.

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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

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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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