

The image shows a grand, ornate hotel lobby. The ceiling is a large, circular stained glass skylight with intricate geometric and floral patterns. The walls are lined with tall, classical columns and arched alcoves. The floor is polished and features a large, decorative tile pattern in the foreground. The lighting is warm and elegant, with several lamps and chandeliers. The overall atmosphere is one of luxury and historical grandeur.

HOTEL AVENIDA PALACE

1892

OUR
HISTORY

HOTEL AVENIDA PALACE – A BRIEF HISTORY

When architect José Luis Monteiro received the commission for Lisbon's Central Station, in Rossio, the Real Companhia dos Caminhos de Ferro Portugueses (Royal Portuguese Railway Company) requested that the design a project for an adjoining building for administrative services, which would include a luxury restaurant on the first floor. The restaurant would become one of the most popular restaurants in the city, given its location and the view it provided.

The inauguration of the Rossio Station took place in 1890, when Master Monteiro was already undertaking the project of the adjoining building, the construction of which would be supervised by David Cohen, one of the most illustrious names of Portuguese engineering. However, the railway traffic, which now had a terminal in the city centre, had intensified with the inauguration of the South and West lines, and demanded new resources from the hotel business. Wagons Lits, a company with ties to the railways, made a proposal to the Real Companhia for the new building to be made into a great station hotel, similar to the Palaces of other European capitals. The initial project was altered, and the architect was finally able to dedicate himself to the construction of the new hotel without the style constraints imposed on him for the Rossio Station. Instead of a building in a neo-Manueline style, which aroused a strong controversy, we were faced with a Second French Empire *boulevardier* construction, a classically inspired composition influenced by French architecture, much to the *beaux-arts* taste of José Luis Monteiro, rooted in the constructions of Paris. Nothing was left to chance. In 1889, the D. Pedro IV square, by the hotel, was decorated with two bronze fountains manufactured in France.

The aim was to obtain a luxury hotel, worthy of the finest European aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie from all over the world. Rossio had already become the meeting point for prominent people, as well as the country's political centre (the Café Martinho, where so many political and literary gatherings took place, was just in front of it).

At that time, Lisbon was going through a troubled period. The ultimatum issued by Great-Britain (following the Lusitanian intention to connect Angola to Mozambique) had created a wave of outrage against King D. Carlos. Meanwhile, the city grew. With the influx of great European fast trains, it was slowly becoming a cosmopolitan capital, welcoming illustrious personalities used to the luxury of the new Parisian hotels.

Lisbon did not lag behind. On the 10th October, 1892, the opening of the Grande Hotel Internacional (Great International Hotel) took place, in all splendour, under the management of Edmundo Eloy. The original building, with one fewer floor than today, established an interesting connection between the Station and the Restauradores Square, through an interior gallery, which was later removed. The view was magical: to the North, an immense avenue, named Liberdade (Liberty) six years before, when the prince D. Carlos got married to D. Amelie d'Orléans; to the South, the Tagus, and the city's downtown, dated from the era of the Marquis of Pombal; to the East, the old string of houses of the Castle's neighbourhood, leaning imposingly from above a hill.

The interior decoration had an exquisite *Belle Époque* style. The rugs, portieres, and upholstering of the ottomans were the finest available in the quality market. The furniture was purchased directly from Maple, one of the most elegant stores in London. Almost all the rooms distinguish themselves with their silk lining or leather paper. The walls in the dining room were overlaid with leafy velvet, which was alternated with off by oak wainscoting. All rooms had heating and ventilation apparatus, and almost all already had bathrooms. The guests had a hydraulic elevator at their disposal and the Hotel's kitchen was considered to be one of Lisbon's finest.

In 1893, the Grande Hotel Internacional was renamed Avenida Palace, just as its European counterparts. The Palaces symbolised the court's splendour, in a time when the birth aristocracy was beginning to be surpassed by the bourgeoisie's money. The pleasure of travelling, which up until then was limited to diplomatic, political or commercial reasons, had become fashionable amidst the wealthier classes, favouring the search for hotels with palatial luxury.

The Palace recreated the magnificence of Versailles, offering the fascination of rivalling with the hotels in Paris or Rome. It was fit for princes, and it lodged members of the European royalty. D. Miguel of Bragança, prince of Portugal, was one of them. He defied the law issued by D. Maria II in 1834, which forbade D. Miguel I and his descendants to come to Portugal, under penalty of death upon summary procedure. According to some accounts of the time, the prince D. Miguel II arrived at the Rossio station, on the 23rd of January, 1901. He was escorted by a secretary, "two elegantly dressed young men", and servants dressed as *chausseurs* of the German noble households. The proscribed prince and his escorts lodged at the Avenida Palace under aliases. D. Miguel registered himself under the name of Count of Mutzgen. They were identified by some noblemen and were acclaimed by D. Miguel's supporters. The stay of a Portuguese prince in the Avenida Palace endowed Rossio's hotel with a new romantic aura, drawing clients from both the wealthy Brazilian bourgeoisie and the European aristocracy, who sought a capital with a pleasant temperature.

The hotel did not fall short of their expectations: A private orchestra flooded the rooms with music during their famous Saturday balls, and while the dancing pairs swirled around, spies from everywhere looked for conspiracies. A Special Night Service, characterised by an exquisite French “à la carte” cuisine, sustained Guest in the small, and “seasoned” the most fierce emotions. The aromas of Parisian fragrances filled the air with the faint and sweetish scent of a decadent monarchy.

Upon the monarchy’s fall, in October, 1910, the Palace provided to the diplomatic corps a privileged balcony over the events: shrapnel and grenades flew over the roundabout where the revolutionary armies were camping, and the Rossio, where the realist troops were stationed. The latter’s Military Staff was established in the Palace of Independence, on the S. Domingos square. Inevitably, the hotel was hit. In spite of such a change, the spot still held its attraction over the elites. In the late 1917, a year in which Russia lived some dramatic moments, Lisbon welcomed the Ballets Russes Company, which was run by the famous Sergei Diaghilev. Almada Negreiros went to the hotel to greet the Company, and dedicated a manifest to it. President Sidónio Pais also visited the Palace for some time, and was fatally wounded almost at its doorstep, on the 14th December, 1918, at the Rossio station. He was shot on his way to the Hotel. It is unknown if he ever used the “discreet” door on the 4th floor, which connected the Hotel to the Rossio station. Naturally, little is known about those who used such a “secret path”, meant for VIPs who wished to remain anonymous, and possibly an access to forbidden passions. However, we know it was used on several occasions. Years later, Salazar used it. The former President of Government would have visited the Hotel to greet Biachi (the representative of Yugoslavia in Portugal), who was staying at room 405, using the door on the 4th floor, which was usually locked.

Acknowledged by nobility, and preferred by diplomats and secret agents from all four corners of the world, the hotel was also a channel for knowledge and contacts, a recommended calling card. Alves dos Reis knew that, when he chose it as his temporary residence, while the sumptuous palace he had purchased at Príncipe Real was being prepared.

It is said that the famous forger and swindler, who was overflowing with counterfeit 500 escudo bills, moved from the less elegant Metropole Hotel, at the Rossio, to the Avenida Palace, where he lived some time, in 1925. Manuel Teixeira Gomes used it when he came to Lisbon, before going into diplomatic life, and made several references to the hotel in his books.

In 1937, Emperor Hirohito of Japan chose to spend his honeymoon at the hotel. In that same decade, a group of foreign intellectuals established themselves at the Palace, following the invitation of António Ferro. They were: Jules Romain, François Mauriac, Jacques Maritan, Miguel Unamuno, and Wenceslau Fernandez Flores.

During the Spanish civil war, the Palace was filled with refugees, and it was a manoeuvring area for secret agents. Soon afterwards, during the Second World War, spies and conspirators from England, Germany and the United States, crossed paths in the hotel, and decided upon the fate of the world. In fact, it seems that the political class always had a place at the Palace, with some of Salazar's ministers visiting the hotel regularly. Cardinal Mitsensky also stayed there. Later on, François Mitterrand would also stay there every time he came to Portugal.

In the 1950's, the Portuguese high finance remained faithful to the hotel. The banker Cupertino de Miranda selected it when he needed to stay in the capital, and the Espírito Santo family often visited it. There are fewer references from artists, but they did immortalise it. Nureyev, Guilhermina Suggia, and Amália Rodrigues definitively marked it.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Lisbon did not follow the evolution of other European capitals. The railway service did not evolve, and the Santa Apolónia station had begun receiving the international railway traffic sometime before, taking the role of Lisbon's central station from the Rossio station.

Starting in 1964, and for two years, with the participation of the Gabinete de Planeamento e Arquitectura Carlos Ramos (Carlos Ramos Cabinet of Planning and Architecture), the Avenida Palace was extensively renovated, and equipped with the latest technology, while maintaining the style of its time. The walls are covered by panels with soft golden tones, the ceilings are alight with crystal chandeliers, and the chairs are covered with brocade. The stately staircase connecting the six floors is reminiscent of the old palatial movement. Harmony rivals with exquisiteness.

A centenarian, the hotel gradually evolved, and surpassed its original quality.

Nowadays, the hotel has 82 rooms, 20 of which are suites, one of the latter being a Presidential suite. The suites are spacious, and thematically decorated by eras: Louis XV, D. Maria, D. José, Empire, and British Colonial. The rooms, dressed with matching curtains and bedspreads, provide great comfort.

One of the Palace's latest additions was the sumptuous Palace Salon. During the 1998 remodelling, Lucien Donnat turned the hall into this exquisite space overlooked by a stained-glass ceiling, highlighted by the red brocades lining the walls, and by long velvet curtains. Just at its side, the bar is an invitation to dreamers and dilettantes. Each square meter has a story to tell.

The Nobre Salon, on the second floor, which is about 130 sq m, is decorated in classic blue and gold shades, and has made history in international cinematography: "The Count of Monte Cristo", "Passage to Lisbon", and "Chain Reaction", were filmed there..

The walls of the restaurant are lined with solid oak and satin, and the room provides a privileged view over the Avenida da Liberdade and Restauradores Square. It no longer provides restaurant service, being only open for breakfast and certain events.

These walls have seen spies and politicians, princes and plotters, forgers and goodwill men. While some wove political intrigues, others burnt passions, and fed impossible loves, amidst the lukewarm tediousness of palatial luxury. A temple of memories, the Avenida Palace has everything to deserve a visit.