

Check in Cotton House Hotel, Barcelona



One of Barcelona's newest hotels is housed in a centuries old setting, one that has been painstakingly revived by local tourism promoters. The Cotton House, part of Marriott's Autograph collection, was once the headquarters of a cotton textile foundation and dates back to the 19th century. From the parquet flooring to ornate ceilings, the building has been lovingly restored after decades of use as the Cotton Producers Guild headquarters. The restoration gives the place a sense of grandeur, while exuding a sophisticated modern style. It also boasts the first freestanding spiral staircase in Europe (built in 1957), which reaches all the way up to the sixth floor.

Rooms

With a total of 83 rooms, including five suites, the eight different styles of room range from 248sq ft up to 969sq ft. Each offers clean design, large comfy beds and views over the city from the top two floors. The special Cotton rooms feature airy patios, with large shutters for privacy, that look out over the rear terrace.

Facilities

The first floor houses the library that was once the social and meeting rooms for the Cotton Producers Guild. Nowadays, you can spend some quiet time here and relax at the restaurant and bar. This area extends out to a large terrace, where you can enjoy food and drink alfresco. Those feeling sporty, or looking to catch some rays, can head up top, where there exists a small outdoor pool, gym and sun loungers.

Bottom line

A boutique hotel owned by a global chain may sound like something to be wary of, but Marriott have proved they can pull it off. With flawless service, great food and drink and stunning décor – both in the rooms and the public spaces – this is among the hottest properties in Barcelona right now, and for good reason.

Cotton House Hotel 670 Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, Barcelona, +34 93 450 50 45; hotelcottonhouse.com. Rates from \$2,312 (inc tax).



Staycation of the Fortnight Hong Kong Gold Coast Hotel

Finding a hotel that not only meets your standards but also keeps the kids entertained is a plight most parents know all too well. That's why Gold Coast Hotel's new kid-themed rooms are likely to be an instant hit. The hotel has long been popular as a retreat for Hongkongers, thanks to the idyllic location and its range of facilities. The 453-room property features a large outdoor pool, spa, gym, tennis courts and kids' fun land. The latest additions are the pirate and safari themed rooms. These are fully decked out with appropriate props and furnishings, from treasure chests and wooden barrels to a bed made to look like a jumbo jeep. The special room packages, including a themed afternoon tea set, in-room treasure hunt and themed art workshop, start from \$2,388. *Hong Kong Gold Coast Hotel, 1 Castle Peak Rd, Tuen Mun, 2452 8683; sino-hotels.com.*

Wanderlust with Cynthia Rosenfeld



Off-piste luxury

"Not normally open to the public," reads an e-invite from Aman Tokyo. I was curious about the luxury brand's latest urban incarnation and finally booked a flight when presented with this opportunity 'for Aman Tokyo guests only' to participate in a raw sake tasting, at Japan's Miyasaka Brewery, opened in 1662 and renowned for its still and sparkling sakes, made with *kyoukai nana-goh* organic natural yeast compounds. Something of a sake aficionado, I already knew what the invitation went on to explain, that sake made with *kyoukai* yeast is especially prized for its rich aroma, the result of hundreds of years of fermentation. My taste buds utterly distracted with anticipation, I realised this insider offer represented something of a travel trend. In response to the ever increasing demand among jetsetters eager to return home with the best bragging rights, the world's most luxurious hotels and tour operators are looking to create exclusive experiences for their most in-the-know guests who can no longer be satisfied simply by booking an activity off the hotel's list of suggestions.



One client's trip took them to the largest surf swell to hit Central America in a century

"For our VIP clients, the trip itineraries have no fixed location," explains Tropic Surf (*tropicsurf.net*) founder Ross Phillips when I ask the Australian surf guru about this emerging phenomenon. "We study internet surf forecasts. There's a private plane, so clients can jet off to wherever we find the most awesome surf among the Seven Seas." According to Phillips, a client's previous trip took them, last minute,

of course, to southern Costa Rica in time to ride the largest swell to hit Central America in over a century.

Of course, everyone's idea of the ultimate off-menu item is different. Most guests at Norden Camp (*nordentravel.com*), an eco-chic encampment in China's Gansu province, visit the 18th century Labrang Monastery. For those who display an appreciation and understanding of Buddhist traditions, the camp's Tibetan owners may arrange private visits to the monks' quarters for a glimpse into monastic life, or even for an audience with the current incarnation of the monastery's most revered lama. For those who worship royalty, Hong Kong's Lightfoot Travel (*lightfoottravel.com*) can get its London-bound clients invited to dinner parties hosted by Lord and Lady Mountbatten and, for material girls, Lightfoot sets up private fittings with Vivienne Westwood or Amanda Wakeley – a favourite of the Duchess of Cambridge. You just have to know to ask.

"We only send people whom we think will get it," explains Nick Yarnell, general manager of the newly opened Six Senses Douro Valley (*sixsenses.com*) along Portugal's Douro River. Yarnell's team can arrange customised excursions to the most jaw dropping of the region's more than 700 quinta, or wine estates, including lunch or dinner with the owners, private tours of the house, vineyards and cellars. "If the owner, like our neighbour Eduardo da Costa Seixas at the 17th century Quinta de Santa Júlia de Loureiro and our guest hit it off," Yarnell continues, tantalisingly, "this can lead to tastings of 100-year-old ports from their private collections." That's reason enough for me to start snooping around the internet for Mr Seixas' likes and dislikes, in anticipation of my next liquid led off-piste holiday.

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Room to breath Six Senses Douro Valley