

The Royal Treatment

On your next trip, immerse yourself in a royal fantasy by staying at a castle turned hotel.

By Theresa Gawlas Medoff

We Americans have a fascination with aristocracy and its trappings, one we indulge by following the latest gossip about real-life British royals, watching the upstairs/downstairs intrigue of *Downton Abbey*, or touring grand mansions and royal palaces on our travels. When being a spectator no longer satisfies your obsession, check in at one of these mansions, palaces or castles turned luxury hotel.

TAJ LAKE PALACE

Udaipur, India

Seen from afar, the Taj Lake Palace appears like a mirage: a shimmering white confection floating atop the blue-green waters of Lake Pichola in India's City of Lakes, about midway between Delhi and Mumbai. Built in 1746 as a summer palace for the prince Maharana Jagat Singh, the marble fantasy was slowly lapsing into decay until its restoration in the mid-20th century as a five-star hotel that has hosted the likes of England's Queen Elizabeth, the King of Nepal and Jacqueline Kennedy.

That same opulence surrounds today's guests at the Taj Lake Palace, ranked as the #3 hotel in the world in *Condé Nast Traveler's* 2019 Readers' Choice Awards. Gilt molding, mirrors and inlaid stones adorn the hotel's complex of corridors, pavilions and courtyards. The 65 guest rooms and 18 suites are resplendent with canopy beds, woven silk textiles, hand-painted walls, mosaics and stained glass. They also feature views of the courtyard garden, the lake and, in the distance, former island palace Jag Mandir, the City Palace in Udaipur, and the Aravalli Hills.



From the moment your boat arrives at the Taj Lake Palace's ornate jetty (bottom left), you'll feel like royalty, whether you're lounging poolside on a cushioned recliner (above) or relaxing in your opulent suite.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAJ LAKE PALACE, UDAIPUR



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GLENAPP CASTLE

The grounds of Glenapp Castle and its Azalea Pond (above) are breathtaking when spring brings its rush of color. (Right) The Earl of Inchcape Master Suite, with its views of Ailsa Craig, is among the most opulent guest accommodations in the castle.



GLENAPP CASTLE

Ballantrae, Ayrshire, Scotland

Once the estate of the Earl of Orkney, the 36 acres of garden and woodland at Glenapp Castle now serve as a country getaway for guests of this Relais and Châteaux property on Scotland's west coast. The 1870 castle itself, designed by celebrated Edinburgh architect David Bryce, is a masterpiece of Scottish Baronial style, combining elements of Gothic and Renaissance design into a fairy-tale edifice of towers, turrets and crenellations. Inside, the opulent surroundings feature high ceilings, oak-paneled walls, antiques and rich fabrics. The 17 individually designed guest rooms are likewise lavishly furnished, with some affording views of the Firth of Clyde and Irish Sea.

With the wide range of activities offered—from games of tennis, croquet and boules to archery, falconry and clay pigeon shooting—guests can remain happily ensconced on property. But, if you wish, the staff will gladly plan a personalized tour of area whisky distilleries or chauffeur you around the countryside in a classic car. Or, board the castle's fully staffed 42-foot boat for the signature Hebridean Sea Safari, a guided land-and-sea glamping expedition that takes in the rugged landscapes, sandy beaches, remote fishing villages and ancient archaeological treasures of Scotland's west coast and Hebridean islands.

WALD & SCHLOSSHOTEL FRIEDRICHSRUHE

Friedrichsrue, Germany

Now home to a five-star hotel with a two Michelin star restaurant and the top-ranked spa in Germany, this 12-acre property one hour north of Stuttgart has a pedigree that extends back to 1612, when Count Kraft VI of Hohenlohe created a large animal park here with a hunting lodge. The hotel's 66 guest rooms and suites are scattered in multiple buildings, each with its own motif. Rooms in the 1712 hunting lodge, the oldest remaining building, feature modern décor, for example, while those in the gate house—a former horse barn—present an understated Laura Ashley sensibility.

Chef Boris Rommel oversees the cuisine at the castle's four restaurants, which include the gourmet Le Cerf, where the classical French cuisine is influenced by the flavors of southwest Germany. All guests have access to the hotel's expansive wellness area and spa. Treatments cost extra, and many make use of the hotel's own SanVino line of products made with grapes from the region's vineyards. Hotel guests also receive reduced green fees at the park-like 27-hole golf course Heilbronn-Hohenlohe e.V.



The 1712 hunting lodge (above) is the oldest of several buildings at Wald & Schlosshotel Friedrichsrue with guest rooms and suites (inset). The award-winning spa has indoor and outdoor pools (left).

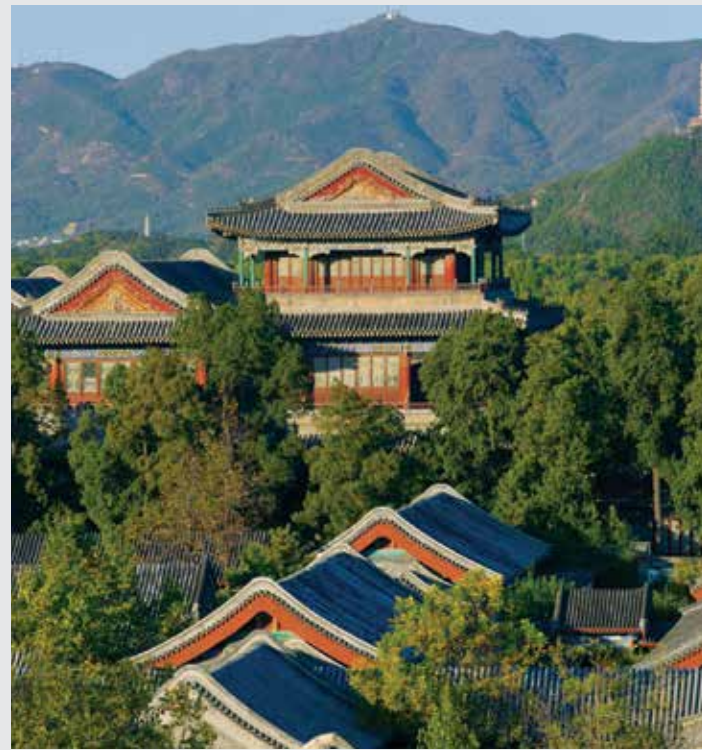
PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALD & SCHLOSSHOTEL FRIEDRICHSRUHE

AMAN SUMMER PALACE

Beijing, China

This ultra-luxe hotel in northwest Beijing is situated adjacent to the East Gate of the must-see royal Summer Palace, a historic complex of palaces, temples, bridges, hills, lakes and gardens recognized by UNESCO as “a masterpiece of Chinese landscape.” The Aman Summer Palace’s 51 guest rooms and suites occupy a series of pavilions more than a century old that were used by guests of the Summer Palace awaiting an audience with the Empress Dowager Cixi.

The hotel’s courtyard style pays homage to the design of the Summer Palace and reflects traditional Chinese architecture. Highly timbered interiors with Jin clay tile flooring and intricate wooden screens feature furnishings and motifs reminiscent of the Ming Dynasty. The hotel’s three main restaurants specialize in traditional Chinese, Japanese *kaiseki* and Western grill fare. Tea, either formal or relaxed, is served every afternoon. At the two-level underground spa, guests can choose from a range of spa treatments, including those that incorporate reflexology, gemstone massage and traditional Chinese medicine. The Aman’s Cultural Pavilion hosts local artisans who demonstrate traditional Chinese arts such as calligraphy, kite making and paper cutting.



Aman Summer Palace (opposite page) comprises a complex of pavilions more than a century old that now houses guest rooms, restaurants, a spa and more.

Guests at Aman Summer Palace can enjoy a variety of teas in settings both formal and relaxed (above). The luxury hotel is located in northwestern Beijing close to numerous natural and cultural attractions, such as the lake at right. The Imperial Suite (far right) boasts three pavilions surrounding a courtyard.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMAN

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CHANLER AT CLIFF WALK



The Chanler at Cliff Walk (above) enjoys an enviable location near a beach and at the start of Newport’s famed Cliff Walk. Guest rooms are each individually decorated by theme, such as the Renaissance Room shown at right.



THE CHANLER AT CLIFF WALK

Newport, Rhode Island

Unless you’re someone like Jay Leno or Alex and Ani CEO Carolyn Rafaelian—both of whom own homes in Newport—you probably don’t have a summer place in New England’s sailing capital. But you can affect the lives of the rich and famous by staying at the AAA Four Diamond Chanler at Cliff Walk, a 20-guest-room retreat whose accolades include “the most romantic hotel in America” (*Country Living*) and “the number one hotel in New England” (*Condé Nast Traveler*). Occupying the Gilded Age “cottage” of a 19th-century U.S. congressman and his pedigreed wife, The Chanler sits on 4.5 acres adjacent to Easton’s Beach and at the start of Newport’s famed Cliff Walk, a rugged 3.5-mile-long path along rocky Atlantic shoreline.

Elegant furnishings and luxurious linens in the guest rooms suit their individual themes. The second-floor Louis XVI room, for example, complements its spectacular ocean view (and large private deck) with a royal palate of blues and creams, crystal chandeliers and marble bath. The hotel’s popular Café serves breakfast, lunch and dinner indoors and out (in season), but reserve at least one evening for dining at Cara, the hotel’s eight-table restaurant with tasting menus that draw on classic French, Italian and Spanish influences.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHÂTEAU DE MIRAMBEAU



From its exterior appearance to its interior décor, Château de Mirambeau fulfills all your castle fantasies. A special feature of this castle is its Cognatheque (bottom photo), where locally made Cognac can be enjoyed.

CHÂTEAU DE MIRAMBEAU

Mirambeau, France

Situated atop a hill overlooking the tiny town of Mirambeau (population 1,500) this Renaissance-style palace welcomes guests to vacation in luxury. A castle has stood on this property since medieval times, and, though the building was extensively rebuilt in 1816, portions date to the 11th century, with turrets, ramparts and gargoyles aplenty. The château’s location midway between the vineyards of Bordeaux and Cognac makes it an ideal locale for sipping your way through southwestern France.

The 40 guest rooms and suites occupy either the main castle building or the orangery, renovated in 2017. With walls upholstered in embroidered silk, Louis XVI-style furnishings and sumptuous linens, every room is fit for royalty. Dine at the gourmet restaurant Les Deux Levriers, and consult the sommelier for the perfect pairings of local wines for every course. After dinner, settle into a leather chair beside the fireplace in the vaulted, stone-walled Cognatheque for a glass of Cognac.

The hotel also boasts indoor and outdoor pools as well as a spa where you can enjoy a Finnish sauna or Turkish bath or select from a menu of pampering treatments.