

World's 10 Most Unusual Hotels

They say that travel is about the journey, not just the destination. But if you've ever arrived at your destination only to find out that your hotel room is dingy, dirty, and miles from all the action, it's time to take matters into your own hands.

An increasing number of hotels are positioning themselves to be more than just a place to sleep—they are the action.

You may have heard of the ice hotel in Sweden or even funky spots like the Dog Bark Park in Cottonwood, Idaho ... but here are few more unusual hotels to inspire your next trip.

1. To the Lighthouse

Love all things nautical? Then try sleeping in a lighthouse.

There are actually dozens of lighthouses around the world that welcome overnight guests, but at Brown's Point Lighthouse in Tacoma, Washington, you get to be the lighthouse keeper.

This 30-foot concrete structure is perched by Commencement Bay and the keeper's dwelling (at right) was recently restored for overnight stays. Guest participate in the "keeper program," in which they maintain the lighthouse and hold public tours. This job is designed for at least two people, and six maximum, making it a great educational experience for families. Rates range from \$500-\$700 per week. 253-927-2536, www.pointsnortheast.org

2. Go Climb a Tree

If it seems like the days of kids clambering up trees and running around outdoors are a thing of the past, skip the sedentary vacations and force them out – and up.

The Cedar Creek Treehouse is a private mountain retreat in the woods of Mt. Rainier, located 50 feet up in a 200-year-old Western Red Cedar tree.

Owner Bill Compher built the treehouse himself, making it large enough to accommodate up to five people.

There's a bathroom, kitchen and dining area, not to mention skylights and an observatory 100 feet up that offers great views from all around.

Though it's a safe climb up, kids under 10 are not allowed inside the treehouse. Rates are \$250 for two people, and \$25 for each additional guest. 360-569-2991, www.cedarcreektreehouse.com

3. All Aboard the Romance Train

To conjure up the romantic days of train travel, why not cozy up inside an actual train car for the night? The Northern Rail Traincar B&B in Two Harbors, Minnesota, is made up of connected rail cars with 18 guest rooms.

The Porter Suite sleeps two and includes a dinette and a private bath for \$109-\$139.

Located on 160 acres of forested land (about 25 minutes outside of Duluth), you have access to Lake Superior and Gooseberry Falls, plus outdoor activities like hiking and golfing. 877-834-0955; www.northernrail.net

4. Were You Raised in a Barn?

Located on the Puget Sound, just a ferry ride away from Seattle, is a quirky little spot designed for two. The Big Red Barn Getaway is a real barn built in the 1890s which has been renovated into a tiny inn.

You'll be surrounded by miles of unspoiled nature (and may even catch sight of a Bald Eagle). The historic Victorian seaport of Port Townsend is a 10-minute walk away, and Fort Worden State Park is only two minutes away, with gorgeous beaches and plenty of hiking trails. 360-301-1271, www.BigRedBarnGetaway.com

5. How About a Yurt?

Ever slept in a yurt? Even know what a yurt is?

These round, canvas dwellings were created by Mongolian nomads more than 2,000 years ago; it's an ingenious structure that sits sturdily on the ground and often can fit several people at once.

Treebones Resort in Big Sur, California, has 16 yurts along the ridge above the Pacific Ocean, four of which can fit families. You'll have the best ocean-view room in town. Rates are \$170-\$270 for two to four people, including a waffle breakfast. 877-424-4787, www.treebonesresort.com

6. Batting Around in a Cave

You may not know that there are several underground hotels in Cappadocia, Turkey (a region in the middle of Turkey not too far from Ankara), but the most highly touted one of all is the Gamirasu Cave Hotel, which is located inside a restored, thousand-year-old Byzantine monastic retreat. There are 18 exquisitely adorned rooms, some of which were actually monk cells, which are carved into the cave or built with volcanic rock.

Don't worry, there is running water. Room rates range from about \$110 for a double room to about \$500 for a deluxe suite. www.gamirasu.com

7. Digging the Dug-Out

The Australian outback is filled with opal mines and dugouts galore—so dive in and experience one first-hand at the Desert Cave Hotel located within the sandstone of Coober Pedy.

The hotel boasts 19 underground rooms, and about 30 rooms above ground for those who prefer not to live troglodyte-style. Also underground are casinos, shops featuring locally mined opals and Aboriginal arts and crafts. Rooms are about \$150 a night, not including meals or a cave tour. www.desertcave.com.au

8. Sleeping in the Pipelines

If you ever wanted to brag that you slept in a drainpipe, read on ... Daspark Hotel in Lintz, Austria consists of three concrete drainpipes in the middle of a park.

Inside each one is a teensy room built for two, with a double bed, a lamp, a small storage space, and even power outlets. Food, toilets and showers are all located nearby.

If you're concerned about sleeping in a public park, rest assured that the drainpipes are all locked with a safety code. And best of all, you get to determine your own rates. www.dasparkhotel.net

9. Sleeping with the Fishes

With both China and Dubai building underwater hotels called the Hydropolis, sleeping under water seems to be the wave of the future. China is hoping to have its land-based HydroTower component open by the Olympics, but if you can't wait until then, visit the Jules Verne Undersea Lodge.

This underwater hotel is actually a research lab in Key Largo, Florida, but regular landlubbers are invited to spend the night. You'll actually have to scuba dive your way into the hotel, but they'll give you all the necessary training. An overnight visit costs about \$475 and includes diving gear and unlimited dives if you're certified. 305-451-2353, www.jul.com

10. Doing Time

The new Liberty Hotel in Boston has been making headlines as a former jail-turned-luxury-hotel. After a five-year renovation program that cost upward of \$150 million, the Charles Street jail has maintained some precious features that pay homage to its history—such as a restaurant called Clink, and a bar called Alibi housed in the former “drunk tank.”

But if you're looking for a more, well, authentic prison experience, you'll have to jet yourself over to Latvia to the Karosta Prison. Located in Liepaja (about three hours west of Riga), this former Soviet detention facility was once known as the "prison that nobody escaped from."

Today, it welcomes (if that's the right word) visitors to spend a night for about \$16.

Guests play the role of a prisoner, complete with ex-Soviet military guards berating and ordering you around, cold iron beds, and toilets that remain uncomfortably close to their original state. <http://www.karostascietums.lv/1/EN/news>

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Peter Greenberg is a preeminent expert on travel. His focus is on the journey, providing insider's tips and recommendations to an increasingly savvy and demanding traveler. Peter is also author of The New York Times best-selling series, The Travel Detective, which uncovers secrets the airline, hotel, cruise and rental car industries don't want consumers to know. Check out [Travel Hotels](#) for more insider information.