

top ten glass hotels

The attractions are clear

Staying in a hotel where the doors, floors, restaurants, bridges and bathrooms are made of glass means making the most of the surroundings, whether that's the sea, snow-capped mountains, a Formula 1 race circuit or a shark. **Kitty Melrose** chooses some incredible glass architecture

1 Conrad Maldives Resort and Spa, Maldives

This is cheating slightly because Ithaa is a restaurant, albeit the world's first all-glass undersea one, at the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island. However, to celebrate its fifth anniversary, the resort is offering guests the chance to sleep under the sea surface by turning the translucent venue into an exclusive suite for two.

Located in a coral reef five metres below the waves of the Indian Ocean, it's encased in clear glass arches, similar to techniques used in aquariums. From a deck above the ocean, descend via a spiral staircase to marvel at the marine life from your bed - rays, sharks and colourful fish floating by your panoramic window. A fantasy experience, if you're prepared to splash out.

A one-night stay for two costs from \$11,710 (Dh43,094), including private champagne dinner and breakfast (www.conradmaldives.com; 00 960 6680629). Offer open until December 2010.

2 DO & CO Hotel, Vienna

This hotel is in the glass-walled Haas Haus building, a post-modernist landmark originally designed by Pritzker prize winner Hans Hollein. He was also behind the building's upgrade, which included transforming the top four floors into 45 unique cone-shaped hotel rooms. It's a perfectly placed location, right in the city centre facing St Stephen's Cathedral. All the elegant rooms offer a unique view of the cathedral, but it is most dramatic in the two enormous suites. Here, the 12th-century church looks as if it's about to burst through your wraparound floor-to-ceiling windows - literally. The Onyx lounge and bar, roof garden and culinary "temple", a private rooftop glass dining pavilion, also offer 360-degree platforms to scan Vienna's rooftops. DO & CO are a successful restaurant and catering company, so of course the hotel has an impressive restaurant on the seventh floor with a menu of "everything from schnitzel to sushi".

The Istanbul-born owner Attila Dogudan didn't skimp on the interiors either: the rooms have a "wine bar", glass-paneled bathrooms, dark wood floors, kilim bedcovers and Bang & Olufsen technology. Doubles cost from \$286 (Dh1,053), including taxes (www.doco.com; 00 43 1 24 188, bookings through www.designhotels.com; 00 49 30 884 940).

3 The Yas Hotel, Abu Dhabi

Reviewed by this newspaper not long after it opened in November, The Yas Hotel on Yas Island has become an instantly iconic building, not least for its exterior. Designed by glass-loving New York firm Asymptote Architecture, the hotel's two buildings flank Abu Dhabi's Formula 1 race track and are linked by a steel-and-glass bridge that crosses the Grand Prix circuit.

The two buildings are draped in a veil-like way by 5,096 exterior glass panels that change colour at night. Certainly the optical effect, seen for miles around, is stunning. Underneath this "gridsheer" are rooftop pools and the Skylite bar, eight restaurants and 499 rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and balconies from which to watch the race cars zoom around the track and yachts in the marina alongside. Doubles cost from \$212 (Dh779) per night, including dinner and taxes (www.theyashotel.com; 02 656 0000).

4 Shakti 360 Leti, India

Resolve is certainly needed to get here: a nine-hour train ride from Delhi, followed by an eight-hour car journey up Uttarakhal's mountains and 90 minutes on foot along a steep goat track. But then, there you are on "the world's rooftop" and it's instantly worth it.

Perched on a 2,740-metre-high Himalayan plateau close to Nepal, four eco-chic stone and teakwood cottages overlook misty valleys and snow-capped mountains. Two or three sides are glass, allowing you uninterrupted views over it all, starting with a stunning morning pink glow, that can also be enjoyed from the private terrace with a fire pit. But it's the view of Nanda Devi mountain that everyone falls for.

The whole "camp" is solar powered, and in the evenings wood stoves and candles are lit. The lodge, also glass-fronted, serves delicious food from the Tibetan chef. It's another world offering tranquility and treks.

A minimum three-night stay costs from \$1,825 (Dh6,702) per person based on two sharing, including transfers and taxes (www.shaktihimalaya.com; 00 91 124 456 3899). Open from October 1 to May 15.

5 Hotel Remota, Chile

This striking eco lodge in the Patagonian fishing village of Puerto Natales is about as extraordinary as the wilds it sits in near Torres del Paine National Park. Designed by eco-architect German del Sol, who took his inspiration from Patagonian sheep sheds, what you see on approach is a long, low-lying building snaking across the rugged and sloping landscape. It's 60 per cent glass, with wild grass roofs and a series of askew windows, as if bent by the area's ever-blowing wind, letting in so much sky that the spare interior is flooded with light.

The 72 guest rooms are done out in slate, wood and glass panels, and the barn-sized lobby has perfect views of Ultima Esperanza Bay, the Balmaceda glacier and the Paine mountain range. Take one of the 30 excursions on offer before enjoying the impressive spa with saunas, outdoor Jacuzzi and an infinity pool, where huge floor-to-ceiling windows provide a peaceful place to contemplate the mountains and fjords you've just explored.

Doubles cost from \$1,549 (Dh5,684) per person, all-inclusive, including five daily excursions, for a minimum three-night stay (www.remota.cl; 00 56 2 387 1500). Foreign travellers are exempt from the 19 per cent tax.

6 The Opposite House, China

This sparkling glass-cube hotel opened in 2008 but continues to win design awards. Most recently it was described as an "architectural icon" lighting up Beijing's thriving Sanlitun Village development. Designed by renowned Japanese architect Kengo Kuma to resemble the traditional wooden latticework of Chinese craft, it is made up of emerald, yellow and blue sheets of panelled glass that turn orange in the evening light.

Inside, a vast lobby filled with contemporary Chinese art leads to indulgent open spaces taking full advantage of all the glass. The hotel's 99 light and modernist suites and studios feature king-size beds, ryokan-style bathrooms with oak soaking tubs, glass partitions and mirrors. Just as dramatic is the 22-metre stainless steel swimming pool illuminated by tiny lights. And because it's part of The Village, a retail and entertainment complex, there is plenty to keep you busy. Doubles cost from \$655 (Dh2,405)

7 Juvet Landscape Hotel, Norway

This highly unusual sleek hotel in Burtigard, north-west Norway, calls itself "Europe's first landscape hotel" and the intention is to provide stylish accommodation that shows off nature without disturbing it.

So, set deep in the woods on a sheer river bank are seven pine and glass-encased suites which, from a distance, almost appear to be floating on thin metal stilts. Each suite has one or two walls of glass; some look out onto snow-capped mountains, others face the forest, valley or ravine.

The idea, says head architect Jan Olav Jensen, is you get your own surprising view of a dramatic piece of landscape. Inside it's understated, with nothing but a bed, table and a couple of lounge chairs, so as not to distract you from the location. If you can't wait to get out and enjoy it, there is rafting, hiking, fishing, skiing and abseiling.

Rooms from \$482 (Dh1,769) per person, including meals and taxes, Norwegian Big Five excursion package and access to mini-spa (www.juvet.com; 00 47 950 32 010)

8 The Oitavos, Portugal

This glass-structured resort in Portugal is due to open on September 1. With 142 rooms, The Oitavos is set within the Sintra Cascais National Park, just 20 minutes from Lisbon. Owners Quinta da Marinha Group, who operate luxury five-star properties in Portugal, sought to create a place to "embrace rather than compete with the natural surroundings". The result is a minimalist approach with clean lines and lots of glass to focus your attention outside, the best view being over the West Atlantic coastline. The zen-like design incorporates four restaurants, an organic spa, indoor and outdoor seawater swimming pools and conference facilities. The resort also offers access to a health and racket club, an equestrian centre and one of the world's finest golf courses, The Oitavos Dunes.

Doubles cost from \$493 (Dh1,811) including taxes (www.theoitavos.com; 00 351 21 486 0020). The hotel is taking bookings now.

9 Hotel Habita, Mexico

Converted out of a five-storey derelict 1950s apartment building in the Mexico City's fashionable Polanco district, this boutique hotel, opened in 2000, was summed up as "a cool ice cube standing on a hot street corner".

Eager to give it a new look, the visionary design team wrapped it in frosted glass panels suspended a few metres away from the old structure. The space acts as an "air buffer" between the 36 stylish rooms and the hustle and heat of the street below; sandwiched between are walkways and balconies. Two decks floating above its roof, similarly wrapped, provide a swimming pool, gym, bar and terrace. The rooms themselves are filled with light diffused through two planes of glass - the outer one translucent, the inner one transparent. This means that at night, when guests switch on their lights, the entire building glows like a luminous glass box.

Doubles cost from US\$310 (Dh1,139), including taxes (www.hotelhabita.com; 00 52 55 5282 3100)

10 The Standard, New York

To look at, the towering Standard looks like two

