It hosted the global elite, became a Nazi HQ, and a refuge for those returning from concentration camps – the history of Paris' most famous hotel

History

Former French prisoners in Germany dining at the Hotel Lutetia in May 1945. Photo: Getty

Author Jane Rogoyska. Photo: Hal Howe

Rory O'Sullivan

Fri 27 Feb 2026 at 14:30

The Hotel Lutetia on the Parisian Rive Gauche boasts a glamorous guest list. Artists such as Picasso and Matisse visited. A young Charles de Gaulle and his wife Yvonne stayed there for the first night of their honeymoon. James Joyce was a regular at the bar; his family stayed for two months in 1939 when the heating broke in their apartment.

In Jane Rogoyska's words, the Hotel Lutetia is today "a modern luxury hotel, its rooms priced to tempt not locals but the global 'elite'." Located on the Boulevard Raspail in the 6th arrondissement, it is at the heart of an area of the city in which ordinary people do not live.

But in the 1920s and 1930s it was more within reach to stay at the Lutetia than some of the other glamorous hotels in Paris.

This accessibility may have been one reason why it became a meeting-point for German dissidents, then the Parisian base for Nazi military intelligence, and finally a processing centre for those liberated from concentration camps.

Read more

- Lior Torenberg's Just Watch Me takes a dark dive into digital self-commodification (/entertainment/books/book-reviews/lior-torenbergs-just-watch-me-takes-a-dark-dive-into-digital-selfcommodification/a1834252718.html)

- Julian Sancton's Neptune's Fortune skilfully deep dives into Roger Dooley's hot pursuit of the mythical San Jose shipwreck (/entertainment/books/book-reviews/julian-sanctons-neptunes-fortune-skilfully-deep-dives-into-roger-dooleys-hot-pursuit-of-the-mythical-san-jose-shipwreck/a2053983941.html)

- **From best man to the firing squad – Gerard Shannon traces how taciturn engineer Rory O'Connor became a key IRA figure (/entertainment/books/book-reviews/from-best-man-to-the-firing-squad-gerard-shannon-traces-how-taciturn-engineer-rory-oconnor-became-a-key-ira-figure/a58829505.html)**

It is this darker side that Rogoyska devotes the vast majority of her new book, **Hotel Exile**, a history of the Lutetia, making a collage of different stories held together loosely, with the hotel's involvement, sometimes far in the background.

This may disappoint those looking for another exploration of the Parisian art scene, or even for a straightforward history of the Lutetia. The hotel is not the book's main character but more like the backdrop against which countless individual dramas play out. But the result, on its own terms, is a devastating and memorable account of lives thrown into upheaval by Nazism.

The first part follows dozens of German emigres – artists, politicians, Jews – as they struggled to rebuild their lives in France, only to lose everything once more when the Germans broke through the Maginot Line.

For refugees then, as now, the first problem was having the right papers, the second was finding work and a place to live. Failure on either count could lead to imprisonment or worse.

From 1938, foreign residents in France need to have their identity cards stamped when travelling, even within the same *departement.* High-flying Germans like the lawyer Theodor Tichauer suddenly found it impossible to work in France without money or connections.

Author Jane Rogoyska. Photo: Hal Howe

Emigres went hungry. Rogoyska recounts the writer Manes Sperber's story of an evening with the French literary star Andre Gide during which, to his horror, he fell asleep: "I realised too clearly that this tiny, barely perceptible incident was paradigmatic of the situation of an emigre intellectual and also of that of an impoverished person who is the more infrequently invited for meals the more - urgently he needs them."

In the 1930s, the Lutetia's conference rooms hosted meetings of the German Popular Front, a short-lived association of dissidents exiled from Nazi Germany ranging from social democrats to Stalinists. Its leaders included the author Heinrich Mann (brother of the famous Thomas), and Walter Ulbricht, the future premier of East Germany.

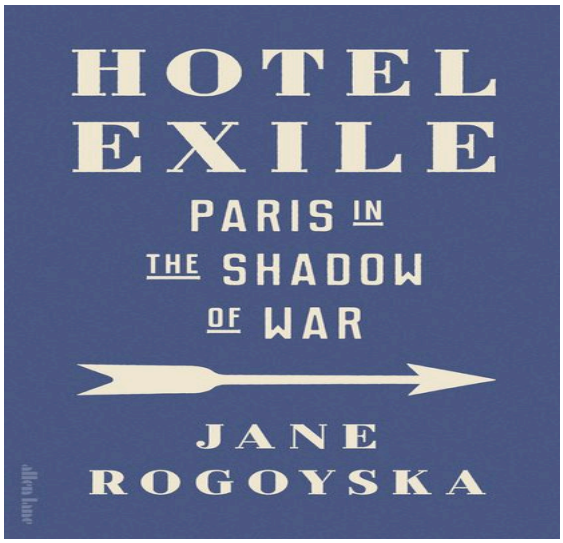
The modern-day Hotel Lutetia in Paris. Photo: Getty

But in 1940, after the German invasion of France, the hotel became the Parisian base of German military intelligence, the Abwehr. In the book's second section, Rogoyska portrays the lives of German soldiers in the Lutetia as a mix of champagne and foie gras (though the hotels' chef caviste, Marcel Weber, hid the best wines behind a false wall in the basement).

Relations were complex between the Abwehr and overlapping Nazi institutions, such as the SS and the Gestapo. Heinrich Himmler considered the Abwehr "a breeding-ground for traitors".

Not without reason: its head, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, was regarded as the "spiritual instigator" of Claus von Stauffenberg's plot to kill Hitler, and he was hanged in 1945.

After the war, the French government requisitioned the Hotel Lutetia as an arrivals centre for people returning from concentration camps. Crowds gathered hoping for news and were treated with the shocking spectacle of emaciated survivors.



Their stories are some of the most famous of the 20th century. To these Rogoyska dedicates the book's final part, describing the slow and at times ambiguous process of reintegration: hygiene protocols, questions, misunderstandings. This is to say nothing of the painful process of learning who was alive and who was dead.

At the Lutetia, the resistance fighter Jacques Debord was confronted by a woman showing him a photo of someone he recognised as a dead friend. "The woman," writes Rogoyska, "is so desperate that when she asks, 'Do you think he will return?' he replies, 'Yes, madame, he will.'"

Read more

- **Lior Torenberg's Just Watch Me takes a dark dive into digital self-commodification (/entertainment/books/book-reviews/lior-torenbergs-just-watch-me-takes-a-dark-dive-into-digital-selfcommodification/a1834252718.html)**
- **Julian Sancton's Neptune's Fortune skilfully deep dives into Roger Dooley's hot pursuit of the mythical San Jose shipwreck (/entertainment/books/book-reviews/julian-sanctons-neptunes-fortune-skilfully-deep-dives-into-roger-dooleys-hot-pursuit-of-the-mythical-san-jose-shipwreck/a2053983941.html)**
- **From best man to the firing squad – Gerard Shannon traces how taciturn engineer Rory O'Connor became a key IRA figure (/entertainment/books/book-reviews/from-best-man-to-the-firing-squad-gerard-shannon-traces-how-taciturn-engineer-rory-oconnor-became-a-key-ira-figure/a58829505.html)**

After the war, the Hotel Lutetia received occasional visits from old deportees. The head concierge, Jean-Luc Jean, would show them around the place that received them at the close of "one of the most complex and devastating periods in twentieth-century history".

'Hotel Exile' by Jane Rogoyska, Allen Lane, €36

Latest Books

PREMIUM

Crime novels and thrillers to read this March, from Henrietta McKervey to Claire Douglas

(/entertainment/books/book-reviews/crime-novels-and-thrillers-to-read-this-march-from-henrietta-mckervey-to-claire-douglas/a2130644829.html)

New Irish Writing: Poem by Caroline Heffernan

(/entertainment/books/new-irish-writing-poem-by-caroline-heffernan/a137972458.html)

New Irish Writing: A Break in the Weather by Tara McEvoy

(/entertainment/books/new-irish-writing-a-break-in-the-weather-by-tara-mcevoy/a1254775045.html)

PREMIUM

Enjoyable Queen Elizabeth biography is both gushing and eye-opening about the family scandals and a life less ordinary

(/world-news/britain/enjoyable-queen-elizabeth-biography-is-both-gushing-and-eye-opening-about-the-family-scandals-and-a-life-less-ordinary/a1803385409.html)

PREMIUM

It hosted the global elite, became a Nazi HQ, and a refuge for those returning from concentration camps – the history of Paris' most famous hotel

(/entertainment/books/it-hosted-the-global-elite-became-a-nazi-hq-and-a-refuge-for-those-returning-from-concentration-camps-the-history-of-paris-most-famous-hotel/a1516853453.html)

Madeleine Keane on books: World Book Day spreads joy, Sheila O'Flanagan hits the promo trail and Listowel Writers' Week line up is revealed

(/entertainment/books/madeleine-keane-on-books-world-book-day-spreads-joy-sheila-oflanagan-hits-the-promo-trail-and-listowel-writers-week-line-up-is-revealed/a1762582492.html)

PREMIUM

'The Lies Between Us': Feuding sisters, thwarted love and a body on the beach in thrilling debut

(/entertainment/books/book-reviews/the-lies-between-us-feuding-sisters-thwarted-love-and-a-body-on-the-beach-in-thrilling-debut/a1031131374.html)

Irish-Russian novelist AV Pankov's dark debut Going to Zossen is a savage parody of capitalism

(/entertainment/books/irish-russian-novelist-av-pankovs-dark-debut-going-to-zossen-is-a-savage-parody-of-capitalism/a26787679.html)

PREMIUM

A walking guide to some of Ireland's best pubs? We can drink to that!

(/entertainment/books/book-reviews/a-walking-guide-to-some-of-irelands-best-pubs-we-can-drink-to-that/a248043784.html)

PREMIUM

Henrietta McKervey: 'I was lucky to have Éilís Ní Dhuibhne as my tutor at UCD. I learnt so much from her classes and reading her work'

(/entertainment/books/henrietta-mckervey-i-was-lucky-to-have-eilis-ni-dhuibhne-as-my-tutor-at-ucd-i-learnt-so-much-from-her-classes-and-reading-her-work/a975560865.html)

Show more

Top Stories

Health Features PREMIUM

I haven't made myself sick in over 10 years, but I still struggle with the effects of bulimia and anorexia every day

(/life/health-wellbeing/health-features/i-havent-made-myself-sick-in-over-10-years-but-i-still-struggle-with-the-effects-of-bulimia-and-anorexia-every-day/a605554169.html)

Health & Wellbeing PREMIUM

Ask Allison: My daughter is making friends in secondary but I keep projecting my awful school experience on to her. Help!

(/life/health-wellbeing/ask-allison-my-daughter-is-making-friends-in-secondary-but-i-keep-projecting-my-awful-school-experience-on-to-her-help/a1667854405.html)

Gaelic Football PREMIUM

Conor McKeon: Post-match content is being gobbled up, and it's the managers who are feeding us all

(/sport/gaelic-games/gaelic-football/conor-mckeon-post-match-content-is-being-gobbled-up-and-its-the-managers-who-are-feeding-us-all/a1225067731.html)

Comment PREMIUM

Tanya Sweeney: 'It's been 15 years since my mum died but the grief and unfairness of losing her has roared back to life'

(/opinion/comment/tanya-sweeney-its-been-15-years-since-my-mum-died-but-the-grief-and-unfairness-of-losing-her-has-roared-back-to-life/a1443695898.html)

Latest News

Britain

BREAKING | Edinburgh area locked down after reports of man with weapons and stabbings

10:26

(/world-news/britain/edinburgh-area-locked-down-after-reports-of-man-with-weapons-and-stabbings/a1507823855.html)

Rugby PREMIUM

Decline in South African drug-testing casts cloud over World Cup wins

10:22

(/sport/rugby/decline-in-south-african-drug-testing-casts-cloud-over-world-cup-wins/a680201635.html)

Travel News PREMIUM

The 24 countries on Ireland's 'Do Not Travel' list – ignoring the advice will void your insurance

10:14

(/life/travel/travel-news/the-24-countries-on-irelands-do-not-travel-list-ignoring-the-advice-will-void-your-insurance/a517748013.html)

Travel

US Iran conflict: What's the latest on travel disruption? What are my rights if flights are cancelled or delayed?

09:55

(/life/travel/us-iran-conflict-whats-the-latest-on-travel-disruption-what-are-my-rights-if-flights-are-cancelled-or-delayed/a2078551324.html)

Comment PREMIUM

Who is likely to take over in Iran, and what may happen next?

09:18

(/opinion/comment/who-is-likely-to-take-over-in-iran-and-what-may-happen-next/a1040669150.html)

Irish Business

Aer Lingus owner's shares down 13pc as markets drop in response to Iran war

09:08

(/business/irish/aer-lingus-owners-shares-down-13pc-as-markets-drop-in-response-to-iran-war/a1906841654.html)

Celebrity News

'Petrifying': Celebrities share experiences of 'very scary' night in Dubai

09:03

(/style/celebrity/celebrity-news/petrifying-celebrities-share-experiences-of-very-scary-night-in-dubai/a1687047212.html)

Middle East

LIVE | No plans to evacuate Irish citizens in Middle East as advice is 'to shelter in place'; Israel launches strikes on Beirut after Hezbollah fires missiles

09:00

(/world-news/middle-east/no-plans-to-evacuate-irish-citizens-in-middle-east-as-advice-is-to-shelter-in-place-israel-launches-strikes-on-beirut-after-hezbollah-fires-missiles/a627608921.html)

World News

Israel launches strikes on Beirut after Hezbollah fires missiles across border

09:00

(/world-news/israel-launches-strikes-on-beirut-after-hezbollah-fires-missiles-across-border/a762787684.html)

Comment PREMIUM

Why it’s time to remove a huge injustice imposed on farmers

08:39

(/farming/comment/why-its-time-to-remove-a-huge-injustice-imposed-on-farmers/a1850117269.html)