

What are Boutique Hotels?

A *boutique* hotel is one that is generally not chain-affiliated, features an intimate, stylish or different appearance and provides personal service. Also referred to as lifestyle or design hotels, the trend and related name began in the 1980s by Northern Americans. Although many boutique hotels are small, ranging from single digit rooms to less than 100, some in major cities have well over 100 rooms.

The definition of boutique hotel is rather vague. Boutique hotels are sometimes hip and at other times historic. Some are unique in design, architecture or theme. However, a boutique hotel usually distinguishes itself in these areas: design, service and target market. Some boutique hotels are themed; many attempt to be unique by either offering themed rooms or choosing an overall theme for the hotel.

A boutique hotel can be equally appropriate for business, honeymoon, or vacation. The target market for most boutique hotels is the 25-55 age range, most within the middle to upper income level. For some boutique hotels, the target is the corporate traveler who will provide repeat business for the hotel, refer others and is one whose business is not based on a particular season.

Service might be the distinguishing feature of what classifies a hotel as a boutique hotel. The goal for a boutique hotel is a level of personalized service not necessarily doable in a larger hotel. At many boutique hotels, the staff may know each guest by his or her name. Most offer 24-hour guest services. Some offer the comforts of canopy beds, bathrobes and fireplaces in the lobby. Others offer healthy food choices, mind and body themes and on-site bookstores.

As a boutique hotel varies in other features, so does its technological amenities. While some offer the latest in technology, others focus on a calm, soothing environment. To some patrons, the bed and breakfast concept may be similar to that of the boutique hotel. As the trend continues to grow, many hotels market themselves as boutique; most being small, offering nice little touches and providing many free items where in larger hotels you will have to pay.