One of a kind

Quirky hotels make a stay special from the moment your clients check in, reports Katie McGonagle

Ask a Godfather fan if they want to sleep with the fishes, and you might not get the reaction you were hoping for – but tell them you’re talking about one of the world’s most spectacular underwater hotels and it will be an offer they can’t refuse.

Unusual properties are the perfect way to add a twist to any trip before clients even step outside their hotel, so Travel Weekly has rounded up a few exciting ideas to offer inspiration.

From tree-houses towering over the jungle to overwater villas with nothing but blue sea below; from converted castles or convents to rooms carved into caves or out of ice, there’s no excuse for being boring when it comes to choosing the right hotel.

**WATER WORLD**

Clients will definitely need a few bob to spend a night in the mind-blowing underwater suite at Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, but imagine the joy of waking up to tropical fish swimming overhead. It’s £7,766 a night, which includes private champagne dinner and breakfast in bed the next morning.

When it’s not hired out by high-end honeymooners, the undersea suite doubles as exclusive Ithaa restaurant, where diners can gaze at colourful sealife while enjoying a six-course meal of caviar, lobster and champagne.

It’s not the only underwater spot in the Maldives. Niyama Maldives boasts an underwater club that attracts international DJs, and fellow Per Aquum property Huvafen Fushi has underwater spa treatment rooms.

Life is just as exciting above the ocean in the Maldives’ signature overwater villas. The Shangri-La Villingili Resort & Spa counts 60 water villas among its 132 rooms, built on stilts above the resort’s lagoon and connected to the island by a wooden walkway. A five-night half-board stay in a water villa starts at £3,204 with Kuoni, including Emirates flights and group transfers in July.

While the Maldives is best known for overwater suites, other spots offer a similar sense of luxury. In French Polynesia, the Four Seasons Bora Bora is just one of the resorts offering overwater bungalows, while other destinations such as Malaysia are increasingly investing in this style of property.

**TENTS AND TREETOPS**

If you’ve ever been on a safari, you’ll know staying in a tent doesn’t necessarily mean...
Forget identikit hotel rooms – some buildings have a story to tell. The Gritti Palace in Venice has undergone a €35 million restoration to preserve its past as home to 16th-century doge Andrea Gritti. Signature suites take their names from former guests – Ernest Hemingway, Somerset Maugham and Peggy Guggenheim among them – plus the antiques and artworks lining the halls add to the sense of heritage. A deluxe room, including breakfast, leads in at £415.

In Spain and the Canary Islands, the historic Paradores properties are truly unique. One of the most notable is 14th-century Parador de Cardona, and with moats, turrets and four-poster beds, this is everything you would expect of a medieval castle (£109 per night).

In mainland Europe, many historic properties owe their foundations to the church. While it won’t be everyone’s cup of tea to stay in a converted convent or monastery, these buildings are often at the heart of the area’s history. Small Luxury Hotels of the World counts 8th-century monastery Kloster Hornbach in western Germany, and 12th-century priory Le Prieuré on the River Loire, among its portfolio, with prices from €149 per night with breakfast at the former, and €110 room-only at the latter.

Convento do Espinheiro was at the centre of life in Evora, Portugal, since the church and convent were built in 1458, and played host to Portuguese monarchs throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. Rooms start at €176.

Sometimes Mother Nature makes the best building materials, and never more than with the spectacular ice hotels dotted around the world’s chillier spots. Travel 2 highlights the Hotel de Glace near Quebec City, open from January to March 2014; a one-night stay plus two nights at the Manoir Victoria Hotel starts at £395, excluding flights. Closer to home, take your pick from Romania’s ice hotel at the foot of the Transylvanian Alps (Explore has a five-day trip with one night there, from £757 with flights), Sweden and Iceland.

Getting back to nature is also the focus at 1,000-year-old monastic retreat Gamirasu Cave Hotel, a 30-room property in the famous troglodyte caves of Cappadocia, Turkey. Anatolian Sky Holidays pairs four nights in the cave hotel with three in Istanbul, from £1,145 in October, including all flights, B&B accommodation, transfers and excursions. TW