

Penthouses THAT STAND APART

How Hotels are Elevating Their Top Accommodations



KIMPTON GRAND ROATÁN RESORT & SPA BEACHFRONT PENTHOUSE



BY JILLIAN DARA

Historically, penthouses occupied the top floor of a towering apartment building. The classification dates back to the 1920s in New York City, where one of the first penthouses was designed for American businesswoman Marjorie Merriweather Post. At the time, Post was monikered as the richest woman in America, so it was only natural she designed an abode to match—the resulting 54-room palatial penthouse spanned the top three stories of a 14-floor edifice. Following the success of Post’s penthouse, a new sector of the luxury real estate market emerged, expanding from residential apartments to hotel room categories.

At hotels, penthouses quickly became the top-tier room category and for nearly a century were reserved for the top floors of any chamber. Some properties even created private elevators and entrances for personal access to these exclusive rooms. Recently, however, a handful of luxury hotels have expanded the penthouse room category to include standalone residences for increased seclusion and exclusivity.

“Independent penthouses strike the perfect balance between a traditional resort experience and a private vacation rental, making them perfect for travelers seeking comfort and seclusion while not completely giving up opportunities to immerse yourself in a destination and the amenities of a larger resort,” shared Soraya Castillon, director of sales and marketing at W Punta de Mita, where their superior E-WOW



LEFAY RESORT & SPA

penthouse is a standalone beach house. “E-WOW guests particularly love the suite’s attention to detail, incorporating local design elements throughout it that create an authentic connection to the destination with its art, textiles and even the house’s building materials, down to using local rocks to pave its out-of-this-world bathrooms.” The two-bedroom, 3,626-square-foot tropical oasis features an open kitchen with white marble walls and countertops, an oceanfront living and dining room, a porch hot tub and a rooftop patio with an infinity-edge plunge pool.

“The desire for privacy, space and personalized experiences is becoming more pronounced, especially among high-end travelers, said Tirawan “Waew” Taechaubol, owner of Cape & Kantary, a luxury, Thai hotel group. At Cape Panwa Hotel in Phuket, Taechaubol explained that their three penthouse-level rooms include the Pool Villa, Panwa Lodge and Cape Absolute Suite which are all detached from the main accommodations. Though these freestanding villas were part of the hotel’s original concept from 1987, Taechaubol said they’ve witnessed a growing interest in this type of accommodation, as it aligns with trends toward more independent, luxurious, and immersive travel experiences.

“This travel style really grew during the pandemic when private space was, for a period, a necessity and the demand has grown steadily since,” said Craig Bradbery, chief operating officer of Baillie Lodges. Bradbery and his team responded to the modern demand by developing a series of freestanding, ultra-premium pavilions across their portfolio of global properties, including the two-bedroom Dune Pavilion at Longitude 131 in Yulara, Australia and the four-bedroom Alex van Heeren Cottage at Huka Lodge in Taupō, New Zealand. “We see guests valuing time spent together with the ones who matter most, and the flexibility to really relax as one would in their own private holiday home,” added Bradbery.



CAPE PANWA HOTEL



D MARIS BAY

In 2023, Lefay Resort & SPA Dolomiti debuted a Penthouse Residence in the form of a three-bedroom cottage in the midst of the Italian Dolomites. The 3,100-square-foot villa stands alone with three bedrooms, three and a half baths, a fully furnished kitchen and bar, electric fireplaces in the living room and master bedroom, a private terrace with a heated jacuzzi and hot tub as well as a bio-sauna.

In Roatán, Honduras Bay Islands, Yule Peixoto, resort manager of Kimpton Grand Roatán Resort & Spa says their addition of a two-bedroom beachfront penthouse apartment in 2024 was driven by the increasing demand for exclusivity and ultra-luxury experiences. “We wanted to create a private sanctuary for discerning guests—whether honeymooners, VIP travelers or families—who desire the intimacy of a luxury home, with direct beachfront access, spacious interiors and personalized services,” said Peixoto. “Many have described it as ‘the ultimate Roatán escape,’ perfect for a longer, immersive stay in paradise.”

Peixoto credits the shift as a reflection of a new era of luxury hospitality, “where travelers seek curated, personalized stays beyond traditional hotel accommodations.” This shift isn’t just encouraging new builds, but rather fueling renovations. Along Turkey’s Aegean coast, D Maris Bay added an independent townhouse to their inventory during their 2014 renovation. The 3,330-square-foot villa is tucked into its own private gardens with its own hammam, sauna and swimming pool and attended to by a dedicated butler.



D MARIS BAY

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WINDJAMMER LANDING

At the start of this year, Windjammer Landing Resort & Residences in St. Lucia debuted their new Presidential Manor as part of a resort-wide, three-year \$30 million renovation. “The space was reimagined to offer added privacy, upgraded amenities and enhanced design elements, ensuring it stands apart from the resort’s main accommodations,” said Nick Prattas, managing director of the resort. The four-bedroom, Mediterranean-inspired residence is located at the top of the hill with panoramic views of the Caribbean. The prime real estate was revamped to cultivate a private experience that evokes a “home away from home” feeling. “Guests love the spacious accommodations, which offer plenty of areas to gather and spend time together, while still providing the option to retreat to their own room for some quiet relaxation,” said Prattas.



OJAI VALLEY INN

The Ranch at Laguna Beach restored a former private residence into a new Treehouse accommodation, a freestanding 1,600-square-foot suite that COO Kurt Bjorkman said guests praise for its enhanced security and fully equipped chef’s kitchen that’s ideal for entertaining. “It is built on a hill with a gated private entrance, above the resort and has sweeping views of the canyon and resort area,” shared Bjorkman. Highlights include two bedrooms with floor-to-ceiling windows, a wrap-around deck with a gas fire pit and access to the adjacent Treehouse Gazebo which is ideal for hosting intimate social gatherings from a dinner party to personal yoga class.

Ojai Valley Inn also converted their onsite private residence, that previously belonged to the hotel’s owner, into their top-tier offering. The 10,147-square-foot villa, or Casa Elar, was built in 2005 but thoughtfully renovated in late 2022 to cater to group travel like family reunions, intimate weddings and celebrity escapes. “A large percentage of guests return to Casa Elar annually, becoming a tradition for them, which may be the best feedback I could possibly ask for,” said Cody Creighton, executive services manager on the success of the Tuscan-style accommodation thus far.

Hotels are even replacing common spaces to make room for more exclusive room categories. As part of its 2020 renovation, The Marker Key West Harbor Resort swapped out their detached ballroom and office area for its one- and two-bedroom residence suites that top out at 1,400 square feet.

As standalone penthouses are on the rise, don’t be surprised if you have to start booking this room category even further in advance than usual. As Creighton mentioned, these newer, more exclusive accommodations are encouraging repeat visitors, so they’ll be filling up for both short- and long-term visits. ✈

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