

## Hotels in Medan During the Colonial Era

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran hotel-hotel di Medan pada masa kolonial, tidak hanya sebagai tempat penginapan, tetapi juga sebagai pusat kegiatan sosial dan budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis isi, yang dimaksudkan untuk menarik kesimpulan berdasarkan data historis dengan mempertimbangkan konteks sosial dan budaya pada masa itu. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa hotel-hotel pada era kolonial di Medan memainkan peran penting dalam kehidupan sosial, berfungsi sebagai tempat berkumpul, pesta, dan berbagai acara yang dihadiri oleh kelompok elite seperti pejabat kolonial, pengusaha, dan tokoh masyarakat. Meskipun banyak dari hotel-hotel tersebut kini sudah tidak ada, warisan arsitektur dan historisnya tetap memberikan pengaruh terhadap perkembangan industri perhotelan di Medan hingga saat ini.

**Kata kunci:** hotel, sejarah, periode kolonial.

### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the role of hotels in Medan during the colonial period, not only as places of accommodation but also as centers of social and cultural activities. The research uses a qualitative method with a content analysis approach, intended to draw conclusions based on historical data while considering the socio-cultural context of the time. The findings reveal that colonial-era hotels in Medan played a significant role in social life, serving as venues for gatherings, parties, and events attended by various elite groups such as colonial officials, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. Although many of these hotels no longer exist, their architectural and historical legacy continues to influence the development of the hospitality industry in Medan today.*

**Keywords:** hotels, history, the colonial period.

### INTRODUCTION

Medan, the capital of North Sumatra Province, Indonesia, has a complex socioeconomic history, particularly during the colonial period. From the 19th to 20th centuries, the city served as a strategic trade and cultural center, as well as a key location for Dutch colonial settlements. In this context, Medan's hotel sector thrived to meet the accommodation needs of visiting businesspeople, travelers, and the Dutch colonial elite.

The presence of numerous hotels in Medan during the colonial era reflected

the aesthetics and architectural luxury of the time, and also marked the beginning of the modern hospitality industry in the region. The concepts of "hospitality" and "hotel" share etymological roots in Latin, but the term "hotel," derived from the French *hôtel* (meaning "large house"), only became popular in the 18th century. The global hospitality industry has undergone significant evolution along with the advancement of human civilization (Tahiri et al., 2021). Beyond its function as accommodation, this sector also played a crucial role as a center for social,

cultural, and political activities, and served as a symbol of social status for its visitors, who were generally officials, merchants, and businessmen visiting for business, meetings, or recreation (Bibi et al., 2022). For the Dutch colonial community, hotels also served as a forum for the exchange of ideas, concepts, and cultural interaction between colonists and local residents.

In recent decades, restoration and conservation efforts have been intensified in Medan's historic colonial hotels to preserve its cultural and historical heritage. Some are still operational and have become city icons, valued as valuable relics that retain their architectural beauty and historical significance. These hotels offer a unique experience for contemporary visitors, capturing the rich colonial feel through their distinctive architecture, interiors, and atmosphere (Affandi, et.al, 2024).

Revisiting Medan's colonial period through the lens of these luxury hotels provides insight into the dynamics of life and cultural development during that era. They reflect not only colonial glory but also the interrelationships between the Netherlands and Indonesia, as well as the social shifts that occurred. By preserving and appreciating the legacy of these hotels, we help preserve historical memory and honor their contributions to the development of Medan (Pane, et.al, 2018, March).

By exploring the history of Medan's hotels during the colonial period, a comprehensive understanding of the city's development, colonial relations, and their social and economic significance can be gained. These hotels serve as historical windows, revealing the complexities of Medan's past. They also illustrate the evolution of the hotel industry and its vital role in revitalizing the city's social and cultural landscape. This study aims to provide a preliminary description of Medan's hotels during the colonial period.

## **METHODS**

This study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods, grounded in the philosophy of postpositivism, were used to investigate the natural conditions of the object (Maksimovic et al., 2023), with the researcher acting as a key instrument. Qualitative research results emphasize the interpretation of meaning.

The specific approach used in this research is content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data, taking into account its context. The research object is explored through various information sources, including historical archives, reference books, and primary sources relevant to hotels in Medan during the colonial period.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Medan, as a center of trade and colonization in North Sumatra during the colonial era, became the location for a number of hotels. Important Which reflecting luxury and elegance that period. These hotels served not only as accommodations but also as centers of social, cultural, and political activity. They symbolized social status and played a vital role in meeting the needs of Dutch colonial officials, traders, and explorers visiting Medan (Hati, et.al, 2017).

The role of hotels in Medan during the colonial period very significant in reflecting the social, economic and political life of that era. These hotels become point meeting for the Dutch and colonial communities, as well as a center of cultural and business activities. They became symbols of luxury and social status for their guests, who enjoyed lavish amenities and modern comforts accessible only to the elite of the time. Staying at these hotels signaled high social standing and served as a means of demonstrating power and economic success (Pereira et al., 2021).

These hotels were also centers of social and cultural activity. Various events such as dance parties, high-society gatherings, and other social activities were often held at the hotel facilities. This reflects the dynamics of colonial social life in Medan and provided a platform for interaction and networking

for both Dutch and colonial communities. Furthermore, hotels in colonial Medan served as venues for meetings and interactions between Dutch colonists and local residents, reflecting the complex relationship between the colonial authorities and the local community. Although local residents sometimes served only as workers or servants, they also witnessed the cultural developments and interactions that took place (Panjaitan, et.al, 2025).

Architecturally and historically, Medan's colonial hotels hold significant significance. They preserve cultural and historical heritage through elegant European architectural designs and luxurious interiors. Although many hotels have undergone renovations, some retain their original features. This provides modern visitors with an opportunity to experience the atmosphere and beauty of Medan's colonial era.

Hotels in Medan during the colonial period also played a crucial role in the city's development. They served as centers of economic, political, and cultural activity. Hotel guests, mostly officials, merchants, and businessmen, contributed to Medan's economic growth and infrastructure development. These hotels also witnessed the social and political changes that occurred in the city during the colonial period (Sitorus, et.al, 2023).

In conclusion, Medan's colonial hotels are important markers of the city's

history and development. They reflect luxury, social status, and the interaction between the Dutch and local residents. They also possess significant architectural and historical significance, playing a vital role in Medan's social and economic life. Studying these hotels allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of colonial relations and the evolution of Medan.

The following is an overview of several hotels in Medan during the colonial period:

#### **1 . Hotel de Boer**

Hotel de Boer, established in 1898, was one of Medan's most luxurious and prominent hotels during the colonial era. It provided comprehensive facilities, including comfortable rooms, a restaurant, and meeting rooms. Social events, such as balls and high-society gatherings, were frequently held at the hotel, making Hotel de Boer a vital center of colonial Medan's social life.

Today known as the Grand Inna Medan, this legendary hotel, a relic of the Dutch East Indies era, is steeped in history and has been designated as one of the city's cultural heritage sites. The hotel is the result of the merger of two previous hotels: Hotel Wisma Deli and Hotel Dharma Bakti. Originally built in 1898 by Aeint Herman de Boer, a Dutch businessman, it was known as NV. Hotel Mijn de Boer before becoming known as Hotel De Boer (Withington, 1962).

Today, the Grand Inna Medan is managed by a State-Owned Enterprise (BUMN) of the Indonesian government, unlike its former private ownership. The initial construction of the Grand Inna Medan Hotel by a Dutch entrepreneur was intended to provide accommodation for foreigners involved in tobacco plantations in Tanah Deli, given the lack of hotels in Medan at the time.

Initially, Hotel De Boer only consisted of a restaurant, bar, and seven rooms. Then, in 1909, the capacity was expanded to 40 rooms. It is located at Jl. Balai Kota No. 2, Medan City, North Sumatra. The original building of the former Hotel De Boer has been preserved and has become a city icon, located in the center with two floors and 51 rooms.

During the colonial era, Hotel De Boer housed distinguished guests of the Dutch government and prominent Western artists, including King Leopold II of Belgium and the notorious secret agent Mata Hari. On December 14, 1957, as part of the nationalization of Dutch-owned companies, Hotel NV Mijn De Boer was taken over by the Indonesian government. Although renovated with painting and ceramic tiles, the building's vintage feel remains intact. The hotel serves not only as an accommodation but also as a significant historical site, allowing visitors to explore the well-preserved historic building and learn about its history.

Currently, the legendary hotel has been transformed into a 4-star hotel under the name Grand Inna Medan, offering 132 rooms consisting of various types, and equipped with meeting rooms that can accommodate 50 to 300 guests for various corporate events, exhibitions, or wedding receptions.

## 2. Kesawan Hotel

Hotel Kesawan, established in 1904, is located on Jalan Kesawan, the center of colonial Medan. It features elegant European architecture and luxurious interiors.

Modern amenities such as an elevator and a fan are also available in every room. Hotel Kesawan became an icon of Medan's hospitality during the colonial era, serving as a venue for business meetings, social events, and community gatherings.

Hotel Kesawan was founded by Dutch businessman HJ van den Broek. Its elegant design, featuring European architecture, made it an icon of colonial Medan. The name "Kesawan" comes from the street where the hotel stands. Originally a two-story building, Hotel Kesawan was later expanded to three floors to accommodate growing guest demand. The hotel offered modern amenities for its time, including comfortable rooms, a restaurant, a bar, and meeting rooms.

Established in the early 20th century, the Kesawan Hotel became one of Medan's leading colonial hotels. Originally a Dutch villa, it was later converted into a luxury hotel. Tjong A Fie, a Chinese businessman who played a key role in Medan's development, is also associated with the Kesawan Hotel, although detailed information about his role in its establishment is difficult to find.

During the colonial period, the Kesawan Hotel was a favorite accommodation for Dutch officials, traders, and explorers visiting Medan. The hotel also served as a center for social, cultural, and political activities. Many important social events and business meetings were held there, making it a center of colonial life in the city.

To this day, Hotel Kesawan remains one of Medan's leading luxury hotels. Despite undergoing renovations, the hotel retains its architectural beauty and historical significance. Hotel Kesawan is a draw for tourists interested in the colonial era and seeking a unique stay in Medan.

## 3. Hotel Deli

Hotel Deli has a fascinating history dating back to the colonial era. Founded in 1898 by Deli Maatschappij, a tobacco plantation company in the Deli area of North Sumatra, the hotel was built to serve high-ranking officials,

businesspeople, and foreign tourists visiting Medan during the colonial era. Hotel Deli was designed in a luxurious Dutch colonial architectural style, featuring elements such as expansive verandas, ornate Dutch-style roofs, and exquisite architectural details, making it one of the most prestigious buildings in Medan at the time.

Hotel Deli became the preferred accommodation for high-ranking officials, businessmen, and the colonial elite visiting Medan. Offering luxurious service, comfort, and modern amenities for its time, Hotel Deli played a significant role in Medan's history. Besides providing accommodation, the hotel served as a hub for social and cultural activities during the colonial era. Numerous meetings, events, and parties were held there, facilitating interaction among various social groups.

Unfortunately, the original Hotel Deli building was demolished in 1947 during a period of political instability in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the name "Hotel Deli" remained and was attached to a new hotel building built on the same site in 1956. The new Hotel Deli remains one of Medan's most iconic luxury hotels to this day, despite no longer retaining its original colonial structure.

The presence of luxury hotels in Medan during the colonial period also served to reinforce the city's image as a center of modernity and progress in North

Sumatra. These hotels reflected the wealth, elegance, and advancement of architecture and facilities available in Medan. Furthermore, these hotels played a role in fostering the development of the city's tourism industry. By providing quality accommodations, they attracted tourists to Medan and generated a positive economic impact.

In addition to the contributions of Dutch entrepreneurs, Chinese entrepreneurs also played a significant role in the development of hotels in Medan during the colonial period. This research will also investigate the role of Chinese entrepreneurs like Tjong A Fie and their impact on the hotel industry in Medan.

## **CONCLUSION**

During the colonial period, Medan evolved into a popular tourist destination for Dutch colonial officials, businesspeople, and foreign tourists. The presence of luxury hotels in the city reflected the growing interest in the tourism sector. Colonial-era hotels in Medan were designed in a distinctive Dutch colonial architectural style. These buildings featured elements such as spacious verandas, Dutch-style roofs, and striking architectural details.

More than just lodging, hotels in colonial Medan served as centers of social and cultural activity. They hosted meetings, events, and parties attended by

a diverse group of people, including high-ranking officials, businessmen, and the colonial elite. Several historic hotels in Medan, such as the Hotel Kesawan, have ties to Chinese entrepreneurs like Tjong A Fie, who played a significant role in the city's development and contributed to the hotel sector.

Although many of these hotels have undergone renovations or are no longer operating in their original form, their architectural and historical heritage continues to have a significant impact on the development of Medan's hospitality industry today. Medan's colonial-era hotels are an integral part of celebrating the city's heritage and attracting tourists seeking to explore its rich history and culture.

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