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Case study 1: César Ritz – the man whose name became a byword for luxury

Few words evoke the idea of luxury in tourism and hospitality as ‘Ritz’ but it all started with a man born in the 19th century in a small Swiss village, César Ritz. From humble beginnings he rose to a position where he was known as the ‘king of hoteliers and hotelier to kings’. In his career he transformed the hospitality industry.

He was dismissed from his first job in the industry in Brig and he was told that ‘he would never make a true hotelier’. Ritz left for Paris and gained experience in modest hotels there and eventually returned to Switzerland to work in Lucerne in a management position, where he met the great French chef, Escoffier. Because of the seasonality in the Swiss lakes he split his time between Lucerne and the French Riviera where he spent his winters. Both places were playgrounds for privileged travellers and even royalty.

In 1888, he acquired his first properties, a hotel and restaurant in the fashionable spa resort of Baden-Baden. This was followed by the purchase of a hotel in Cannes on the French Riviera. The Ritz ‘empire’ took off from this point. He moved to London, took on what was in effect a management contract at the Savoy and persuaded its owner to purchase Claridges. Like today’s celebrity chefs, Ritz got involved in many ventures simultaneously.

By all accounts Ritz was not an easy man to work with or work for, being strong-willed and obsessed with hygiene. One of his tasks at the Savoy was to dismiss Escoffier for alleged financial irregularities. Eventually in 1898, thanks to a financial backer, Ritz opened the Paris hotel that was to bear his name. This was added to a growing portfolio of hotels and restaurants. In 1906 he went on to open the Ritz Hotel in London.

Sadly his personal story did not end well and he died after a battle with mental illness in 1918. However, his legacy was immense and was nicely summed up in an article from 2016 in ‘*e-hotelier*’:

‘Ritz was a snob, a perfectionist and a taskmaster, yet always ambitious and driven. He was indefatigable in his attempts to deliver perfect service within the luxury and comfort of a grand hotel setting. Many of Ritz’s original insights are part of today’s industry standards. For example, a hotelier’s duty to a guest is to “*guide him, advise him, anticipate his wishes and, above all, remember him in order to offer what he likes when he comes back*”. Another motto was “*Never say ‘no’ when a guest asks for something, even if it is the moon. You can always try, and anyhow there is plenty of time afterwards to explain that it was not possible*”. Ritz

also probably created the most famous of hospitality's maxims, "*the customer is always right!*" (ehotelier.com/insights/2016/03/29/industry-icons-cesar-ritz)

Ritz represents that old-style formal style of hospitality that has become a benchmark against which all luxury end hospitality came to be judged. He also created that culture where guests are, at the same time, pampered, shown huge respect almost to the point of sycophancy, but also manipulated and treated almost as children

In this book I have suggested that this highly formalised, traditional style of service is now being challenged, even in luxury establishments, by more informal service styles and guests serving themselves. But Ritz still deserves recognition as the man who transformed an industry and who has influenced the idea of luxury for more than a century.

I feel a personal connection to Ritz, as from 2008 to 2011 I had the privilege of being Academic Director of César Ritz Colleges in Switzerland, a prestigious private hotel school with a campus in Ritz's home town of Brig as well as Le Bouveret and Lucerne. Although the curriculum was wholly modern the idea of exceptional personal service was undoubtedly part of the ethos of the institution.

Case study 6: The design of luxury hotels and resorts

Over the years we have seen a number of trends in the design of luxury hotels and resorts, reflecting trends in both tourist behaviour, hospitality fashions, and architectural thinking.

The longest established luxury hotels include the 19th century lakeside and mountainside hotels of Switzerland, the century or more old grand hotels of the great cities and the 'colonial staging post' hotels, usually in coastal locations, which again generally date back to the 19th century. Their design is about grandeur and opulence but still offering guests the latest in technology, even if at the time this was simply electric light! But otherwise everything is about tradition and continuity.

The so-called 'new world', and particularly the USA in the early 20th century took luxury hotel design to the next stage of development with city centre skyscrapers and a recognition that many high spending guests were on business rather than leisure and also wanted efficiency, modernity and convenience. In the 1950s to 1980s, with the rise of hotel chains, design took second place and large concrete boxes became the norm, even for luxury hotels, in city centres and even in coastal resorts.

Over time, as international tourism grew and new destinations emerged, new hotels often seemed to be following standard designs that had little to do with the location of the hotel or local architectural traditions. A pristine beach backed by virgin forest in an Asian country with a pronounced monsoon season would suddenly become home to a 15-storey concrete block that would not have looked out of place in downtown New York.

However, there has been another parallel phenomenon in luxury hotel design for at least 60 years, which is seen most clearly in modern destinations such as Las Vegas and Dubai, both places with few if any natural attractions for tourists as both are located in inhospitable deserts. Here the architectural style can best be described as fantasy. We have the opulent but pastiche style of the themed hotels of Las Vegas which seek to bring Venice, Paris, Egypt and New York into a corner of the Nevada desert. Meanwhile, in Dubai, we had the creation of the truly unique *Burj-el-Arab* hotel with its underwater restaurant and rooftop helipad. This hotel changed the world of luxury hotels forever, not only through its architecture but also because it claimed to be the world's first 'seven star' hotel, thus destroying forever the international convention that no hotel could have more than five stars. This simple move showed the meaninglessness of the hotel classification ideas that had existed for decades.