



ESPLANADE ZAGREB  
LUXURY HOTEL

## HOTEL HISTORY

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the two best – known inns of the time became too small for the increasing number of travellers arriving in Zagreb on the famous Orient Express train. As the recently opened Palace hotel, on Zrinjevac Square, could not satisfy the needs of a growing town, the building of a new luxurious hotel became a necessity. The hotel was to be built on a large field, near the railway station – at that time the only link with Europe and the rest of the world.



In 1917 the international tender was opened, with participation of many outstanding architects of that time, including the famous Swiss Alfred Loos, who however did not win the contest. The winner was a German Otto Rhenig, whose original plans have been alternated by Croatian well known architect Dionis Sunko, who today is considered as architect of this masterpiece of belle epoque building. The name “Esplanade”, meaning “field” has been given to the Hotel.

## A TOUCH OF CLASS

The building of the hotel was completed in only 26 months. Nearly 200 guests were at the gala opening on the 22nd of April 1925. Among the “distinguished guests were the district prefect, the Mayor of Zagreb Mr. Heinzl, consuls, bankers, journalists and many others in that beautiful hotel with a touch of class”. Newspapers wrote: “The hotel is worldly appointed, luxurious, sophisticated, extremely comfortable and equipped with the latest achievements in modern techniques. It reminds one of the famous international hotels.

Private lounges for smoking, conversation, music and business meetings are there to meet all the needs of business travellers. The intimate ambience of some of these rooms is ideal for a dinner for two. The big ballroom, decorated with ionic columns and sculptures is the most impressive. The restaurant and the coffee shop are also beautifully appointed”.

The importance of the Esplanade hotel for the development of tourism in Zagreb has been pointed out, as well as the importance of its location near the Zagreb railway station. A few days after this, the hotel opened its doors to receive its first guests – amongst them was a certain Mr. Glück, and as “glück” in German means “luck”, and the opening had been such a huge success, it was hoped that a bright future was in store.

Indeed, those first visitors had nothing to complain about. Two hundred rooms with hot and cold running water, one hundred bathrooms, a telephone in each room, numerous suites and lounges, a dining room offering delicious Viennese and Hungarian cuisine, were at their disposal.

The Esplanade hotel also acquired some literary notoriety by becoming an ideal setting for love affairs in the work of contemporary writers.

## THE CRAZY ‘20s

The hotel, it was said “attracted dissatisfied wives and their lovers”. One of the most interesting love affairs of the crazy ‘20s was printed in the local newspaper. During one of the “soiree dansante’s”, a well-known Zagreb Don Juan seduced a young lady. Their love lasted for a few months, mostly using for its meeting places the luxurious hotel rooms, until the man found a new love. After a public quarrel, the lady “fainted” and a public scandal was aroused.



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The first striptease in the country happened at a farewell party given by an Italian count, at which champagne and caviar were served, and during which certain ladies took off their shoes and clothes, remaining only in their underwear. The hotel was shaking, and the Manager, Mr. Matignon, went through the most difficult night of his life. One of the very interesting events of that time also took place in the Esplanade. It was the Miss Yugoslavia (1926) contest, organised by "Fanamenta", a film company from Berlin. Miss Yugoslavia, and later Miss Europe was Miss Štefica Vidačić, the owner of a small café in Jurišićeva street. In the interview to the press this "charming young lady of almost perfect proportions, with greenish-brown eyes and brown curly hair" said that "she preferred men of a feminine type, but of a strong manly character".

The hotel also became known through some incidents in which even the police had to intervene. Certain Italians opened a Club for golfers, using it as a cover for a casino. For some time, the police turned a blind eye, but when prostitution was mentioned, they closed the casino.

### ***A RENDEZ-VOUS OF DISTINCTION AND ELEGANCE***

The Esplanade's most frequent guests were journalists in the constant search for interesting people and special events. The balls they organised were the most attractive of all and for many years the biggest social event in the town. A great interest for this "rendez-vous" of distinction and elegance was aroused even by guests who came to see it from abroad. They couldn't stop wondering at the fact that "a town of this size can put on a high class performance with so much good taste, beauty and harmony".

This "most fashionably appointed hotel of Central Europe" attracted many famous personalities. What the Esplanade hotel meant for the social life of that time is proved by the following statement: "Being at the doorstep of the Esplanade was an event worth mentioning to the grandchildren". Generations and generations talked about the elegant and mystical premises of the hotel with awe.

The guests of the hotel were also Asta Nielsen, the famous star of the silent movies and the stage and screen actress Gitta Alpar, who was so popular in Zagreb that her fans besieged the railway station and the Esplanade hotel for hours. Similarly, crowds waited for the arrival of the black Venus, queen of the Parisian cabarets, singer and dancer, Josephine Baker. Upon her arrival she had to fight her way through the masses at the main entrance of the hotel. The fans croationized her name and shouted "we love Pepica Bekerica". Some puritan ladies of Zagreb demanded that her performance be cancelled, but in spite of that, the citizens of Zagreb could enjoy her half naked and sensual dance.

The European king of shoes, Bata, stayed at the hotel, as well as the greatest screen lover of that time, Vladimir Gajdarov. The signature of Lady Ashby, chairwoman of the International alliance for women's rights is also in the hotel visitor's book. Famous



Charles Lindbergh, the man who first flew over the Atlantic Ocean, was one of the hotels guests and the French writer, Jules Romains with his young wife, stayed at the hotel for a couple of days, too.

Even the King of Spain stayed at the hotel, though the newspapers wrote about it after his death, immediately before the outbreak of war. The prince of Nepal, one of the richest Indian maharajas, the ex



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King of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi, German ambassador von Heren with his bad acts and presumptuous manners announcing bad times, were also the Esplanade's guests.

### ***THE ESPLANADE'S WW2 DAYS***

In 1941, in the first days of foreign occupation, the hotel was completely empty: the last guests disappeared without trace and the new ones came: German officers. The Esplanade became the Gestapo's and the Wehrmacht's headquarters. At the numerous parties the Germans organised in the hotel much information, even the most secret, could be obtained. The war atmosphere was brilliantly described by the Italian writer, a well known anti – fascist, Curzio Malaparte, in his novel "Kaputt". In 1943 he was war correspondent of a Roman newspaper in Zagreb.

One of the events we happily remember from those difficult war times in the guest performance of the opera singer Benjamin Gigli. He had such a strong voice that glasses in the Emerald Ballroom, were cracking. At the end, amidst mass consternation, he took a hat and collected money, which was later given to the maitre d'hotel to distribute among the staff.

### **ESPLANADE'S STARDUST**

Among the first guests during the reconstruction of the hotel in 1957 were the famous Italian tenor, Mario del Monaco and his wife.

It was a time when Arthur Rubinstein and many other prominent artists stayed at the Esplanade. A further connection with the world of entertainment and the arts was given by actors and directors, such as Giuseppe de Santis who, while making his film "The Road a Year Long" stayed in the hotel for several weeks.

During the '60s the most famous guests of the Esplanade were Silvana Pampanini, Yul Brunner, Jack Palance, Rosana Podesta, Belinda Lee, Liana Orfei, Orson Welles and many others. The unpredictable Orson Welles was famous for never bending when a banknote fell from his pocket, however bit it was. When he had his suits cleaned, he would never take back the money he left in his pockets. The hotel staff also remembers him as a great gourmand and very jolly man.

In the middle '60s, Anita Ekberg, the sex symbol of that time was expected in the hotel. As the time of her arrival was uncertain, a small welcoming committee was waiting for her at the reception. Not one of them had seen her before, but they thought that such a sexy lady couldn't pass unnoticed. When an attractive blonde appeared at the main entrance, the committee greeted her, a short speech was made, and she was presented with an armful of red roses and escorted to the most beautiful suite. The lady didn't look surprised, she even smiled happily.

The welcoming committee, satisfied with the reception, was having a refreshing cup of coffee, when another blonde appeared. This one was the right lady, Anita Ekberg herself, and the one they had greeted was her secretary. Anita made a joke out of it, not believing there could possibly exist men who would mistake her for her secretary.

In those years the Esplanade accommodated the most famous actors and the most famous artists – Domenico Modugno, Charles Aznavour, Maria Callas, Maja Plisetszkaia, Arthur

Miller, Dizzie Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Aran Hachaturian, Henryk Szeryng, Pablo Casals and David Ojstrach.



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***DIPLOMACY IN THE EMERALD BALLROOM***

Many a diplomat and world statesman came to the Esplanade. What did the hotel offer them? Was the service to their satisfaction? During Nikita Hruschtchow's visit – a duck in red cabbage was on the menu.

Leonid Breshnev and his delegation were offered saddle of venison a'la wild and crabs. Prince Sihanuk was so delighted with the dinner the Esplanade's cooks prepared for him that he gave the Chef Martin Maček gold dessert cutlery as a reward.

The Esplanade's cooks delighted president Nixon with their culinary art as well. The British Queen Elisabeth showed a special admiration for the Chef's ability and presented him with a gold coin for an expertly prepared guilt-head bream Dalmatian style.

Italian politician Fanfani was served veal knuckle royal style, a well-known speciality of the hotel. Among the statesmen who liked the Esplanade and its excellent cuisine were Aldo Moro, the president of Uganda Milton Obote, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the American senator Fulbright.

In later years the signatures of Andrej Gromiko, the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and later President, dr. Rudolf Kirschleger, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs Matteoti, Portugal's Prime Minister Mario Soares, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs Maurice Couve de Murville and many others were in the hotel's guest book.

Some statesmen and politicians passed through the hotel incognito. One of them was Panama's president, general Torrijos. Fortunately, a young man recognised the president and drew the hotel photographer's attention to him. That young man later became the ambassador of Panama.

***IN HIGH SOCIETY***

1964. was a year of special importance for the Esplanade hotel. It was then that it joined the Inter-Continental Hotel Corporation, a corporation established by PAN AM, in order to accommodate their passengers in the best hotels in the world and at the same time offer them the best possible service and comfort. The golden years of the Esplanade start from this time: joining the corporation and entering the high society of the best hotels in the world.

In 1967, the Esplanade received the Zagreb city Assembly award for business performances. In 1968 it was nominated the best among 62 Inter-Continental hotels in Europe and the Middle East.

In 1975 by the acknowledgement of President Tito the Esplanade hotel received the Order of Labour with a golden wreath.

The long list of the worlds most famous celebrities becomes even longer: Pele, Kurd Jürgens, Yves Montand, Simone Signoret, Stuart Granger.

An interesting story s connected with Stuart Granger's birthday. As he had already left the hotel on his way to Split, he couldn't be given the usual birthday gift from the hotel, so a waiter, a cook, and the front office manager went after him to the railway station, greeted him and presented him with the huge birthday cake.

Elena Tessadri, a well-known Italian novelist, chose the Esplanade as the setting of one of her novels, and described it as a most beautiful and warm hotel. Writing about the hotel, she always emphasised its warmth, elegance and luxury. The Esplanade becomes the centre of social and cultural life of Zagreb, in which numerous events, symposiums, fashion shows, culinary competitions and gastronomic events are organised. World personalities, such as Errol Garner, Ike and Tina Turner, Cliff Richard, Gian Maria Volonte, Mikulski, Clay Regazzoni, Bob Guccione and others continue to visit the most famous hotel in Zagreb.

The year of the 50th jubilee of the Esplanade (1975) was of the greatest importance to it. The new Inter-Continental hotel was opened in Zagreb and the Esplanade was, in a way, its begetter and model.



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***THE SYMBOL OF SERVICE AND ELEGANCE***

The Esplanade Zagreb Hotel continues to follow its glorious tradition by caring for the high standards of personal service which are highly appreciated by the guests who like the discrete and elegant services of its staff. With the spread of the tourist industry, The Esplanade Zagreb chooses high individual standards of service focusing on each guest's personality. Its employees' philosophy says that it is not merely a hotel, but a temple of comfort and gastronomy. Following this way of thinking and working, a special procedure beginning at the very entrance to the hotel, is established. After having recognised and accommodated a guest, the staff continue to care about him or her. The maitre d' is on hand: through his manners, appearance, gestures and words a guest is introduced to the atmosphere of the restaurant.

Besides being a hotel caring for tradition, the Esplanade Zagreb keeps pace with the present time. The harmony of the old times is not disturbed by modern devices.

***IMPORTANT DAYS IN THE HISTORY OF THE HOTEL***

**22 April 1925** Opening of the hotel. The architect was a Croat, Dionis Sunko. The Hotel Was constructed for the Orient Express passengers near the railway station. The first guest was a businessman from Osijek, Mr. Glück who was considered to have brought good luck to the Hotel. (Glück in German means luck).

**1925 - 1940** The Hotel was the center of the social life of Zagreb. It offered unseen luxury to the guests. All personalities coming to Zagreb, stayed at the Esplanade - Josephine Baker, Charles Lindbergh, kings, politicians, artists...The Esplanade was famous for elegant and refined balls of the high society.

**1940 - 1945** During the war the Hotel was headquarters of Gestapo and Wermacht. Curzio Malaparte stayed at the hotel and wrote here his famous novel. Several waiters have been involved in spying on Germans for partizans. When they have been discovered, they have been shot.

**1945 - 1960** Years of recovery after the war. The hotel was turned into the public kitchen, the plates and cutlery was of aluminium. Poor people have been given to eat in the hotel restaurants. However, the arrival of business and cultural personalities started to change the image of the hotel, and the service started to improve.

**November 1964** The hotel joined Inter-Continental Hotels Corporation, in franchise agreement, as the first one from any socialist country. It proved to be a great success and the business flourished. Movie stars, cultural, political and business personalities started to arrive. Upon Esplanade experience, other Inter-Continental hotels in socialist countries followed. The Hotel introduced hotel standards (soaps, butter, shampoo, etc.) and forced the local producers to start producing quality and size requested by hotel.

**1967** The first casino in the country is opened by Miss Italy at the Esplanade.

**1970** The first Snack bar is opened at the Esplanade.

**8 March 1975** The Esplanade constructed and inaugurated another Inter-Continental hotel in Zagreb. It was one company for several years, but the construction of new hotel meant also transfer of the best personnel which caused drop in quality of the Esplanade.

**1975** Elena Tessadri, Italian writer writes a book entitled "Esplanade". The romantic love story is entirely taking place at the Esplanade.



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**1979 - 1989** Years of struggle for quality.

**1981** Famous pianist Ivo Pogorelić plays piano at the Emerald Ballroom within the classical music program named "Concerts at the Esplanade".

**1985** A TV documentary is done about the Esplanade on the occasion of its 60th anniversary. The script is written by famous Croatian writer Zvonimir Milčec.

**1986** The first Bistro, a French cosy restaurant, in the country is opened at the same place where Snack bar was. Never before any restaurant had glass roof. It was the first time to have silk uniforms for hostesses at the Bistro. Every lady guest got a red rose. For the first time champagne and wine on glasses were served, and it was the first time to serve a small chocolate with the coffee. Bistro was a great success and the concept was largely followed by other restaurants.

**May 1988** The Hotel joined The Leading Hotels of the World, as the first one from the socialist country and the only one in Croatia.

**1989 Valentine's Day** was introduced for the first time in the country with great success. Until then it was completely unknown holiday. With years, it started the entire industry dedicated to love. Tiramisu - an Italian dessert - was introduced for the first time at the Bistro. It became a hit, and today is regularly offered in every restaurant.

**12 April 1989** The Esplanade is independent and functions as one hotel company. The Inter-Continental Zagreb is a separate company.

**1990** First independent and free elections in Yugoslavia bring to power Croatian Democratic Union, headed by President Tuđman.

**1991** Croatia proclaimed independence. The war started because Serbs would not allow other republics (Slovenia and Croatia) to reach their independence. The Hotel becomes headquarters for journalists. The Hotel accommodated first group of refugees from Vukovar in December 1991, but most of 70 refugees left within several weeks to other places. One refugee, a nurse from Vukovar is still living in the Hotel. The Hotel faced difficult period of lack of guests. One of the employees was killed in Vukovar and was proclaimed a hero. The shelter for guests was organized in the basement, in the restaurant Taverna Croatica. The only hotel in the country which presented its macrobiotic menu - it was such a rare menu that American newspapers wrote about it.

**1992** The Esplanade was first hotel in Croatia to be privatized. All employees reserved the shares.

**1994** The hotel shares have been bought off from small share holders by a Croat, Drago Ćurković who owns now the hotel. The Hotel started the major reconstruction.

The best wine cellar in the country was opened in the Taverna Croatica with 400 different kinds of wine from all over the world. It was the first time that famous Californian or Australian wines have been offered to Croatian public.

**August 1995** The war was considered over.

**January 1996** Croatia regained the last occupied piece of territory, Vukovar.

**1996** The Esplanade was the first Croatian hotel to have its own web pages.

**1997** The Taverna Croatica received important recognition - it is proclaimed one of the ten best restaurants in Croatia, the only hotel restaurant in Zagreb. Patisseries of the Esplanade win top awards in almost all categories at the Zagreb sweets festival.

**1998** The Esplanade was where the Vienna Opera Ball took place.



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**1999** The Hotel was assigned 5 stars by the Ministry of Tourism of Croatia, according to the new classification. The hotel is winner of many competitions and awards. The difficult economic situation continues, because of the Kosovo crisis and NATO strikes on Yugoslavia.

**1 Jan 2000** The Hotel joined the SRS hotel reservation system, in deluxe collection as the first one in Croatia. The opposition wins at the elections after 9 years of HDZ rule which means the major change in politics.

**November 2002** The Hotel closed for complete renovation. MKV design is assigned with interior design.

**November 2003** The Hotel joins Regent International Hotels family, thus becoming the first Regent hotel in Europe.

**18 May 2004** Soft opening of the hotel after year and a half long renovation under name The Regent Esplanade Zagreb with new restaurant – Zinfandel's, attached Cocktail and Lounge Bar Esplanade 1925 and renovated Le Bistro.

**30 July 2004** President Stjepan Mesic visits the newly opened hotel.

**11 November 2004** Grand Opening of the hotel.

**2 February 2006** Gala award ceremony – King, hotel awarded the most loyal agencies, clients, guests and media.

**10 November 2006** First edition of luxury Regent Esplanade Hotel magazine

**2006** Hotel introduces some new exclusive offers. Segway City Tour, Hugo Boss mobile boutique, Bath Menu and VIP offer for dogs

**2009** Hotel profile on social networks like Twitter and Facebook

**8 December 2009** – Nice Ice – Ice Rink on the Oleander terrace

**16 September 2011** – World Luxury Hotel Awards ceremony held in Regent Esplanade

#### **2004 – 2011 Some of the famous guests**

*Politics:* President of Cyprus Tassos Papandopoulos, President of Israel Shimon Peres, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, EU Commissioner Jose Manuel Barroso, Prince Albert from Monaco, Princess Anne, Emir from Qatar, German President Horst Kohler, Oli Rehn EU Commissioner

*Music:* Depeche Mode, Simple Minds, Franz Ferdinand, U2, R.E.M., Backstreet Boys, Pet Shop Boys, David Guetta, Morrissey, Jose Carreras, Maxim Mrvica, Bob Geldof, Brian Ferry, Jade Jagger, Chris Rea, Joe Cocker, Shakira...

*Sports:* Jennifer Capriati, Mary Pierce, England Football Team, Fabio Capello, David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo

*Business:* Philip Kotler, Bernie Ecclestone

*Actors:* Courtney Thorne Smith, Orlando Bloom and many other.

#### **April 2012 First woman Chef de cuisine**

The young and affable Ana Grgić (31) is the new chef de cuisine of the prestigious Zagreb hotel, the Regent Esplanade.

**1<sup>st</sup> October 2012**

Hotel Esplanade operates again as an independent hotel.



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**November 2012**

Hotel created and introduced the first iMenus on iPads in Croatia, available for guests in Le Bistro and Zinfandel's

**December 2012**

Health Club Esplanade opened the first Kanebo Sensai Salon in Croatia

Hotel created and introduced the first hotel application specially designed for iPhone & iPad available for free download on App Store

**May 2013**

Hotel received Halal Certificate of Quality - that guarantees guests the services of hotel accommodation, gastronomy and wellness according to strict Halal standards.

**August 2013**

As the first hotel in Croatia, Esplanade Zagreb introduced PressReader Hot Zone – more than 2500 free domestic and international newspapers available for download to smartphones and tablets

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***About Esplanade Zagreb Hotel***

*Opened in 1925, the Esplanade Hotel Zagreb is one of the city's most famous and elegant buildings. Originally built for passengers of the Orient Express, this iconic hotel combines stylish luxury, genuine hospitality and a tradition of capturing the zeitgeist to reflect the art deco heritage. The hotel was recently renovated adding contemporary touches while retaining some of the classics. The effect was described by a guest as "very old Hollywood glam". The hotel provides 208 spacious and lavishly furnished rooms and suites, signature restaurants, a health club, bar/lounges, conference facilities and Scented Baths and much more.*

*For more information, visit [www.esplanade.hr](http://www.esplanade.hr)*

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