

# information

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## **MANDARIN ORIENTAL RITZ, MADRID – DID YOU KNOW...?**

Mandarin Oriental Ritz, Madrid has played an integral role in Spanish society since its inception in 1910, regularly hosting Royalty, politicians, corporate leaders and celebrities. In 2004, Hotel Ritz played host to more than 24 dignitaries from across the globe, including the Emperor of Japan and Crown heads from Oman and Saudi Arabia, for the Royal wedding of King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia.

### **Ritz Etiquette**

No biography of The Ritz would be complete without mentioning the much-talked about Ritz Etiquette. When under ownership of the Marquet family, its management team imposed guidelines designed to protect the privacy and comfort of the hotel's distinguished guests. The Marquet believed that only people with the correct background, education, style and manners could become a Ritz guest.

Mr. Marquet's strict set of rules included a secret coding of guests. Those who were unfortunate enough not to make the grade were called NRT's, which translated then as Not Ritz Types. Mr. Marquet only wanted the most select clientele so those who did not follow a certain manner of behaviour, would be sent to other hotels.

### **Ties**

Ties had to be worn without exception and the issue of not wearing one has been a source of numerous anecdotes at The Ritz, the most famous being one concerning Herbert von Karajan. The famous conductor was known as an elegant dresser, wearing usually dark blazers combined with the finest silk or cashmere turtleneck sweaters.

One day, upon entering the restaurant, the waiter asked him to wear a tie. Karajan was not amused, but it was too late to look for another restaurant outside of the hotel and reluctantly he went back to his room where he changed and came down in a dinner jacket. On leaving the hotel the next day, he advised the manager that he had lost a client for ever.

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The following year the General Manager, Pablo Kessler, received a personal telephone call from Mr. Karajan himself, who requested his usual suite, 528 – 529. Mr. Kessler told the esteemed conductor that he would be delighted to welcome Mr. Karajan back to the Ritz, as long as he remembered the house rules!

### **Ladies in Trousers? Out of question!**

Another of the house rules was that ladies could not enter the hotel in trousers. Two American ladies, determined to drink their tea at The Ritz, became resourceful. They simply went to the lady's cloakroom, removed the offending pieces, put on their coats and went to enjoy their tea!

Smoking was only allowed in the lobby but certainly not in the restaurant. Mr. Marquet considered that smoking and enjoying the exquisite flavours of a good meal were not compatible.

The 'No Animals' rule infuriated the actor and dancer Gene Kelly, who decided, although already in the lobby, not to check in at all and left for a hotel more tolerant of his pet dog.

### **Artists and bullfighters**

For many years, it was believed that The Ritz did not allow show-business people to stay. It was not that Marquet had anything against them personally, it was simply that he objected to their noisy, colourful entourages and the presence of boisterous fans in front of the hotel. As Marquet also owned the Hotel Palace at the time, when the secretary or agent of a Hollywood star requested a room, they were politely informed that The Ritz was full, but that they might be very comfortable at The Palace!

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Of course, even Mr. Marquet made exceptions for actors he greatly admired, such as Leslie Howard, Henry Fonda - who spoke perfect Spanish, Laurence Olivier, because he had the title of a Lord, Cary Grant who was always impeccably dressed, James Stewart who was booked in by the American Embassy as Army General James Stewart, Orson Welles and Richard Burton.

Among other guests who have made the hotel their Madrid home were The Duke and Duchess of Windsor. The royal couple stayed at The Ritz on many occasions and always in Suite 511-512. The Duke loved speaking Spanish and attended many social events, polo tournaments and hunting parties whilst in the country.

Prince Rainier of Monaco and Princess Grace began their Honeymoon at the Ritz in Madrid and returned frequently to the hotel.

Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was another esteemed royal guests, but his country's etiquette dictated that nobody could look him directly in the eyes or turn their back on him, meaning that staff were required to leave the room walking backwards. Needless to say, this resulted in quite a number of "crashes"! No touching was allowed, making it a difficult task for the housekeeper who often had to sew his many medals and distinctions on to his official evening attire when he was already dressed.

During the dramatic years of the Spanish Civil War, the Ritz became a Military Hospital. Many of the regular staff stayed on to support the patients during those difficult times. The Madrid palaces of many aristocratic families were badly damaged during the war and whilst they were restored to former splendour, many of their owners lived at The Ritz, some became so used to the comfort and service that they never left!

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Leonard Bernstein, the famous composer and conductor stayed at The Ritz in 1984. The management had tuned the piano at the entrance of the restaurant, hoping that he wouldn't be able to resist playing it during his stay. Their foresight was rewarded. One day, walking past the piano he stopped and started to play a few notes, frowned, tried again and closed the lid saying that the piano did not sound right. Everybody was puzzled, the tuner arrived once more to check out the piano and all was revealed. Leonard Bernstein was right; it was out of tune because the hotel pianist had left a plate of cake within the entrails of the instrument.

Ava Gardner came to the hotel for the first time in 1950 when shooting a film in Madrid and stayed for 20 years. She lived at The Ritz before later moving to her own home in the city.

Frank Sinatra visited in 1986 for a concert and stayed in suite 110-111-112. He rarely left his accommodation and was disappointed that his concert in Madrid did not sell well. There were 20,000 tickets left on the day of the concert, which resulted in members of The Ritz staff receiving complimentary tickets.

Leslie Howard always disguised himself as an old man in order to avoid his legions of fans who waited patiently day and night outside the hotel. They waited in vain as they never recognised him when he passed them when entering and exiting the front door.

Salvador Dali and his wife Gala lived at the Hotel Palace when in Madrid but always had lunch at the Ritz restaurant, the final time being in 1980.

The famous scientist **Alexander Fleming**, who stayed in 1948, enjoyed the "Callos" of the Ritz (traditional Madrid dish of tripe with garlic) so much, that the chefs prepared tins for him, which he took with him back home to England.

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Antonio Banderas celebrated his first wedding at the Ritz. He later stated that he had especially thought of The Ritz for his wedding, knowing that in the past actors had not been welcome there and that being accepted to celebrate his special day at The Ritz made him feel that he really had arrived. In later years he returned with his second wife, Melanie Griffith.

Barbara Hutton, heir to the Woolworth fortune, stayed at The Ritz in the 1970's. She and her entourage occupied almost a whole floor. Immensely eccentric, on occasion she would refuse to walk, and on these occasions the strongest of her chauffeurs were required to carry her up to her room. She adored bull fighting and had at least one love affair with a well-known bull fighter while at The Ritz.

Yves Saint-Laurent, one of the greatest names in French fashion, always chose to stay at The Ritz during his visits to Madrid, favouring the Royal Suite where he said he “genuinely felt at home.”

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**For further information, please contact:**

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