

TOP DESIGNER UNUSUAL HOTELS OF THE WORLD



Hotels all around the world have been painting interiors bright colours and upgrading towels and soap in a bid to increase their rates and call themselves 'designer' hotels. While some are great properties whose updates add much needed enthusiasm to otherwise drab buildings a growing proportion have joined the designer bandwagon with a conversion that is little deeper than the paintwork. Steve Dobson suggests some lesser known properties that justify their designer labels and bring a little more WOW to your overnight stay.

The Marmara Antalya, Turkey

This property literally makes your head spin as the whole property and its 24 guest bedrooms slowly revolve. Located on the famous Falez cliffs outside Antalya, the 'Revolving Loft' building of The Marmara Antalya provides magnificent views of the Mediterranean and the pool a few hours later. The rotation is not a scary fairground ride but smooth and peaceful, taking anywhere between 2 and 22 hours to complete.

Some guests might be tempted to ponder how it is possible to create a 2750 ton building that floats in a tank holding only 478 tons of water, or even consider how the rooms can rotate to face the sea or pool, yet still have flush toilets and working taps - others might just ask themselves why?

Next to the revolving annex, the main hotel building provides 232 air-conditioned guestrooms decorated by the famed French designer Christian Allart. More spacious than average, the rooms are decorated in a bright, contemporary style. The main hotel also provides an innovative lobby area - the "Tuti Floor" which aims to set the tone for comfort and design throughout hotel. Built with glass on three sides, Tuti Floor offers guests an opportunity for social interaction with fellow visitors in a home-from-home environment. Guests can eat while checking emails, lie down on sofas and read a book from the Tuti Floor library, or play pool. There is even a giant swing suspended from the ceiling, a climbing wall and a graffiti column where you are free to share your thoughts with others. With restaurants and pools the hotel caters for families and business guests, but there is a final WOW designer feature that makes this property stand out - a man-made flowing stream 'The River', created specifically for canoeists. Running 297 meters long, Canoe River is fully controllable and provides adrenaline lovers an unforgettable sense of adventure without having to leave the hotel complex at all.

The Marmara Antalya
Antalya, Turkey

Photo: (c) The Marmara Antalya

Atelier sul Mare, Sicily, Italy

The Hotel Atelier sul Mare, in Castel di Tusa, Sicily is a living showcase for international artists and brings the work of many designers together under a single roof. Not only have rooms been handed over to the artists to be transformed into works of art, they include the hotel guest as part of the creation. The predominant theme is water - and the sea is just outside the hotel. Different artists use this inspiration in different ways and you are encouraged to try out different rooms during your stay - as each is different and unique. About half of the rooms are turned over to art, so if you feel you're

about to overdose on modern art, check into one of the normal rooms - or just look out into the bay and enjoy the view.

Atelier sul Mare also offers something for those that aren't aficionados of art. Courses range from pottery making to Sicilian wine and cuisine to classical music recitals.

Hotel Atelier sul mare
Castel di Tusa (Me)
Sicily Italy

Photo: (c) Atelier sul Mare

Crazy Bear Hotel - Beaconsfield, UK

The oldest documented building in Beaconsfield has been structurally restored to offer luxury design - without restraint or compromise.

Each of the 10 bedrooms is a showcase of made-to-order materials and one-off-designer fittings. Leather floors, textured and padded walls, satin ceilings and spectacular lighting. Near theatrical vases, chandeliers and glassware mix with statement furniture like a Swarovski studded chesterfield. Bathrooms do not escape the luxury treatment and copper roll-top baths are matched with huge downpour showers, textured gold leather ceilings and mirrored walls.

Overall the feeling is one of a design without restraint, compromise - or perhaps budget. It is easy to appreciate why this property took 3 years to restore!

As well as 3 private dining rooms and a separate private bar, public areas include a lounge bar and 2 fine restaurants. The English serves modern British food, while the Thai restaurant - a Crazy Bear specialty, is in a room with a high vaulted ceiling, and specially commissioned carvings.

Hotel's facilities include a garden with a huge infinity swimming pool.

The property is a showcase of dramatic architecture, luxurious materials, spectacular lighting and statement furniture. Guests are guaranteed an unrestrained WOW experience.

Crazy Bear Hotel
Beaconsfield
Buckinghamshire UK

Photo: (c) Crazy Bear Hotel

Hotel Puerta América - Madrid, Spain

If you want to give designers an opportunity to be really creative, you need to give them the space to do something special. With 12 floors and communal spaces providing canvas for 19 design agencies, your choice of room is critical at Hotel Puerta América. Thankfully the front desk staff anticipates guests changing rooms. A menu of design choices for the different floors is provided at check-in and you are recommended to study closely, or to review the website in advance. Some floors are a triumph of style over substance and there are stories of guests whose inability to find (or use) room fittings forced them to call reception for help. Although floors have a similar layout, when you exit the elevator on each floor you feel in altogether different worlds - from futuristic red plastic to black marble through to traditional leather and wood.

Example floors include the first floor by Zaha Hadid, where everything seems to come out from the wall. The bathroom is a single structure from floor to ceiling which changes colour according to the room. Most frustratingly the waste basket is intended as a challenge for guests, because it is not so easy to find. Or you can just drop your rubbish on the floor with frustration.

The eighth floor by Kathryn Findlay titled "Light in motion" intends to suggest a feminine touch.

Refusing to consider walls or doors, Findley provided for sweeping white curtains that separate the bathroom from the room. The entire room is white and forms a single space.

Patience is required on the ninth floor of Richard Gluckman with his 'Boxes of colours' concept as you need to find everything in the room and bathroom, because it is hidden in a box. The biggest box, in the middle of the room, houses the television. In the bathroom, the first thing you see when you enter the room, is a large glass box containing the shower, with a sliding door separating it from the bedroom by means of a white metal curtain. Contrasting a raw industrial look with back-lit illumination, it is critical for guests to ask how to turn off the lights, otherwise you'll struggle to get to sleep.

Hotel Puerta América
Madrid, Spain

Photo: (c) Puerta América

Desert Palm resort, Dubai, UAE

Set amidst 150 acres of verdant greenery, Desert Palm resort is an exclusive enclave, contrasting with both the vast sandscapes of Arabia and the customary opulence of Dubai. As visitors to Dubai will attest, there is nothing half hearted about hotel development here and the resort provides a country club atmosphere for its guests - and a welcome escape from the noise of the city. Situated on a private estate that was originally created as a haven for owner, Mr. Ali Alwardy's personal enjoyment of polo, the estate has four championship polo fields, a riding school, stables, endless sunshine and beautifully groomed gardens with water features.

Accommodation is in 24 private pool villas and guest suites, whose distinctive designs embody the simplicity and elegance of the estate's graceful surrounds. This is Dubai - but apart from the sunshine, you could be watching the Polo at Smiths lawn in Windsor, UK.

As a property managed by Per Aquum, you'll see that spa facilities are top notch - and Desert Palm resort brings a highly addictive, designer spa journey of Arabia touched with the Avant-garde.

Desert Palm Resort
Dubai, UAE

Photo: (c) Desert Palm resort

About Unusual Hotels of the World

For over 5 years, this guide to over 150 of the worlds most Unusual Hotels has showcased properties from around the world in Lighthouses, Caves, Treehouses, Planes, Trains - even Underwater - with a unique WOW rating based on the feedback of around 3,000 daily visitors to their website.

They have recently published a top rated Unusual Hotels of the World book, available from www.gounusual.com with 50 favourite properties, available in English, French, Italian and Spanish. For more details of the hotels suggested, comments and rating, check out their website

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