

Europe's Quirky Themed Hotels

Snazzy, Sleek & Offbeat

By Genevieve Northrup

Whether visiting a European capital, escaping to the wilderness, or balancing your bucket list with the kids', you'll find funky, fun and often affordable themed accommodations.

Kolarbyn Eco-Lodge, Kolsva, Sweden
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Rustic & Rural Refinement

Barns, mills, tree houses and wooden huts — some are now shabby chic, some contemporary and others give new meaning to the term “rustic.”

Hayema Heerd, Oldehove, The Netherlands: As if from the pages of the “Three Little Pigs,” hay bails have become houses at Hayema Heerd. Luckily, there haven't been any Big Bad Wolf sightings, and mosquito netting protects against other pests.

Hayema Heerd's straw castle is a converted barn insulated by straw piled high and filled with antiques, fur rugs and lovely bedspreads atop straw mattresses. If you'd prefer more privacy, request a straw tent on the outskirts of the property.

Silogie, Epe, The Netherlands: The owners of Silogie have transformed a 1950s grain mill into a bed, breakfast and wellness retreat. Modernly decorated chambers provide five-star bells and whistles, as well as glimpses of the original brick walls, beamed ceilings and grain elevators. The Tower Room, located in the silo, features a kitchenette and large living area. Next door is the elegant Veldhoeve restaurant inside an 18th century farmhouse.

To complete your peaceful holiday, redeem discounted tickets to the Thermen Bussloo and

VeluwseBron sauna and spa resorts. Or borrow Silogie's bicycles and traverse the Veluwe ridge.

Castle Cottage Bed & Breakfast, Fittleworth, England: At this quaint B&B, a tranquil cottage, barn and tree house are tucked amid the wooded landscape of the Coates Castle. The former barn is a spacious suite; the front door opens to a classy parlor, and a bed and bath are tucked upstairs.

The Castle Cottage is best known for a grown-up tree house that has a furnished bedroom and full bath. Wake to the birds chirping and sip tea while looking at the gardens from your sanctuary's balcony. After an English breakfast, discover the U.K.'s countryside by glider or hot air balloon.

Kolarbyn Eco-Lodge, Kolsva, Sweden: The amenity list at “Sweden's most primitive hotel,” does not include free WiFi, plush mattresses or a buffet breakfast. Instead, trek to Kolarbyn Ecolodge to connect with yourself, your loved ones and nature.

Facility support includes wood for your hut's fireplace, a store of food items, wilderness toilets, a dishwashing station at the stream, supplies for the outdoor cooking area, wooden cots and minimal bedding. Bring extra pillows and sleeping bags for increased comfort.



DéfiPlanet', Dienné, France
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Fanciful & Fairy-Tale

The creators of these resorts have designed family-friendly lodging inspired by fairy-tale characters, medieval castles and enchanted forests.

DéfiPlanet', Dienné, France: This nature park and resort in rural France provides entertainment, education and magic. From mid-February to December, participate in games and exercises to increase your knowledge of environmental protection and natural resource conservation. But that's only the beginning: swim the indoor pool, swing and belay on the high ropes course (open most of the year), learn to aim at archery, and ride horses.

The excitement continues in the whimsical, inexpensive, apartment-style lodging. Live like the Smurfs in a giant mushroom, snooze in a super-sized snail's shell, or view the kingdom from a tree castle. Other options include yurts, elf cottages and cabins.

Dëtenice Château Resort, Dëtenice, Czech Republic: The Dëtenice Château takes visitors to the Middle Ages, when travelers stopped at inns for hearty meals and ales before stumbling to their beds. In the rowdy tavern, observe obnoxious serving wenches, aggressive beggars, spirited minstrels, even brawls between sword-wielding patrons.

Shock quickly turns to amusement in the adjoining Medieval Hotel, where conveniences are hidden behind medieval facades. Don't panic; your room's wooden “outhouse” is a cleverly disguised 21st century bathroom.

La Balade Des Gnomes, Durbuy, Belgium: Until you see this place, you won't believe it exists. In small-town Belgium, you can choose from the Trojan horse, a seafarer's dream, a night on Mars or the Sahara. Whimsical and colorful designs, ample space and little luxuries enhance the experience.

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nhow Music and Lifestyle Hotel, Berlin, Germany ©Cem Guenes/nhow

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Hollywood Glam & Rock 'n Roll Grunge

Music, television and film are responsible for some of Europe's hip and out-of-the-ordinary accommodations.

The Pavilion Fashion Rock 'n Roll Hotel, London, England: At the Pavilion, you can sleep in quarters graced by VIPs, including Daft Punk, Duran Duran, Daniel Day Lewis and Naomi Campbell. The 30 flamboyantly outfitted boudoirs have motifs ranging from colors and countries to decades and celebrities. You may wind up in Morocco, an homage to Marilyn Monroe or a '70s disco.

Hard Day's Night Hotel, Liverpool, England: Celebrate The Beatles in the city where they met. Photographs of the band and artwork representing the members, albums and songs accentuate the sleek furniture and bold textiles of the Hard Day's Night Hotel.

Economy rooms are reasonable, but to live like a rock star comes at a price. The McCartney Suite has two TVs, bathrobes, dual sinks, a den and balcony, a king-sized bed, a loaded mini bar and a rain shower at a price of 750 British

pounds per night, including breakfast. Upgrade to the Lennon Suite for another 200 pounds.

Hotel Pelirocco, Brighton, England: Spice up your love life with a weekend at this peculiar destination in the heart of Brighton. Dubbed "England's most rock 'n roll hotel," the Hotel Pelirocco is risqué, saucy, sultry, for adults only.

The Kraken's Lair has an 8-foot round bed with a matching mirror overhead, and another (the name is too scandalous to publish) has call girl ads, dark walls and silky bedding. Other rooms pay tribute to pin-up girls, lingerie designers and vodka brands.

nhow Music and Lifestyle Hotel, Berlin, Germany: nhow's über-modern Berlin location showcases interior design and fashion, but the showstopper is music. It's probably the only hotel in the world with a concierge service that will deliver a guitar or keyboard for a jam session. When you're ready for your debut, record your tunes in one of the state-of-the-art onsite studios.

Repurposed for Rest

As if barns, hay and tree houses weren't weird enough, these abodes are made from renovated construction equipment.

Das Parkhotel, Bottrop-Ebel, Germany & Ottensheim, Austria: You won't see a reception desk at Das Parkhotels. Instead, make a reservation online and bring the provided pin code to unlock the pipe you'll call home.

Each concrete cylinder has storage space, a bed and linens, nightstand, lamp and small skylight. Meals, bathrooms and more are available at nearby supportive businesses. At checkout, you'll determine how much to pay for your stay.

Faralda NDSM Crane Hotel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: You'll have a new perspective of Amsterdam after sleeping in a shipbuilding crane. Each multi-level suite has a sitting area and half bath, plus a loft with a soaking tub and bed. The most lavish is the steel gray, gold and crimson Mystique Suite, 150 feet above the city's trendiest new neighborhood.

Think you're not afraid of heights? Then book a crane bungee jump, 300 feet above ground!



Faralda NDSM Crane Hotel, Amsterdam
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Europe's eccentric, eclectic hotels are usually booked months in advance. So hop online and plan your vacation to a top city, a fantasyland or the great outdoors. ■