



# Hotel California

The Eagles



## IS IT REALLY A 'LOVELY PLACE' ?

- Abhinav Gupta

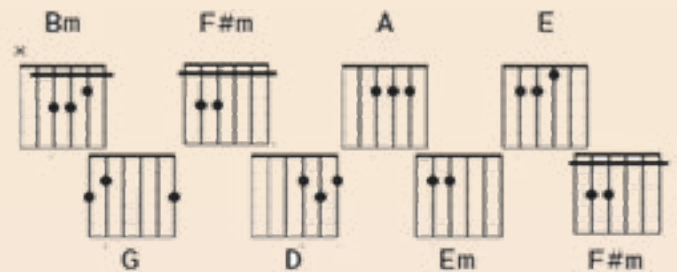
**“Welcome to the Hotel California, such a lovely place”**

We've all heard these words at least once in our lifetime. Arguably one of the greatest Rock n' Roll songs of all time, Hotel California has left a legacy in the world of music that is truly unparalleled. The song has become a cult classic, played over numerous rock stations to this day. It has consistently shown up in cinema, is frequently mentioned in pop culture and has been countless covered by musicians all around the world.

For instance, who doesn't remember the popular 'Jesus' scene from *The Big Lebowski*? Many critics attribute the success of this breakthrough character to the Spanish version of the song being played in the background. Or who remembers when it was played during the Sopranos? A very popular song, indeed!  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdOjVsfuKPs>

But before we get into what the song is really all about, let's take a minute to admire its musical prowess. It's truly a breathtaking song, one that every guitarist in the world has attempted to learn and play. For starters, it's got a gorgeous chord progression:

**`Bm-F#m-A-E-G-D-Em-F#m`**

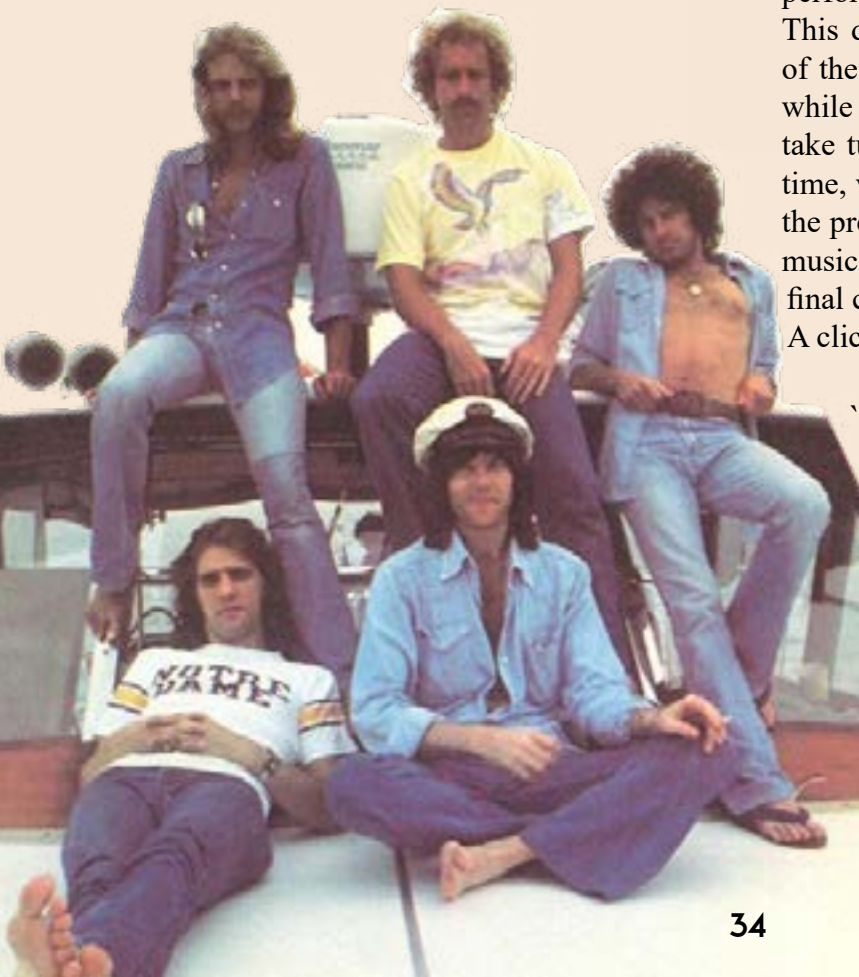


Wow. Just Wow. Sounds absolutely marvellous. This guitar solo is one of the most celebrated musical pieces in the world. However, I like to call this a **guitar duo**, because this masterpiece is performed by Don Felder and Joe Walsh together! This duo is a classic guitar face-off, between two of the greats. They battle it out against each other, while playing for the same team! Felder and Walsh take turns and play this majestic solo 8 beats at a time, with each sequence getting better than the previous one! Now generally, in rock music, a guitar solo comes before the final chorus.

A cliché song format is:

**`verse - chorus - verse -  
chorus - bridge - solo -  
chorus`**

But The Eagles chose to **end** the song with the guitar solo. There is no final chorus, and instead, the ~~solo~~ duo comes right after the bridge, as Felder and Walsh set in and play those absolutely phenomenal notes on their guitars! This duo goes down in history as one of the greatest guitar pieces ever composed.



What an incredible way to end the song!

Here's a mellifluous live version of this song, check out the guitar coda at the 4:30 mark.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x47aiMa1XUA>

The music, the chord progression, the masterful guitar *duo* at the end, Don Henley's splendid vocals and sharp drum beats - all of these combine together to create a spectacularly unique song.

But what's really special about this song **are the lyrics**. Some of the most thoughtful words ever penned down in music history, it's ironic that no one's really sure what they actually mean! And The Eagles haven't really confirmed it, perhaps they aren't sure about it either. But well, that's the beauty of musical words, it's left to the interpretation of the listener.

Some people believe it's all about a crashing economy, or a classic heartbreak song...but I believe that this song is about something far more serious. It's one of the most enlightening songs I've ever heard, and as you read further, you'll see why.

### YOU CAN CHECK OUT ANY TIME YOU LIKE, BUT YOU CAN NEVER LEAVE.

These are the last lines of the song, before the long guitar coda. Some believe the duo to be the heart of the song. But for me, it's these lines preceding the guitar coda that is the core of this beautiful song! As the solo is about to set in, Don Henley screams, **'you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave'**.

And there is a split-second pause. The drums stop. So do the guitars. And for that immensely small time

frame, it hits you, like a football in the face. **That is my moment of epiphany**. For in a matter of milliseconds, those two lines penetrate your heart and soul and tell you what the song is really about - the creation of a trap of your own sins, and how you're stuck in it for eternity. How you may try to check out, but no matter how many times you try, you could never truly leave.

And as soon as that realisation strikes, the guitars set in, the beginning of the greatest guitar ~~solo~~ duo in the world. And for the remainder of the song, you're not only admiring the magnificent guitar notes...you're also attempting to comprehend what Don Henley really meant when he said, that 'you can never leave'. What was this 'hotel' he was speaking about? And was it really a lovely place? Why could you never leave it?

Let's break this down, line by line.

### THE FIRST VERSE AND CHORUS - SHE SHOWED ME THE WAY.

*On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my head.  
Warm smell of colitas, rising up through the air.  
Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light.  
My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim, I had  
to stop for the night.*

*There she stood in the doorway, I heard a  
mission bell.*

*And I was thinking to myself, if  
this was heaven or this  
could be hell.*

*Then she lit up a candle,  
and she showed me the  
way.*

*There were voices  
down the  
corridor,  
and I  
thought  
I heard  
them  
say...*



*Welcome to the Hotel California.  
It's such a lovely place!*

Now when I first heard the song, I honestly thought he was speaking about a woman. How, while he was driving on a lonely dark road, really depressed, he came across this shimmer of hope, in the form of a woman. He wondered if it was dangerous to go through, but she got him infatuated with that candle of hers, 'showing him the way' to the hotel - which he calls a lovely place!

But then, after my moment of epiphany during the popular 'you can never leave' line, I came back to this verse again. And that's when I realised that it wasn't a woman he was talking about. The woman was most certainly a figment of his imagination. A mere thought, that looked so real and so lifelike because his "head was heavy and his sight was dim". But why was he seeing the woman? Was it all just happening inside his head? It's understandable that he was speculating it to be *heaven or hell*-after all, you don't just follow strangers into a mysterious hotel!

But then he went on to call Hotel California a lovely place! And I really thought it to be a lovely place too! So why was he unable to leave? Why was he trapped inside this lovely hotel? So I moved on to the second verse, hoping for some more clarity to satiate my inquisitiveness.

**THE SECOND VERSE  
AND CHORUS  
- THOSE VOICES ARE  
CALLING FROM FAR  
AWAY**

**PING!**

*Her mind is tiffany twisted, she's got the Mercedes  
Benz - Uh.*

*She's got a lot of pretty, pretty boys - that she calls  
friends.*

*Last night in the courtyard, sweet summer sweat.  
Some dance to remember, and some dances to  
forget.*

*So I called up the captain, "please bring me my  
wine?"*

*He said, "we haven't had that spirit here since  
1969".*

*And still those voices are calling from far away...  
To wake you up in the middle of the night, just to  
hear them say...*

*Welcome to the Hotel California, what a nice  
surprise, bring your alibis.*

Okay, so we know Don Felder's entered this lovely hotel with this mysterious woman he found in the first verse. He's really happy, he's dancing a lot. He seems to be forgetting some of the dances though, perhaps because he's drunk. And he's really surprised





at this woman. She seems to be a little crazy, very popular among the guys and dancing with everyone.

Then the captain walks in. And he refuses to give him the wine, saying that he's never done this since 1969. What in the world does *1969* imply here? Was it just a desperate attempt to get something to rhyme with *wine*, I thought to myself. But then, they were the Eagles, not Justin Bieber or Ariana Grande! Glenn Frey is a remarkable songwriter, one of the best in the world. There's no way he'd add such uncanny information in there, just to make it rhyme.

The Captain was his saviour. His friend, coming to warn him to stop all this. He tried to reason with him, telling him how he's never done all this since 1969. He'd stopped all this, and now he's getting back into it again. But then, those voices, those darn voices, they came back to Don Henley. They were eerie but surprisingly pleasant and attractive, luring him back to the Hotel California and convincing him that it was indeed a *lovely place*. Those voices dragged Henley into the hotel again, the mysteriously beautiful place

where you can find a room at any time of the year!

## THE BRIDGE - THEY JUST COULDN'T KILL THE BEAST.

And then, we enter the bridge of the song. The drums go quiet, and the guitars soften, as Don Henley continues..

*Mirrors on the ceiling, big  
champagne on ice*

*She said, we are all just prisoners  
here, of our own device.*

*In the master's chambers, they  
gathered for the feast.*

*They stab it with the steely knife,  
but they just couldn't kill the beast!*

And that's it! It all finally made sense to me! They weren't actually eating meat at the feast, and trying to cut open an animal's guts. It was a metaphor, that the Eagles use so eloquently throughout the song - **a metaphor for addiction**. No matter how hard they all tried, they couldn't stop. And the woman - who lured Don into the hotel in the first place - she seemed to be realising this too! She knew she was trapped in a prison of her own sins. Don knew it too, that they were all addicted to the alcohol and to the drugs. It's what made his head heavy and caused his sight to grow dim. And they tried and tried and tried, so very hard, to stop all of this...

But alas, they just couldn't kill the beast of addiction. It had taken over them, just as a tsunami sweeps out the entire coastline. And they knew they were trapped. A prison - of their own device - which they had created in the form of the 5 star 'Hotel California'. Yes, there were mirrors on the ceilings and lots of champagne, but it was

nothing but a figment of their imagination. It never ceased to exist, because it never existed to begin with! It was something their minds created due to whatever they were high on. And it did seem like a lovely place, but all it was, was a prison.

And they were trapped, like rats in the cellar.

**OH BUT WAIT...LOOKS LIKE HE WASN'T  
READY TO GIVE UP YET.**

*Last thing I remember, I was running for the door  
I had to find the passage back to the place I was  
before*

*Relax, said the nightman, we are programmed to  
receive*

*You can check out anytime you like, but you can  
never leave!*

Don had finally realised that he was in a prison, and he was desperately trying to get out of it. He ran and ran, trying to get back to how it was before he was high on the drugs, or before he was drunk out of his mind...but he couldn't. He was trapped. And even though it was that

woman who lured him into the hotel, he was the one to blame. He was in a prison of his own sins.

The drugs destroyed him. Alcoholism made it seem like it was all resplendent, but it really wasn't. The woman was 'peer pressure' which he gave into, entering the hotel of his own volition. He realised soon enough that it was all a trap, but it was too late, and he just couldn't kill the beast. The nightman allowed him to check out. But he couldn't leave, and that's how the beast of addiction took over him and his life.

And then, the iconic guitar coda sets in. And it's a perfect ending, because not only do you relish those harmonious notes, but you're also left seriously contemplating the meaning of the song and the relentless nature of addiction.

You know you can stop, but you don't want to. And soon, you desperately want to stop, but you can't. Guess they were trying to tell us that these momentary pleasures are really not worth it. It's a message to live clean and healthy. Because *you can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave.* ■

