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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

Unusual places to stay

Prison hotels Built in 1905, Karosta naval jail in Latvia was originally home to mutinous Russian sailors. In the 1970s it housed political prisoners. According to their website this is ‘an opportunity to stay overnight on real prisoners’ benches and mattresses’. In direct contrast to most hotel publicity, the website goes on to describe Karosta proudly as ‘unfriendly, unheated and uncomfortable’. They are not lying. This is more a reality jail experience than a hotel. ‘Reception’ is a dark corridor where a former prison guard explains the rules to you (no luggage except a toothbrush, no attempts to escape), and then fires his gun in the air to show you he is serious. After a meal of bread and sweet Russian tea, ‘guests’ are given five minutes to wash before making up their own bed from a wooden bench and thin mattress. Sound unpleasant? It is. Mind you, for $12 per night, what do you expect?

Period hotels Would you like to experience life in America’s Wild West 150 years ago? Virginia City in Montana, a former gold-rush town, was a ghost town until it began to be restored in the 1950s for tourism. Owned largely by the state government, the town operates now as a large open-air museum. Nearby is the Nevada City Hotel and cabins where you can hang up your Stetson hat and enjoy life as a cowboy. The rooms feature period Victorian furniture and downstairs the saloon has a true Wild West feel. The cabins look extremely rustic and basic from the outside – two even have their original earth roofs – but inside they have large double beds and private bathrooms. Bear in mind that if you book in the week, you might be disappointed because the city only comes to life at weekends, when actors walk around in period costumes, such as sheriffs, cowboys and gold prospectors.

Cave hotels If you had more primitive accommodation in mind, why not try the caves of Sassi di Matera on the toe of Italy, which have been inhabited since the Bronze Age? During the Renaissance they developed into more sophisticated rooms with stone walls, vaulted ceilings and balustrades. But in recent history they are best known as the poor homes of the peasants who lived there with their animals until as late as 1952. Now, however, they have been renovated to provide hospitality in a historical setting. Although visitors to Le Grotte Della Civita must do without television or fridges, the rooms are comfortably furnished with antique furniture and period terracotta tiles. The owners wanted the caves to still feel as authentic as possible, so they have built the furniture into the walls of the caves and left in place the iron rings where peasants tied up their animals. Prices start at $300 per night.

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Art hotels A modern art gallery is a place where you can lose yourself in an artist’s vision of the world. A hotel is essentially a place where you can spend the night, in either more or less comfort according to your budget. As its advertising promises, Propeller Island City Lodge in Berlin manages to combine the two. Housed in a former apartment block, the hotel is a collection of individually designed rooms – the upside-down room, the all-orange room, the mirror-filled room – which are often so extreme that you have no choice except to get into the spirit of it. In some art hotels, you could forget the art and simply enjoy the comfort of your surroundings. That’s not the case with Propeller Island. However, the rooms can be small and claustrophobic (although some have balconies) and often you have to share a bathroom with other guests. But if you don’t mind that, it may be the next best thing to spending the night in a gallery.