



The Most Unusual Hotels In America

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Rest your head in one of these quirky spots, and you're likely to have an atypical stay.



Good luck trying to get Steve Dobson to stay in a Red Roof Inn.

"Chains actually *strive* to be average," says Dobson, the cofounder of the Web site, [Unusual and Unique Hotels of the World](#) and the author of *Unusual Hotels of the World*. "They are trying not to fail."

But that's not the case, Dobson says, in the world of the quirky hotels.

"An unusual hotel is all about sharing something slightly crazy," says Dobson, who has been visiting them for 20 years. "They are trying to succeed."

Take the [Dog Bark Park Inn](#), located in Cottonwood, Idaho.

Their motto: "Where sleeping in the dog house is a good thing." Here, guests stay inside a wooden dog the hotel claims is the world's biggest beagle, at 35 feet tall. The toilet inside is in the shape of a fire hydrant.

Not a dog person? At

[Turpentine Creek](#) in Eureka Springs, Ark., you actually sleep among the cats--lions, cougars, leopards and tigers, that is. The resort started as a rescue shelter for big cats that had become too large

or too unruly to live in private homes. It started with 38 cats received from a black market dealer who was on the run from the law.

"You're not encouraged to open the window and put your fingers out," says Dobson. "But it's thrilling to sleep among the big cats." A little bit of Africa found in Arkansas.

In fact, the US of A is full of weird and wacky lodging. Dobson says there are literally hundreds of quality hotels in the country that fit in the "unusual" category.

"It would be painful to cut the list to just 10," he says.

We asked him to do it anyway.

Ever wanted to sleep underwater?

At the [Jules Undersea Lodge](#) in Key Largo, Fla., guests must

scuba dive 21 feet to get to their rooms (they offer a class for those without scuba diving certification). In the underwater hotel--which is a former laboratory--the guest rooms are fully stocked, with a 42-inch TV and refrigerator. But perhaps the best entertainment comes in sipping a glass of wine and looking out of the window.

At [Winvian Cottages](#) in Morris, Conn., guests have a choice of 18 differently themed cottages. You can stay in a treehouse. Or maybe you'd prefer the golf cottage, where you can putt from your bedroom to your own private green. Dobson's favorite cottage is the "helicopter" room, where you bunk with an actual Sikorsky King Pelican.

The [Liberty Hotel](#) in the heart of Boston's Beacon Hill is the former infamous Charles Street Jail. Former inmates include Malcolm X and Sacco and Vanzetti. Though you may want to be an inmate for life at Liberty, one of the city's finest hotels, where "luxury meets the unusual," says Dobson. Among the amenities offered: in-room private bars, overnight shoeshine and, on some weekends, Saturday yoga.

Or perhaps you've always wanted to know what it's like to be a lighthouse keeper? You can do so in style at the [Saugerties Lighthouse](#) in Saugerties, N.Y., which looks over the [Hudson River](#). Guests must hike in a half-mile to the remote shoal. The views are said to be worth it.

One of the great things about the hotels on this list, Dobson says, is that most are relatively inexpensive.

"People have that perception, that if it's different, it must be pricey," he says. "That's not always the case." One exception on our list is Winvian, where double occupancy rates start at \$650 and reach \$2,000.

And 2010 may be a good year to try out one of these hotels.

According to

PriceWaterhouseCoopers, last year was one of the worst years on record for the U.S. lodging industry, with only a 55% occupancy rate. A slight recovery is expected this year, with the occupancy rate climbing toward 56%, still well below the 63% long-term average. Lodging should be in good supply, and pricing should be agreeable.

So what's the allure of staying at a weird hotel? Dobson says it all goes back to our need as humans to tell stories.

"So often people ask 'What have you been up to?' and we just have an empty response," he says. "Sleep in a giant dog, or in a former prison or among lions, and you'll have a tale."