

Book Your Reservation: The Grand Budapest Hotel Is A Hit

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Writer-director [Wes Anderson](#) continues to expand his creative palette as well as his courage to invent vibrant characters and indelible settings. Few directors are capable of producing such cinematic joyrides that smack of color and whimsy (*Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Moonrise Kingdom*), and, for the most part, they never fail to walk a comedic tightrope between the ironic and the absurd.



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Oh, how we've come to revere the man.

His eighth feature film, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, is another artistic achievement—what a breezy, dreamy and quirky comic caper it is. The themes of honor and friendship play out nicely here, too—surprising, considering all of the antics that unfold—and set against an imaginary backdrop of a 20th-century European spa village at a time between the two menacing wars, this film is certainly among Anderson's best endeavors.

But to fully absorb *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (***/4 out of four), it's imperative to note from whom Anderson found his inspiration—Stefan Zweig. The Austrian-born Zweig was one of the most prolific authors of the early 20th Century. To say that he had a vivid imagination does not do the man justice. He penned several dozen novellas, short stories and a bevy of other delicious literary works—poems, articles, speeches, libretti. That he wrote more than 10,000 letters in his lifetime is noteworthy if not somewhat staggering to compute, and by the mid-1920s, Zweig, who often wrote in violet ink, had become one of the most widely translated authors in the world. [George Prochnik](#), the author of the forthcoming book, "The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World," reports that early on, when the writer resided in his first bachelor-pad—in Vienna no less—he enjoyed entertaining guests. In fact, Zweig served them "liquors sprinkled with gold leaf in rooms that were buried in books and painted a deep red that one friend described as the color of the blood of 4,000 beheaded Saxons. Rich, handsome, a dreamy sensualist who chain-smoked Virginia cigars and once had an essay he penned about Handel printed entirely on silk, Stefan Zweig was the quintessential dandy cosmopolite."

Prochnik has Zweig down—to a T. And so does Anderson.

Set in a fictional alpine spa town of Zubrowka—think Eastern Europe, toss in the fascist takeover/Communist brouhaha of the '30s and stir—*The Grand Budapest Hotel* unfolds much like a Russian nesting doll. There's a story within a story within a story and we soon find ourselves involved in the frolics of Gustave H ([Ralph Fiennes](#)), the Grand's legendary concierge and Zero Moustafa (newcomer Tony Revolori), a newbie lobby boy who eventually morphs into Gustav's most trusted confidant. Clearly Gustav is modeled, in part, after Zweig—he's dripping with charm. But behold Fiennes here: unleashed, he delivers one of the most uninhibited performances of his career. Anderson reportedly had only one person in mind prior to casting—Fiennes. It's nice to see this side of the actor. Meanwhile, Revolori is a refreshing surprise. He may be a newcomer, but he is pitch perfect and clearly apt at maneuvering through the delicate comedic mine field Anderson often sets up for his actors. (One wrong glance can thwart the ripple effect Anderson hopes to generate, but Revolori seems to have learned very quickly.)

After the mysterious death of 84-year-old dowager countess Madame Céline Villeneuve Descoffres und Taxis aka Madame D. (Tilda Swinton), just on

romance, Gustave and Zero quickly become involved in a series of bizarre events. Madame D's family doesn't take well to Gustave's appearance at the reading of her will and what follows is a rare kind of comedy. There's the theft of a priceless Renaissance painting; a contentious battle for Madame D's family fortune; an attempted

prison break; and a feverish attempt to recover the missing painting. In between, Anderson delivers some spectacular eye candy. Everything from interior walls painted so richly red or orange to a gaggle of breathtaking, edge-of-your-seat chases on motorcycles, trains, sleds, and skis. And much of it unlike anything we typically see in a theatrical outing.

Anderson's supporting cast are among the finest from his previous graduating classes. Here we find a bombastic Adrien Brody (as Madam D's son) and a steely Willem Dafoe (a thug) sparring with a lyrical Jeff Goldblum (a lawyer), among others. F. Murray Abraham, Jude Law, Bill Murray, Edward Norton, Jason Schwartzman, Tom Wilkinson and Owen Wilson pop up at various points along the way. Not to be left out: The Grand Budapest—the hotel itself is a spectacular creature and it's a hoot to watch these characters unravel within its many peculiar chambers.

Best of all, however, may be this: Just as *Moonrise Kingdom* sped toward its delirious and passionate ending, we're raced toward a climactic, one-of-a-kind conclusion here, too. And yet, we're left to sit with deeper thoughts and emotions, ones that nudge us to contemplate the significance of friendship, how humorously we allow ourselves (if at all) to maneuver through life's absurdities and, perhaps, that curious thing we all must face at some point: the inevitable passing of time.

Bottom line: Check into this charming hotel.

The Grand Budapest Hotel

***** ½ (out of four)**

With Ralph Fiennes, Tony Revolori, F. Murray Abraham, Mathieu Amalric, Adrien Brody, Willem Dafoe, Jeff Goldblum, Jude Law, Bill Murray, Edward Norton, Saoirse Ronan, Jason Schwartzman, Tilda Swinton, Tom Wilkinson, Owen Wilson. Written and directed by Wes Anderson.



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