



#### GREAT WALLS OF CHINA

Clockwise from above: the Salon Chinois of the Baron's Suite at Château du Grand-Lucé, named for the canvas-covered walls painted in the chinoiserie style by the 18th-century artist Jean-Baptiste Pillement; the château was built in the neoclassical style; the rooms of the suite are filled with French fabrics and furnishings; the Presidential Suite at La Réserve; a perfect view of Paris's renowned landmark from La Réserve's aptly named Eiffel Suite







ULTRAHOTELS

# SUITE DREAMS

When it comes to the best of hotel living, the word penthouse simply doesn't cut it any longer. These days, luxury is about individuality and exclusivity. We round up the most lavish places to stay across Europe

By Sasha SLATER

**One of my most embarrassing** moments in a lifetime of slightly awkward encounters came when I was spending the night at the very newly opened La Réserve hotel in Paris. These days, it's where Chanel puts special clients when they come to stay, but back when it first opened, the gold inlay was still fresh on the library walls, so they had rooms to spare in a way that is impossible, some five years later.

I turned up with husband and slightly scruffy children on plastic scooters in tow. The general manager ushered us with tremendous pride into a suite of rooms worthy of the Duc de Morny who'd owned the building in the 1850s. This excellent aristo developed the Longchamp racecourse and launched Deauville as the hot ticket for bucket-and-spade holidays for the French smart set. He knew how to live.

The GM showed us into this enfilade of at least six rooms, in which marble rococo tables were set with tea for the children incorporating great mountains of spun sugar and pyramids of rainbow-coloured macarons. Behind draped brocade curtains we glimpsed views towards the Grand Palais and beyond to the Eiffel Tower. There were huge Sleeping Beauty beds, their satin cushions plumped and ready. The last word in Toto Washlet lavatories flung open their lids if you approached.

I turned to the GM and asked, puzzled, 'if these are the children's rooms... where are ours?' My confusion was just wanting to understand where one spectacular set of rooms ended and the other began. But the visibly deflated hotel manager clearly thought I meant this accommodation was just about OK for kids, but I expected better for the grown-ups.

I didn't, of course. But so spoilt is today's high-end traveller that, as well as gigantic square footage, the smartest properties have to offer extremes of craftsmanship, technology, architecture, plunge pools, former royal butlers and fully stocked kitchens even to be considered a runner in the Top Suite stakes. If your swanky tropical island hotel room is not sunk 30 feet under the sea, James Bond-villain-style, to give you unsurpassed views of the undersides of reef sharks, you're really not in the game.

It helps if your property has a touch of history to give the room added lustre, which is what I found at a recent contender, the Château du Grand-Lucé in the Loire valley. The Baron's Suite in this newly opened but historic pleasure palace has the high-net-worth essentials of 2,120 sq ft of antique French château and several secret entrances so you can escape prying eyes. It also has 17ft-high ceilings and a private library. But this suite's claim to fame is its Salon Chinois, which boasts canvases painted in the 18th-century favourite chinoiserie style by Jean-Baptiste Pillement, whose great claim to fame was decorating the walls of Marie-Antoinette's Petit Trianon, the ultimate folly.

Exactly what a night in a mindboggling suite should be. *Presidential Suite, £10,700 per night, and Eiffel Suite, £4,000 per night, La Réserve Paris (lareserve-paris.com); Baron's Suite, from £6,500 per night in winter, and from £13,000 per night in summer, Château du Grand-Lucé (chateaugrandluce.com)*

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