



THE FASCINATING HISTORY
OF THE ESPLANADE HOTEL

SINCE 1925



The Esplanade Hotel is by far the best known and most luxurious hotel in Zagreb and the region, and April 2015 marked its 90th year since it first opened its doors. Its timeless elegance, sophistication and charm, which back in 1925 attracted passengers of the famous Orient Express, today is considered an elite venue and cultural historic icon of Zagreb. Known as the temple of comfort and cuisine, during the nineties it positively kept up with contemporary trends, while equally fostering the harmony of tradition and the past.









B U I L T F O R T H E P A S S E N G E R S O F T H E O R I E N T E X P R E S S

In the early 20th century two of the most well-known hotels of the time became far too small for the increasing number of passengers who arrived in Zagreb stepping off the famous Orient Express. In order to meet the changing needs of the city, the construction development of a new luxurious hotel imposed itself as a priority. The hotel was to be built on a vast open field, close to the railway station – the once only link with Europe and the rest of the world - which was one of the stops of the prestigious Orient Express en-route between Paris-Venice-Istanbul.

In 1917 an international tender was announced which attracted numerous excellent architects of the time including the famous Swiss, Alfred Loos - although he did not win the tender. Success came to German, Otto Rehnig, whose original plans were reworked by Dionis Sunko, who today is considered the architect of this masterpiece of architecture of the “Belle Époque”. The construction of the largest hotel in Zagreb took place over a mere 26 months. The opening ceremony, on 22 April 1925, drew over 200 distinguished guests, including Mayor Heinzel of Zagreb. Journalists wrote words predicting a bright future at an international level, and among the first guests of the hotel was a Mr. Glück, (German for *happiness*), which was an indication that this prediction was to become true. And so it was!











L U X U R I O U S , S O P H I S T I C A T E D A N D D I G N I F I E D

Indeed, the first guests had no cause for complaint as the hotel was luxurious, sophisticated, and extremely comfortable, equipped with the latest advances of modern science. There were two hundred rooms available with running hot and cold water, one hundred bathrooms, a phone in every room, numerous apartments, salons, and restaurants with excellent cuisine and a magnificent ballroom decorated with ionic columns and sculptures. The impact of the Esplanade had back then upon the social life of city is best evidenced by recent common opinion that “once you step inside, the experience is worth mentioning to your grandchildren”. It is not surprising that many generations have spoken in awe of the elegant and magical areas of the hotel.











THE GOLDEN YEARS OF THE ESPLANADE

During the early years, the Esplanade's most frequent visitors were journalists who were constantly searching for interesting people and attention-grabbing events. The extravagant Esplanade balls were the most attractive of all, and were for many years the largest and talked-about social event in town. The Esplanade hotel also acquired literary notoriety by becoming an ideal setting for love affairs in contemporary writers' novels, since it was said, "it attracted dissatisfied wives and their lovers." Also, the very first striptease in the country took place at a farewell party given by an Italian count when certain ladies took off their shoes and clothes, remaining in their underwear. This "most fashionably appointed hotel of Central Europe" attracted many famous personalities. One of the first famous guests was the silent-movie star Asta Nielsen and stage and screen actress Gitta Alpár, whose fans besieged the Esplanade hotel for hours on end. Similar crowds awaited the arrival of the black Venus, the Queen of Parisian cabarets, Josephine Baker. The impressive list of famous guests includes the European king of shoes, Bata, the greatest screen lover of the 1920s, Vladimir Gajdarov, Lady Ashby who was Chairwoman of the International Alliance for Women's Rights, Charles Lindbergh, the man who first flew over the Atlantic Ocean, and French writer, Jules Romains. Even royalty chose to spend time at the hotel including the King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, the extremely rich Prince of Nepal and the former King of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi, who have all featured on the Esplanade guest list.







T H E W A R Y E A R S

In 1941, during the first days of foreign occupation, sadly the hotel was completely empty; the last guests disappeared without a trace and German officers arrived. The Esplanade became the Gestapo's and the Wehrmacht's headquarters in Zagreb. Nevertheless, this was equally a place of some remarkably happy moments, such as the guest performance of the famous opera singer, Beniamino Gigli. After the Second World War, the hotel was transformed into a public kitchen, but at the start of the 1950s the hotel underwent its first reconstruction. In time for the re-opening in 1957, the famous Italian tenor, Mario del Monaco and his wife were among the first guests to pay homage to the re-energized hotel. Within just a few years, the Esplanade Hotel proudly joined the Inter-Continental Hotel Corporation.



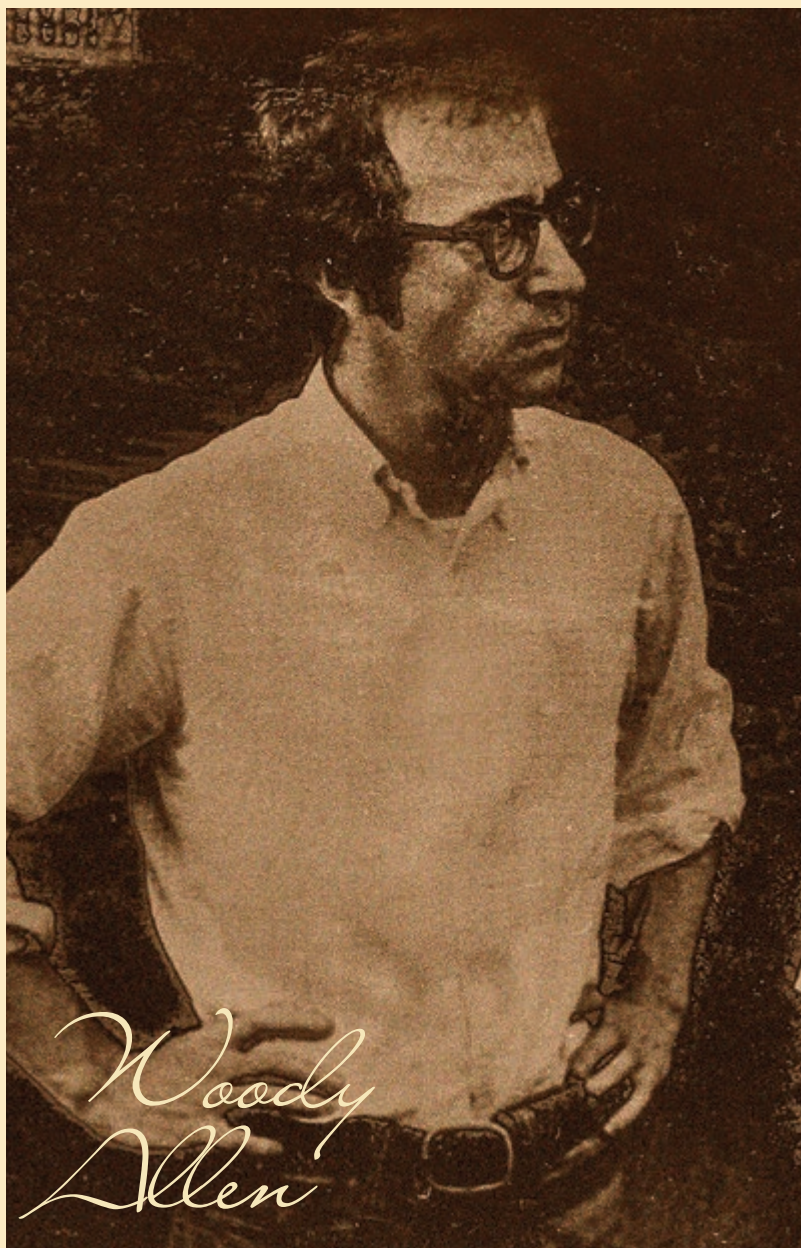


TRACES OF THE STARS AT THE ESPLANADE

Entering the high society of the best hotels in the world marked the beginning of the Esplanade's golden years. The Esplanade Hotel became the centre of social and cultural life of Zagreb, in which numerous events, symposiums, fashion shows, culinary competitions and gastronomic events were held. During the past forty years, a number of famous guests have chosen to stay at the Esplanade: Giuseppe de Santis, Anita Ekberg, Silvana Pampanini, Yul Brynner, Jack Palance, Rossana Podestà, Belinda Lee, Gérard Philipe, Moira Orfei, Orson Welles, Liv Ullmann, Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Arthur Rubinstein, Domenico Modugno, Charles Aznavour, Maria Callas, Maya Plisetskaya, Arthur Miller, Francis Ford Coppola, Anthony Quinn, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Aram Khachaturian, Henryk Szeryng, Pele, Kurd Jurgens, Yves Montand, Simone Signoret, Stewart Granger, Erroll Garner, Ike & Tina Turner, Joan Baez, Cliff Richard, Gian Maria Volonté, Barbara Mikulski, Pablo Casals, David Oistrakh, Clay Regazzoni, Nelson Piquet, Bobby Charlton, Ingemar Stenmark, Irina Rodnina, Fats Domino, Sir Rudolf Peierls, Morgan Fairchild, Bob Guccione, Woody Allen, Catherine Deneuve, Gary Oldman, Armand Assante, Michael York, George Soros, Éva Marton, Juan Antonio Samaranch, Sadako Ogata, Lucia Aliberti, Garry Kasparov, Susan Sontag, Eros Ramazzotti, Alain Finkielkraut, Jane Seymour, Omar Sharif, Paolo Coelho, B. B. King, Pierce Brosnan, Zubin Mehta and several others.

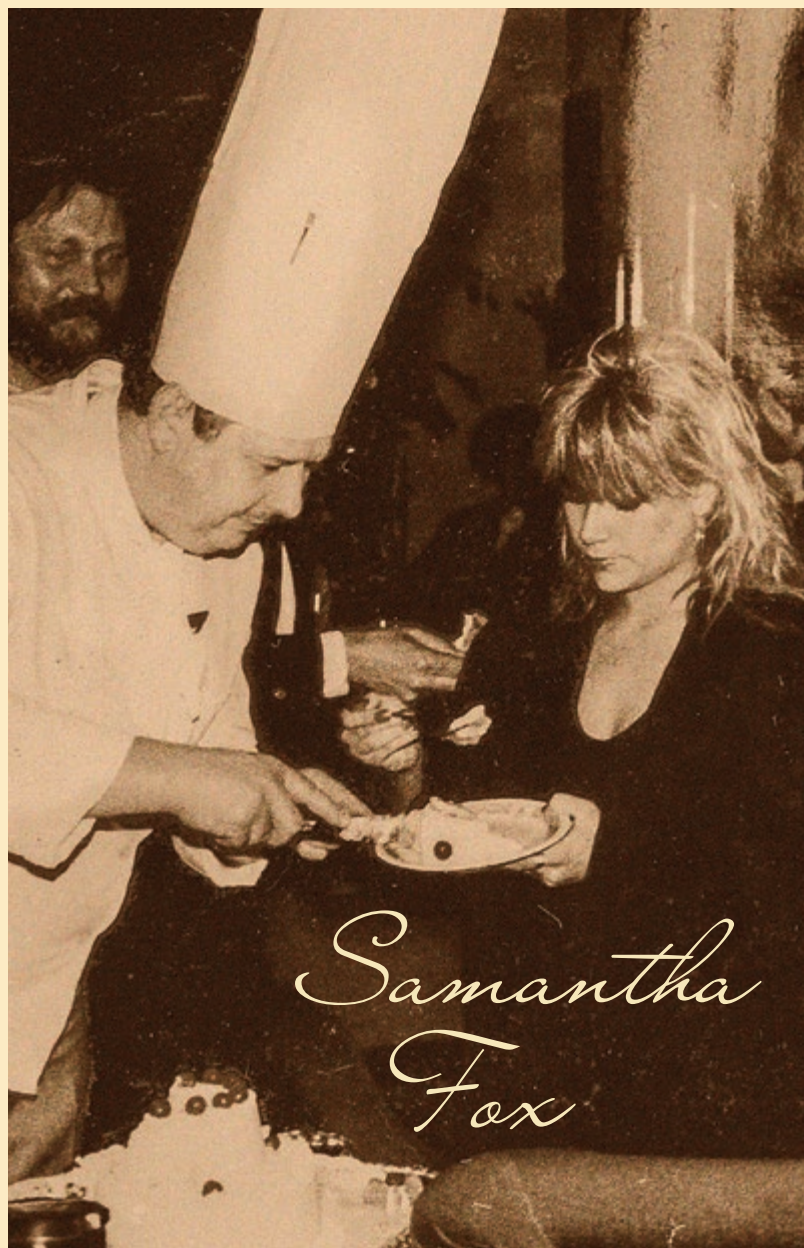








Miss Esplanade



*Samantha
Fox*



Various diplomats and world statesmen have also stepped through the doors of the Esplanade: Queen Elizabeth II, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Richard Nixon, Prince Sihanouk, Amintore Fanfani, Aldo Moro, Milton Obote, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Edmund Kohl, James William Fulbright, Henry Kissinger, Andrei Gromyko, dr. Rudolf Kirschläger, Matteotti Mario Soares, Maurice Couve de Murville, Aldo Moro, Martín Torrijos, Alain Juppé, Francesco Cossiga, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, Turgut Özal, Süleyman Demirel and Hans Dietrich Genscher. These are some of the distinguished guests who signed the Esplanade guestbook and of course, certain celebrities, statesmen, and politicians chose to pass through the hotel incognito.







THE ESPLANADE'S COMPLETE RENOVATION RETURNING TO ITS ORIGINAL GLORY

After the heavy war period during the nineties, when Zagreb was mainly visited by foreign journalists and peace missions, in 2002, the Esplanade entered a new phase as the hotel closed its doors followed by a complete renovation. A Zagreb experts responsible for shaping the hotel and an architecture design company based in London, called MKV Design, led by award-winning interior designer Maria Vafiadis, had a mission to renovate the hotel and return it to its original glory. Finding original designs and photographs greatly assisted the redesigning of the hotel which finally found the right balance between the Neoclassical and Art Deco style of the existing building and the introduction of modern elements appropriate to a luxury hotel at the beginning of the 21st century.

Following two years of extensive restoration and demanding work, the Esplanade Hotel was handed over to the management of a luxury international hotel group and celebrated its official opening on 11 November 2004 under the name of the Regent Esplanade Zagreb. Within the familiar splendour and new image, the hotel continues to follow its well-known tradition of discreet and elegant service at a high level, which guests always appreciate. New trends within the hotel industry, the perfect blend of timeless elegance and tradition of a hotel with modern, dynamic, contemporary design and functionality has launched the Esplanade to the top of the list of most luxurious hotels in the region and equally, across the globe. Once again, the Esplanade has regained the title as the centre of the social life of the city, as the hotel has become a favourite meeting place for business people, celebrities, journalists and all those who admire exceptional service and luxurious surroundings.





*Orlando
Bloom*



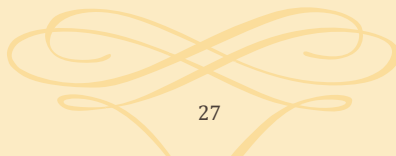
*Ennio
Morricone*



THE CENTRE OF THE ZAGREB SOCIAL SCENE

The first guests at the re-opened hotel, once again enjoyed the luxury and elegance the Esplanade still radiates. The restored hotel with its luxurious and stylish ambience, yet familiar charm, continued to attract many people from public life and the world of showbiz, such as actors, singers, politicians and royalty. Over the last decade the hotel has proudly hosted numerous members of world acclaimed bands such as Depeche Mode, Simple Minds, Franz Ferdinand, U2, R.E.M, Backstreet Boys, Pet Shop Boys, Guns 'n' Roses, The Offspring and Snow Patrol. World-famous singers have equally enjoyed their stay at the Esplanade including Robbie Williams, Bob Geldof, Joe Cocker, Natalie Cole, Bryan Ferry, Sting, Morrissey, Lenny Kravitz, Patti Smith, José Carreras, Paco de Lucía, Chris Rea, Sade and Shakira, not to mention stars of film and TV including Courtney Thorne Smith, Orlando Bloom, Armand Assante, Hugh Laurie and a host of others.

The hotel has often been home to many athletes and sports personalities who have stayed in Zagreb: from David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo, Jennifer Capriati, Mary Pierce, Pep Guardiola to endless famous basketball, handball and football teams. Politicians, diplomats and royalty are frequent hotel guests. Guests who have expressed their delight include Cypriot President Tassos Papandopoulos, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, German President Horst Köhler, President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak, the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso, First Lady of the United States and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Austrian President Heinz Fischer, Prince Albert II of Monaco, Princess Anne, Emir of Qatar, Saudi Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, Japanese Prince and Princess Akishino, Swedish King Carl Gustaf XVI and Queen Silvia, the Danish Queen Margareta II and Prince Henrik and many others. The hotel has also hosted model and daughter of the famous musician, Jade Jagger, famous Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho, renowned photographer Peter Lindbergh, violinist Julian Rachlin, British artists Gilbert & George, designer Karim Rashid, DJ David Guetta, music producer Dave Clark, musician Maksim Mrvica and Academy award-winner Maestro Ennio Morricone with many others on the list.



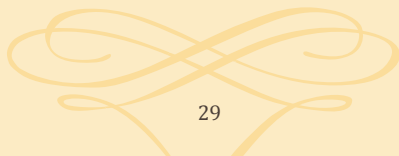




S I G N I F I C A N T A N D H I S T O R I C A L E V E N T S I N T H E L A S T T E N Y E A R S

There have been numerous events and guests that have poignantly marked the last decade of the hotel. Exclusive presentations, conferences, fashion shows, ceremonies and spectacular daily programs held in the magnificent Emerald Ballroom have attracted numerous guests. Notably, one such ceremony award at the Esplanade was the World Luxury Hotel Awards, which attracted enormous attention. A historical celebration on Ban Jelačić Square celebrated Croatia becoming a full EU member state on 1 July 2013. For this occasion, Zagreb welcomed numerous statesmen, many of whom stayed at the Esplanade Hotel due to the historical importance and uniqueness of the event. This day will be forever remembered as being the first time on the same day, several dozen top level delegations stayed at the hotel, which was guarded by security forces as never before.

The Esplanade Hotel, independent from 2012, continues to follow the well-known tradition and high standards of top-quality service and innovation, fresh ideas and pushing the boundaries setting new trends in the hotel industry. A series of numerous awards only confirms the leading position of the hotel in Zagreb and the region. The Esplanade was and is the temple of the finest gastronomy establishing itself as a hotel with exquisite taste, sophistication, exceptional service and special, honest relationships with Zagreb, its citizens and every single guest.











ESPLANADE ZAGREB

LUXURY HOTEL

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