

HOTEL SPLENDIDE ROYAL

LUGANO, SWITZERLAND

Everyone knows that the Swiss are great at delivering impeccable service, and a stay at the luxurious 19th-century Hotel Splendide Royal Lugano backs this view. In the depths of the strikingly beautiful Italian-speaking region of Switzerland, Ticino, and with a flair for the finer things in life, the hotel is run at the highest levels, offering some of the most thoughtful service encountered during a stay at a five-star hotel.

'Traditional Swiss family-style hospitality is a characteristic of this historic hotel owned by the Naldi family,' explained general manager Giuseppe Rossi. 'In 135 years, we've only had five directors, so levels of service have remained consistent. Our personalised approach is unique, offering guests an intimate, detail-oriented experience,' he added.

The 93-room former Neoclassical villa was built in 1887 on a tree-canopied promenade, gracefully overlooking the Lake Lugano. The location is ideal for soaking up the glistening water vistas backdropped by steep Alpine foothills, and exploring the sublime lakeside town of Lugano, near Lake Como and Maggiore on the Italian border. The surroundings offer an enchanting mix of romantic Italian old-world architecture, glorious Swiss scenery, and modern culture.

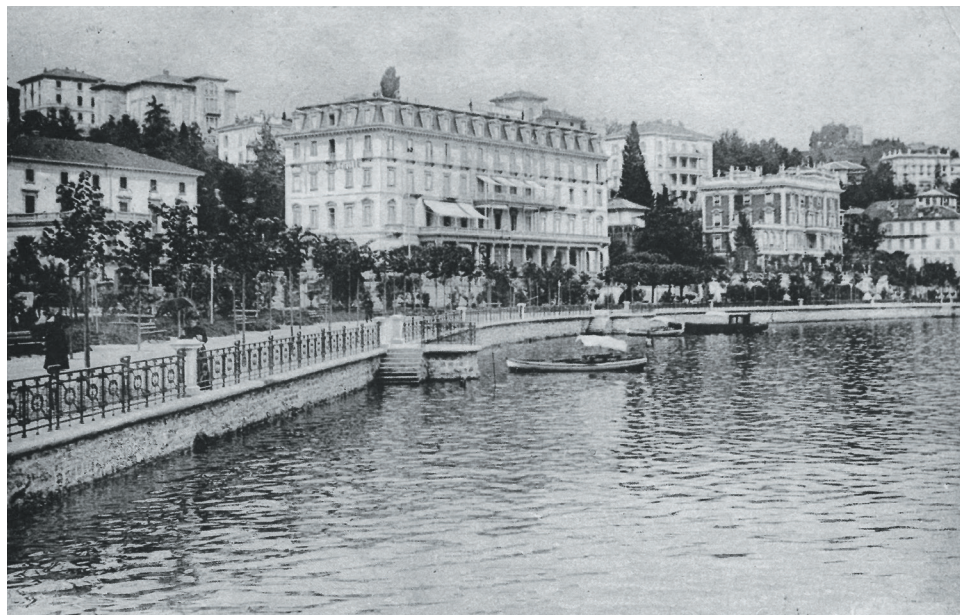
The décor is grand, palatial, ornate, and old-fashioned, with lots of lavish touches, from the original elevator complete with its little padded bench and the preserved marble columns, to the Murano chandeliers, dark-wood antiques, and regal furnishings. Time stands still in the bright and sophisticated mirrored Belle Epoque Bar, where many an A-list guest enjoyed a cocktail mixed by a white waistcoated barman – imagine Sophia Loren, Ella Fitzgerald, Stevie Wonder, Marcello Mastroianni or European royalty, all of whom have slept here over the years.

Rooms feel like royal quarters and have been carefully refurbished over the years to stay true to their traditional design, decked out in silk drapes, fabric wallpapers, and plush furnishings. The biggest room is the Presidential Suite with original fresco ceilings, his and her bathrooms, an elegant living room, and a huge balcony with show-stopping Lake Lugano views.

The hotel's hidden wine cellar makes for a fun secret discovery. Behind a set of grand, imposing wrought-iron doors is a collection of over 450 bottles of the best local and global vintages, stacked open-tier in a vast space with high ceilings and painted wall maps depicting local Ticino wine history: the ideal atmospheric setting for wine tastings and candlelit dinners.

→ www.splendide.ch





The *décor* is grand,
palatial, ornate, and
old-fashioned, with lots
of LAVISH TOUCHES.



LA MAMOUNIA

MARRAKECH, MOROCCO

Entering the ornate bohemian world of La Mamounia with its traditional tiled walls, silk-draped ceilings, and marble fountains is an otherworldly experience. The magic starts when outfitted doormen welcome you in through grand Moorish doors, into a sleek low-lit lobby lounge, onto a plush red-velvet sofa where a steaming hot towel, a glass of almond milk, and a plate of dates await.

Arriving at night is especially atmospheric when the vast historic garden is magically lit. In the morning, a chorus of songbirds, the sound of the call to prayer, and the scent of incense give an unmistakable sense of place. This is Marrakech's oldest and most storied hotel.

'La Mamounia is an oasis in the city cocooned in 20 acres of historic gardens,' said general manager Pierre Jochem. 'Here we have hundreds of olive trees, some over 900 years old, as well as orange and jacaranda trees, cacti, bougainvillea, and delphinium.'

La Mamounia opened in 1923 and has always been a symbol of traditional Moroccan hospitality. It was designed by French urban planner and architect Henri Prost, who developed the Hivernage (meaning 'wintering' in French) neighbourhood in Marrakech into a winter haven for French diplomats.

International royalty, politicians, celebrities, and the jet set have all checked in. Winston Churchill first visited in 1935 and adopted La Mamounia as his winter home, writing to his wife, 'It is a marvellous place, one of the best hotels I have ever visited.' He came here to unwind and paint watercolours, trading his political suit and statesman role for that of an artist.

Alfred Hitchcock filmed several scenes of his 1956 film, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, at the hotel, while The Rolling Stones holidayed here in 1968.

The La Mamounia we see today – most recently in the headlines because it's where the character of Anna Delvey stays in the Netflix series, *Inventing Anna* – was reworked in 2009 by French interior designer Jacques Garcia, with further design tweaks added in 2020 by French architectural firm Jouin Manku, just in time for the hotel's 100th birthday celebrations at the end of 2023. The design celebrates the best of Moroccan craftsmanship and features 135 guest rooms, 71 suites – including six signature suites – and three individual three-bedroom riads, each with a private terrace and pool.

Distinguishing features are too many to list, but worthy of a mention is the Olympic-sized pool, around which a stream of servers ferry champagne and cocktails and hummus to sunbathers; L'Enothèque, an underground wine cellar and dining room where twelve guests dine surrounded by over 2,000 bottles of rare wine; Le Cinema for twenty people with a snack menu designed by French pastry chef and chocolatier Pierre Hermé; and the black-marbled Le Churchill bar. 'This is a favourite hideaway of mine,' said Pierre. 'It's a wood-lined den tucked off the Mamounia gallery named after our illustrious frequent guest, Winston Churchill.'

→ www.mamounia.com





ALFRED HITCHCOCK
 filmed several scenes
 of his 1956 film, *The Man
 Who Knew Too Much*,
 at the hotel.



Hôtel Mamounia Noël 1947



◀ Winston Churchill first
 visited in
 1935 and adopted
 La Mamounia as his
 winter home, writing
 to his wife, 'It is a
 marvellous place,
 one of the best hotels
 I have ever visited.'

THERMAE PALACE

OSTEND, BELGIUM

The blustery sweep of Belgian coast that stretches 65 kilometres from the Dutch border to the French is one marked by vast endlessly flat caramel-sandy swathes, cinematic dunescapes, and quaint towns, the biggest being Ostend. Today, this one-time down-at-heel resort oozes cool after riding a wave of renewal and sees hundreds packing its shores come summertime.

Nicknamed the 'Queen of the Belgian seaside resorts', one of its prized hotels is the vast Art Deco Thermae Palace, a reminder of its Belle Epoque heyday and the glory days of European beach resorts. It started life as the 'Palais des Thermes' spa, which fast grew into one of Europe's most renowned health resorts, attracting several noble families intrigued by the potential healing effects of thermal baths.

This magnificent destination opened in 1933 to great excitement. It featured a hotel with entertaining rooms, Turkish baths, mud baths, massage rooms, and a fresh seawater swimming pool refilled freshly every day – the only public swimming pool in Ostend until 1976, where many locals at the time learned to swim.

'Apparently, in the 1960s, there was a patisserie in the basement where they baked luxury pastries, including choux de Paris and eclairs,' said marketing manager Lisa Gouwy. 'It's also said they baked 2,000 baguettes and made 3,000 packets of butter daily, each wrapped in paper with a fancy Thermae Palace seal on them.'

Another surprising fact: 'Most people aren't aware that one of the greatest French singers, Edith Piaf, stayed here, although no one knows exactly when.' Other famous – and sometimes regular – guests were Louis Armstrong, Maria Callas, Charles Trenet, Georges Brassens, and the Shah of Iran, who occupied an entire floor and brought his own table staff, with tasters.

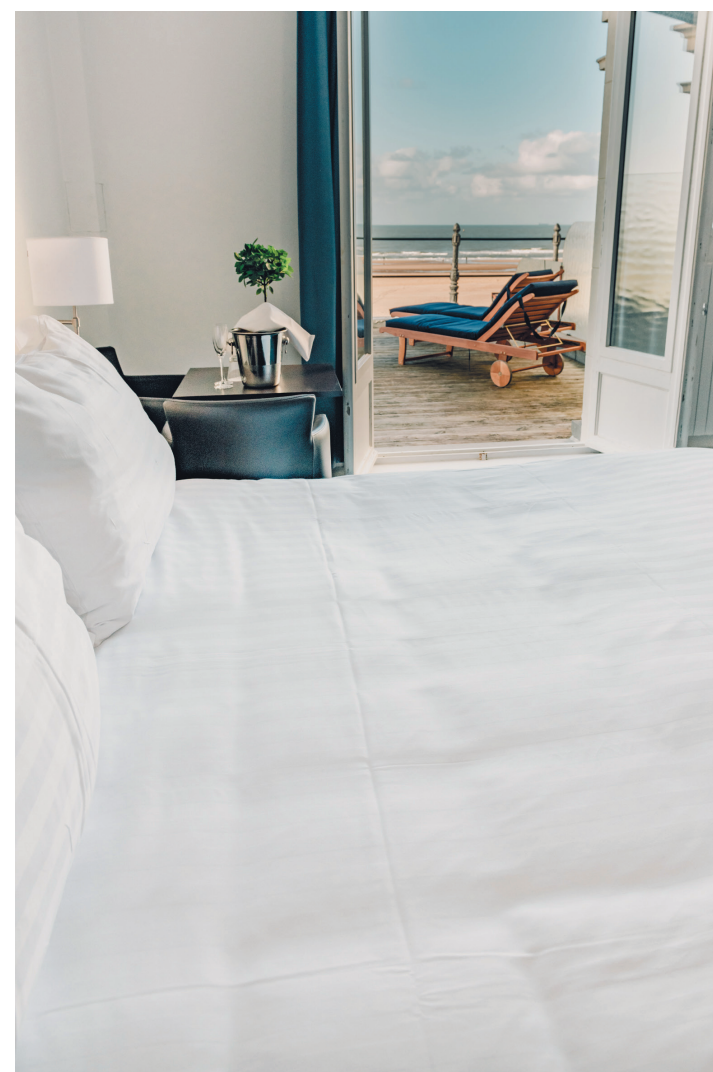
The hotel had its ups and downs, and by the 1980s, all the spa facilities had closed. In the 1990s, it was transformed into the stylish seafront hotel we see today. 'As it's right on the beach and most of the 130 rooms face the sea, guests can open their hotel room windows and watch the crashing distant waves and smell the North Sea,' added Lisa. 'In every room is a set of beach chairs, too, so our guests can sit and relax on the sand.' The dining and breakfast room, Brasserie Albert, with its sea view, is a destination hiding some of the nicest Art Deco features of the hotel. There are also nine conference and banquet halls, each named after one of the members of the Belgian royal family.

→ www.thermaepalace.be





As it's *right on the beach* and most of the rooms face the sea, guests can open their hotel room windows and **WATCH THE DISTANT WAVES AND SMELL THE NORTH SEA.**





► The façade of the Thermæ Palace in the 1950s.



► Ostend's sandy beach with the Thermæ Palace Hotel in the background around 1935.

