
Etiquette Can Be Murder

A woman on her own may be afraid of being perceived as an easy “pick up.” To some unintelligent men, “alone” signifies “available.”

Baldrige, *Letitia Baldrige’s New Complete Guide to Executive Manners*, 1993

Women in Hotels

I recently had a delightful stay in an Embassy Suites hotel in Nashville, TN. I reserved a single



room so that I could have some solo recharging time during the Killer Nashville conference, and was treated like a valued customer by the entire staff. The room was spotless and fresh towels appeared daily. An entire army of attendants was available to serve the buffet breakfast and remove dishes, banquet-style lunches were delivered expeditiously, and my two minor issues—a key that didn’t work and a lamp that blew a lightbulb—were handled instantaneously. Everyone was polite and helpful.

For some reason, being treated so well reminded me of something I had read in my antique etiquette books, about a time period in which a woman was not even allowed to enter a hotel lobby unless she was escorted by a male relative—preferably a father or brother—and no lady could stay in a hotel alone without the possibility of it sullyng her reputation.

So of course, I had to look up the details when I got home from my trip.

In Victorian times, an “Unattended Lady at the Hotel” was only permitted to enter an inn by the ladies’ entrance. She made arrangements for her stay by sending her card to the proprietor or clerk to summon them to the parlor she was allowed to wait in.

She then had to go straight to her room, until she needed to eat in the common dining room. At that point, she was often discriminated against by the maître d’hôtel, by being given the worst table and service possible. Although at some of the nicer hotels, upon request, a waiter would “meet the lady at the



entrance of the dining room and conduct her to a seat, thus saving her the necessity of crossing the room without an escort” (*The Essential Handbook of Victorian Etiquette*, Thomas E. Hill, circa 1873).

Victorians were of course very prudish about such things. But even in America in the 1920s, young women who stayed in hotels were expected to travel with a chaperone—or at least a maid who would share an adjoining room (*Book of Etiquette*, Lillian Eicher, 1921).

Still, rules had become somewhat laxer by that decade, since women had begun to stay at hotels more frequently for business reasons as well as pleasure. Some hotels still had ladies’ entrances, and a female guest was to “govern her actions accordingly.” But in many cities, hotels now offered only “one large entrance where the woman may enter without embarrassment.... There is no reason why she should feel the least hesitancy in stopping at a hotel—providing she knows how to conduct herself” (*idem*).



These rules of conduct required that a woman arrive early, since “certain hostelrys refuse to admit women after a certain hour.” A woman was never to stop at a hotel without baggage, and was still to go straight to her room after registration because “It is not good form to loiter in the lobby.” Respectable women would never dare return to the hotel after midnight, and a true lady would never “dine alone in the hotel dining-room after eight o’clock” (*idem*).

Ladies could only receive gentlemen who called on them in the parlor or reception room of the hotel. They were instructed that “To welcome a man in one’s room is...a serious blunder in hotel etiquette” which defied “a convention that has many years of practice to uphold it” (*idem*).

I would have imagined the rules for women were much different in the 1990s, but actually my etiquette books for that period still state that a woman should be allowed to stay alone in a hotel for business travel, but she had to follow certain guidelines in order to “avoid damage to her reputation” (*Letitia Baldrige’s New Complete Guide to Executive Manners*, Letitia Baldrige, 1993).

According to the Baldrige guide, a woman had to look and dress like a professional at all times, and especially when dining alone at a hotel. A lady did not have to order room service, but she was always to enter the restaurant “with your briefcase or some files (a symbol of your status).” She was to “hold her head high” while asking for a table for one and shuffle papers in a business-like way after ordering her meal, to discourage men from talking to her. She would certainly avoid having men buy her dinner, so that “everyone else will know you are a no-nonsense woman who does not pick up men” (*idem*).

However, in 1993 women *were* allowed to hold business meetings in their hotel suite, with gentlemen in attendance, as long as the bed folded into a sofa or was covered with papers and used as a table. This was to make the bed “a very nonsexual object.” Leaving the door ajar was also recommended (*idem*).

In contrast, guidance for today’s modern woman staying in a hotel doesn’t mention anything to do with her reputation or her possible male visitors.

My most up-to-date etiquette books only require that she treat the staff politely, tip generously, and “never make a mess of her room.” A woman is never to be noisy in the halls, “no matter how many glasses of Champagne she’s had or how giggly she is with her travel companions.” She never blares her TV and does her best not to disturb the other guests. This, along with thanking the staff for any assistance they offer, makes her “the perfect hotel guest” (*Emily Post’s Etiquette: The Centennial Edition*, Lizzie Post and Daniel Post Senning, 2022).



These last and latest guidelines are actually the same rules which apply to men, by the way, and in searching the internet I couldn’t find any current guidelines which are specifically for women staying alone in hotels in the 2020s.

So, I’d say women have finally come a long way in terms of being treated as equals to men, at least in terms of staying at a hotel. (Although, I’m not so sure what I think of the idea of women being the gigglers of the sexes.) But I think we should all have a glass of giggle-inducing champagne to celebrate!

Do you enjoy staying in hotels alone? Or have any funny hotel stories? Drop me a line at [Contact - Lucinda Gerlitz](#) and let me know.

A Reader Asks

During my conference, we had two banquet-style luncheons where the plates with the salad

course were already placed on the table when we arrived, and the hot food was delivered after the salads were dispensed with. Many of us were uncertain about whether we should start the salads when we sat down, or if we should wait for all the seats at the table to be filled. People also asked if the guests who were served the main meal first should begin eating while the food was still hot, instead of waiting until everyone else at the table was served.

The general rules I found are:

If you are dining at a banquet with a large table of guests, it is appropriate to begin with the salad when you are seated. According to Emily Post, “If you are at a large banquet where you are flying solo and there is no assigned seating, you may choose to eat once you are seated, since you don’t know if anyone will be sitting with you.”

The answer on when to begin eating the hot food varies according to the circumstances:

- If you are at someone’s home for dinner, “you may have to wait until everyone is seated and served...before you begin.”
- When the event or the table has a host, “Wait for everyone to be served and for your host to lift their fork as the signal that everyone else may, too.”
- At an event with buffet service that has assigned seating, you must “wait until at least three people at your table have sat down with their food before you begin.”
- “If you are dining out with a large table...if you wish you may decide to wait until everyone else has been served, or maybe just your end of the table.”
- If the host or others at the table insist that you go ahead and start, you may politely do so.

(Emily Post’s Etiquette: The Centennial Edition, Lizzie Post and Daniel Post Senning, 2022)



Our tables at the conference did not have an official host. So next year, I will be able to tell everyone to go ahead and start their salads. I may also politely insist that they eat the main course while it is still hot, instead of waiting for everyone to be served. And, as a bonus, since there were questions about the positioning of the drinks as well—because everything was rather crowded together—I will remember that the tea and water glasses placed to the right side of the place setting are the ones I am supposed to drink out of!

Note to readers: I enjoy reading etiquette books for fun, since they give an entertaining look at the social customs of different time periods. I actually have quite a collection of manuals, which range in coverage from old-world boudoir etiquette to internet dating advice. So, if you have any questions about current or old-fashioned etiquette, drop me a note at [Contact - Lucinda Gerlitz](#) and I'll do my best to look up an answer. And you might even make it into my next newsletter!

Latest News

Last month I attended the Killer Nashville writer's conference as planned, and had a spectacular time. I took part in classes on poisons, planning murders, writing cozies, and growing your newsletter base, just to name a few. I made new friends and met with fellow Sisters in Crime members at a private dinner. I got some very positive feedback on my manuscript from various agents and editors. And since I hadn't entered anything in the contest this year, I was able to relax and enjoy the awards banquet without stress.



My husband, Ken, and my cats made it fine without me, which was great since I was a bit worried about twenty-year-old Thomas. And now that I'm home again, I'm back to writing with

renewed energy and enthusiasm.

As always, if you know anyone who might be interested in signing up for my email list, please pass along my opt-in information at: [Newsletter - Lucinda Gerlitz](#).

Contact Information

I would love for my readers to get in touch! You can drop me a note anytime on my contact page at [Contact - Lucinda Gerlitz](#).

I hope you all have a great month. And for my usual animal photo, here is a picture of some deer enjoying the snow in Colorado:

