

Hotels in Africa (online, 9-10 Jan 26)

Leuphana University, Jan 9-10, 2026

Deadline: Aug 15, 2025

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Hotels in Africa through Archives, Visual and Material Culture, and Storytelling.

This international online workshop brings together scholars, artists, and archivists to examine the layered histories of hotels and guesthouses across the African continent. Focusing on the hotel as both a built form and a lived space, the workshop investigates its roles as a site of encounter, labor, luxury, mobility, and memory. From iconic colonial establishments to ephemeral roadside lodgings, from grand interiors to modest accommodations, and from photographs to fading postcards, we seek to interrogate how hotels have shaped and been shaped by urban and rural landscapes, histories of colonialism and independence, travel, and tourism, the transitory, the imaginary, and the lived experiences of everyday lives. The workshop opens a space to discuss hotels not merely as architectural entities or service institutions, but as nodes in broader transcultural, political, economic, and geohistorical networks. We aim at investigating hotels as social and visual archives – attending to their furnishings, textiles, artworks, gardens, and surrounding infrastructures.

How do the architecture, furniture, fabrics, and choices of vegetation of hotels, but also their embeddedness into the built environment tell stories of power, taste, and transformation? What visual, textual, and spatial traces do hotels leave behind? We aim at discussing the presence of hotels in literature, film, photography, and family histories, as well as in state archives, private collections, and personal memories. Participants are invited to engage with the role of hotels in labor history, tracing the lives and voices of those who worked in, passed through, lived near, or who were affected by these spaces in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. How have hotels structured everyday life for those who worked in them or those who lived near them, passed by, or dreamed of staying there? But we also aim at divesting from the stereotype of the hotel and guesthouse owned by Europeans during the colonial period, or of a focus on higher social strata as hotel guests. The workshop is also interested in hotels and guesthouses beyond the colonial paradigm, aiming at discussing a picture that is not dominated by white tourists, or an emphasis on the higher social classes, but thinking about intra-African travel and traveling of the diaspora across all social strata, about hotels and guesthouses in Africa more broadly as dynamic sites of encounter, tension, desire, resistance, and storytelling. We are thus also inviting proposals on hotels managed, but also taken over or founded and owned by local protagonists, on travel between different African countries, as well as stories about the role of hotels and guesthouses for mobility between the cities and the countryside.

The workshop centers hotels and guesthouses across the African continent as places of tempo-

rary lodging, hospitality, and negotiation, deeply entangled with histories of empire and military occupation, but also with intra-African mobility, the lived experiences of those who spent their lives working there, and the post-independence transformation of cities and the built environment. Together, we aim discussing issues such as in-betweenness, displacement, but also how hotels could be sites of belonging.

Contributions may address single hotels or compare multiple cases; they may examine the biographies of a hotel, the role of a hotel for a certain city, street or neighborhood, perspectives on mobility, tensions of labor and leisure, and spatial imagination. The workshop welcomes contributions that engage with the layered temporalities and geographies of hotels in Africa, social infrastructures that mediate between permanence and ephemerality. Through interdisciplinary dialogues, we aim to collectively discuss the visual and material culture of hotels and guesthouses in Africa – as sites of encounter, tension, aspiration, resistance, and imagination.

Please send us your proposals for 20 min presentations in the form of an abstract (300 words max.) and a brief bio to janetmarionpurdy@uchicago.edu and vera-simone.schulz@leuphana.de by August 15. A publication of the workshop is planned.

Reference:

CFP: Hotels in Africa (online, 9-10 Jan 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 25, 2025 (accessed Jan 9, 2026),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/49579>>.