

How Luxury Hotels Are Trying to Out ‘White Lotus’ Each Other

If you don't have your own Bengal tiger or roller coaster, are you even in the game?



Vidanta

In November, a new Cirque du Soleil water-themed show, *Ludo*, will debut exclusively at [VidantaWorld](#) in Nuevo Vallarta, making it the only place in the world where people can see this performance. Guests of Vidanta resorts will also have access to the Bon Luxury Theme Park: 150 landscaped acres with an airborne private gondola and Latin America's only double-launch roller coaster.

Around the world, at the [Banyan Tree](#) in Kyoto, is a rare-for-resorts Noh stage for the traditional Japanese performance art. Meanwhile, [Las Ventanas al Paraíso](#), a Rosewood resort in Cabo, has an exclusive contract with an on-site magician who integrates music, dance, storytelling, and grand illusion into something that's more reminiscent of a Broadway performance than a kid's birthday party.

Welcome to the hotel arms race for entertainment and amenities. The calculus for investing in all these bells and whistles is twofold: one, to keep the audience captive so they spend their dollars on property. And two, luxury travelers who are, in some cases, spending five-figures per night on a room (one bedrooms in the luxury Estates area of the Vidanta properties in Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Maya start at \$11,340 per night) are used to the best in class in *everything* and crave novelty.

A nice house car and a larger spa won't cut it, says Cristina Buaass, founder of [travel](#) advisory CSB Travel. What resonated with her clients in the last year have been special experiences like a private tea ceremony, the [Shakusui-tei](#), in the Four Seasons Hotel Kyoto's on-property tea house, or an overnight stay at the Baobab Treehouse in Botswana's Okavango Delta.

Cultivating the flora and fauna on site—or completely replacing them—is part of the one upmanship. On [Necker Island](#), an exclusive-use private island owned by Sir Richard Branson, they've made a significant investment in biodiversity with a dedicated wildlife conservation manager and team to protect endangered animals. Now the island has the greatest biodiversity in the BVIs, including seven types of Madagascan lemurs, giant tortoises, flamingos, and miniature horses that guests can interact with.

In Western Pennsylvania, luxury resort [Nemacolin](#) went so far as to re-home three Bengal tigers (they also have African lions in the 2,200-acre wildlife park). Visitors can observe feedings during the resort's [Big Cat Encounters](#), a pinch-me moment in the Laurel Highlands.



Lemurs on Necker Island, a Sir Richard Branson production.

On the highly competitive wellness front, a sauna or infused steam room isn't going to turn heads, at least not in the *White Lotus* era. Next-level wellness is about connecting with your higher purpose and instilling ancient wisdom. Will the experience change you from the inside?

At the Lodge at Blue Sky, an Auberge Resorts Collection hotel outside of Park City, Utah, its Edge Spa focuses on vibrational healing led by their resident energy healers who offer treatments such as chakra balancing, heart-opening tea ceremonies, numerology readings, and a massage that includes a shot of whisky from their own distillery. The Four Seasons Tamarindo on Mexico's Costalegre Coast has an onsite shaman who leads a temazcal experience, a traditional Mesoamerican sweat lodge ritual that combines heat, chanting, and breathing exercises for purification, healing, and spiritual connection.

As for the retail and fashion space, "next level" looks like \$1,800 bespoke Lucchese boots that can be custom ordered at the Hotel Drover in Fort Worth, Texas. (They are handmade and take eight months to complete.) Or the Lanvin private shopping experience at the Dominick Hotel in NYC's Soho—the luxury French brand brings its couture lines, which typically can only be seen at Fashion Week, to your hotel room for a personalized styling and shopping session.

On the recreation front, hotels are going way beyond just golf and tennis courts. Even those focusing on those bread-and-butter leisure sports are taking it up a notch with world-class coaching programs. At the Ritz-Carlton Tiburón in Naples, Florida, they teach the Mouratoglou Method, a tennis program best known for producing world-ranked tennis champions Serena Williams and Coco Gauff.

In Mexico, there's steep competition for the biggest and best polo field. Careyes, a popular vacation destination on the Pacific Coast, is home to the Costa Careyes Polo Club, which set the standard in 1989 with two regulation Bermuda grass fields and stables for 150 horses. The Rosewood Mandarinina, which opened in April, aims to be another world-class destination with the Mandarinina Polo and Equestrian Club that will also host international competitions.

Private ski mountains are another new frontier and not only for the billionaire set. Brush Creek Ranch in Wyoming has its own about 45 minutes from the resort. So does Twin Farms in Vermont, which has six private slopes and a snowmobile that brings you up after each run.

Then there is the seemingly impossible feat: manufacturing ideal surfing conditions. At Xala, the residential community on the Costalegre, they have engineered an artificial reef to support marine life and has also created what Ricardo Santa Cruz, founder of Xala and an avid surfer himself, calls "the perfect wave" (a barrel that breaks near the shore due to the reef).

Yet are any of these experiences enticing prospective travelers to actually book a hotel? In some cases, yes. “One hundred percent these one-upmanship ‘stunts’ are truly business drivers,” says Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of Embark Beyond.



In addition to a stunning spa (pictured) and golf courses, Nemaocolin also has a wildlife park where it has re-homed Bengal tigers and African lions.

Photo Credit Jordan Millington Liquorice, Courtesy of Nemaocolin

For example, when Ezon shows parents the kids’ club at [Airelles Château de La Messardière](#), outside of St. Tropez, where children are picked up by a miniature train and brought to a 5,000-square-foot chateau with two pools, a trampoline, and a mini farm, “ I hear ‘Sign me up!’” he says. The hotel “may not have been on their radar before, and some don’t even know where the hotel is located.”

At the [Evian Resort](#) in the Lake Geneva region, the young skier program is a big draw for parents. The staff of the kids’ club will accompany children ages four and up to the nearest ski resort, where they are then supervised by French Ski School instructors, reserved exclusively for the kids’ resort, leaving parents free to ski on their own or enjoy a day at the Evian spa.

Clubs aren’t just for kids. During a stay at the [Pendry Natirar](#) in New Jersey, guests have access to the private Natirar Club and the social club’s programming. This has upped the ante significantly on typical hotel entertainment, with events like “Mentalism and Martini Night,” a tarot card reading, and a wine pairing dinner.

But perhaps the ultimate next-level amenity, particularly in the age of overtourism, is something far less tangible: privacy and seclusion. Cali Mykonos is the only hotel in the Greek town of Kalafati, which gives the property the feeling of a private island, worlds away from the other Mykonos. Le Dune Piscinas sits on some of the tallest sand dunes in Europe on the emerald coast of Sardinia and has no neighbors for miles and miles. Las Alamandas, on a less developed stretch of the Pacific Coast of Mexico, has four unspoiled beaches and 80 miles of trails. Only hotel guests—45 max—and staff are allowed on property, meaning a guaranteed crowd-free vacation.

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