

BOUTIQUE HOTELIER

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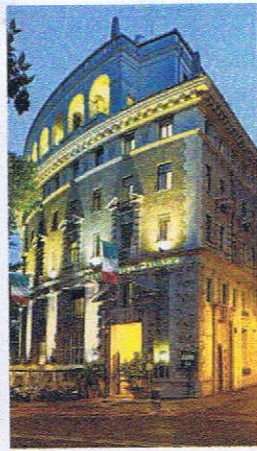
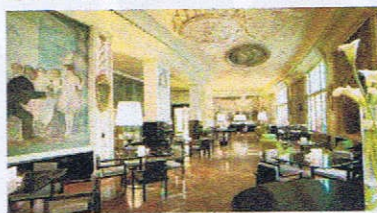
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When in Rome...

EUROPE SAW AN INFLUX OF TRAVELLERS THIS SUMMER, SO HOW DID BOUTIQUE HOTELS COPE WITH THE BOOM? **BH** TRAVELLED TO THE GRAND HOTEL PALACE IN ROME TO SEE EXACTLY HOW THE HOTEL IS CAPITALISING AND BIDDING TO SUSTAIN THE BUSINESS LEVELS ALL YEAR ROUND.



When looking to develop a new boutique hotel in a luxury destination in Europe, Rome has not always been top of people's wish list.

Why not? Tourism is on the up, especially from the USA; the climate is hot and sunny from spring through to early autumn; and Italy's 'tourism tax' rates are lower than the UK's, for example. Surely it should be the hub of mainland Europe's boutique hotel operation?

The reasons for Rome's boutique hotel sector lagging slightly behind some of its European peers are numerous; we can point to that fact that a lot of Rome's buildings are either beyond restoration or owned or protected by the church or the government, and a lot of undeveloped land is unusable because of ancient relics being discovered on-site. Plus Rome, for all its stunning architecture, tourist attractions and great weather, could be said to lack the fashion and commercial appeal of comparable cities

GRAND HOTEL PALACE ROME: AT A GLANCE

- Part of Preferred Hotels LVX Collection
- Consists of 87 rooms
- 25% of guests are from America.
- Second largest market is Italy.
- Joined Millennium Hotels in 2011
- General manager is Andrea Fiorentini
- Hotel boasts a Kami Spa.

“GRAND PALACE ROME HOTEL IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF HOW A BOUTIQUE CAN DELIVER OUTSTANDING SERVICE AND MAINTAIN CONSISTENT BOOKINGS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR”

like Paris and London.

But this doesn't mean that a luxury hotel cannot thrive in modern day Rome. The city's Grand Palace Rome hotel is a shining example of how a boutique hotel can both deliver outstanding service and also remain commercially viable and maintain consistent bookings throughout the year.

Based in the heart of Rome's fashionable Via Veneto street and just a short walk from the Spanish Steps, the Villa Borghese and the American Embassy, Grand Palace Rome represents a different type of hotel to most in the city. The aesthetic is fresh and minimalist, in contrast to the classic and cluttered rooms that Rome is used to.

As of 1 January 2015 the hotel became part of Millennium Hotels, but this hasn't altered its trajectory towards achieving a reputation as a fresh and unique proposition for affluent tourists. Its spa is just one example of its distinctive approach, as this is not the norm in hotels in the rest of the city.

A cursory glance at the breakdown of visitors to the Grand Palace Rome tells us a lot about both its individual design and also the wider hotel market in the city. The majority of its foreign visitors are from America, who account for 25% of the hotel's trade. And the second biggest market? Italians.

Without generalising too much, this tells us that leisure, rather than business, is at the forefront of most guests' minds when they stay at the Grand Palace Rome. It only has three meeting rooms, which, by its own admission, is because business visitors are not a major focus for them.

It is also reflected in the contemporary design of the hotel. The striking, marble floors are one of the first things guests will notice when they are greeted in the lobby, and the design of all the interior is full of clean lines and strong colours. This shows that they are appealing to a younger demographic compared to other high-end hotels in Rome.

So what's the conclusion here? Put simply, there are existential and unpreventable obstacles that prospective boutique hotels in Rome have to negotiate. This perhaps explains why the likes of Four Seasons, Rosewood, Mandarin Oriental and Peninsula are conspicuous by their absence in the city.

But this certainly doesn't mean that it's impossible to run a successful boutique hotel in Rome. With such nice weather for so much of the year, booming tourism, a spectacular cityscape and competitive tourism tax rates, hotels like the Grand Palace Rome have shown what can be achieved in such a magnetic and thriving city. **■**