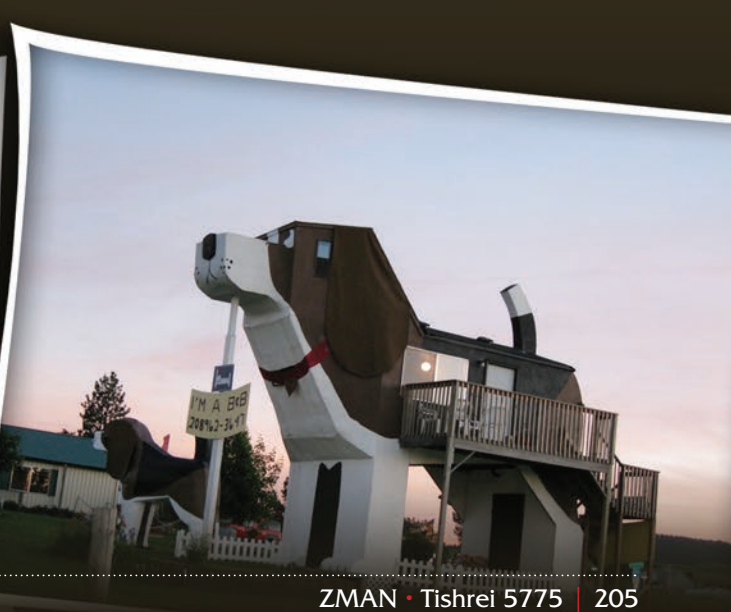


World's Most Bizarre Hotels

Aryeh Cohen

Bored of vacationing in the same hotels? Try adding a bit of spice to your hotel stay the next time you vacation by choosing from any of these one-of-a-kind experiences: a brutal, Stalinist-style prison; the late, lamented Saddam Hussein's palace; inside a cage surrounded by prowling polar bears; a bedroom on a crane; an undersea suite with a view of the sharks; a very popular lodging operation that boasts itself as the "world's worst hotel" and other places to round out your dream (or nightmare) vacation....



Vacation in a Cruel Prison

Are you in the mood of a vacation with your wife and kids, something different? Well, have you considered staying in a prison?

The prison in question is not just another jail. It is a facility where hundreds of victims met a brutal end and thousands more were subjected to unspeakable torture. All its "guests" today are treated like prisoners and served no more than a piece of hard bread and some tea. They must follow a strict regimen of tough exercise and sleep in an unheated cell behind steel bars on a thin mattress with no blanket. Seriously, this will be one vacation you won't soon forget.

There really is such a hotel, and it is known as the Karosta Prison Hotel in Liepaja, Latvia. For just \$16 per night the hotel staff (read: prison guards) will force you to endure everything, including death

threats, warning shots fired over your head and the pathetic cries of fellow inmates undergoing intense interrogations and torture, everything a prisoner in Stalin's time might experience.

A night at the Karosta Prison/Hotel is not suited for the faint of heart. Visitors must sign that they realize that they will be subjected to verbal abuse and forced exercises, and altogether be treated like prisoners of the KGB. The guest must agree to follow all orders given by the guards and to accept mistreatment. The contract also states: "If you do not follow a guard's orders you will be forced to perform physical exercises or cleaning chores."

The prison is located in the historical Karosta neighborhood, formerly a large military base in Liepaja, a city on the western coast of Latvia. Karosta, which translates as "naval port," was

built beginning in 1890 when Russia's Czar Alexander III decided to construct there the largest naval base in the Russian Empire. To this day Karosta is famous for its many grand and historic buildings that housed the Russian soldiers. These include the officers' quarters, a library and other service buildings. There are palaces for the admirals as well as one for the Czar himself, though it was only used once according to legend. There are many remains from the fortifications and magazines, and some underground bunkers as well.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Soviet military forces abandoned the city. Many of the buildings are still empty and in a dilapidated state. The only one that continues to serve in its original capacity is the Karosta prison. The dark, musty structure is still surrounded by the same fence and barbed wire. The same thick steel bars



Welcome to the Karosta Hotel. ...



The dilapidated building is still surrounded by the same wall topped with barbed wire that once prevented inmates from escaping.



Beds consist of thin mattresses on hard boards.



Interrogators traumatize guests beneath a portrait of Lenin.

