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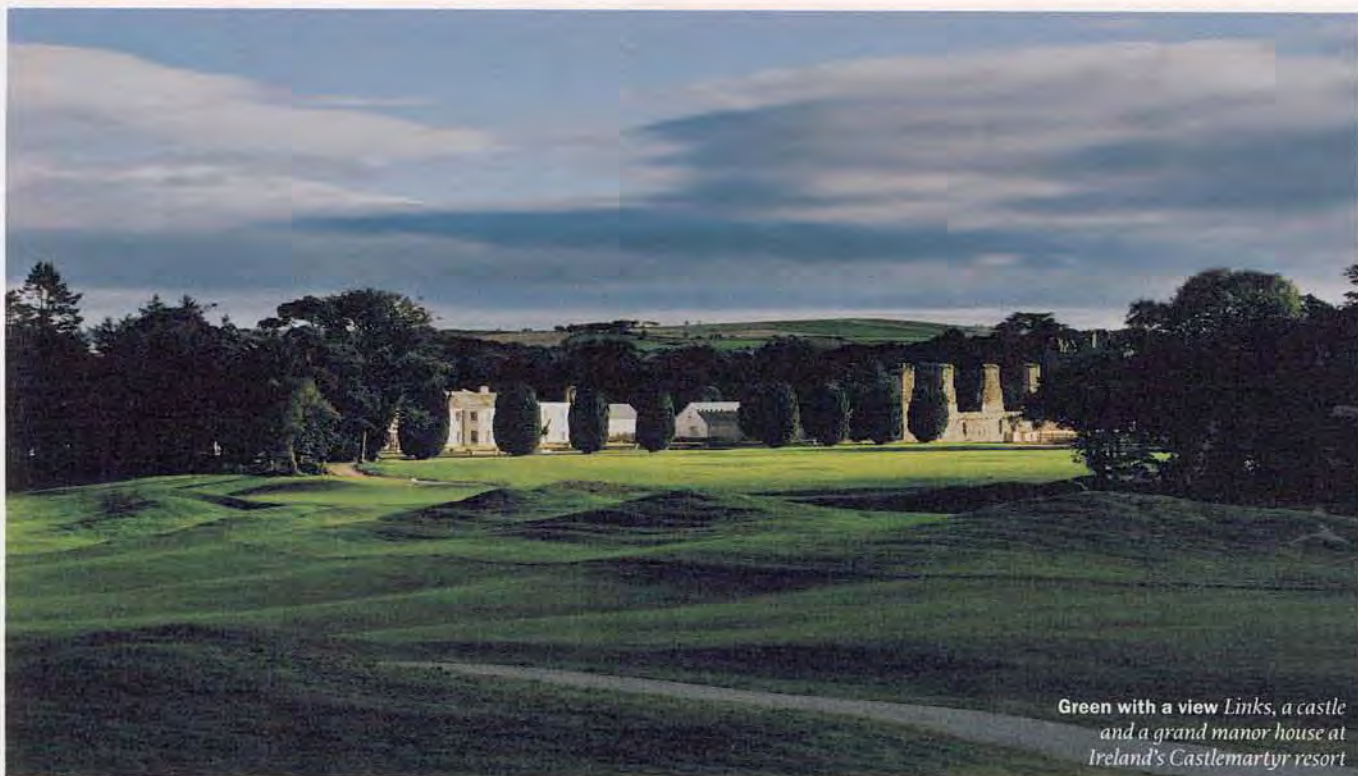


TIME

How Much Longer?



As General Petraeus delivers his progress report on Iraq, here's how to understand the debate



Green with a view Links, a castle and a grand manor house at Ireland's Castlemartyr resort

LIFE AT THE TOP

The Grander Hotel. Why settle for mere luxury? New ultra-high-end getaways are built to lure the über rich

BY ANITA HAMILTON

AS LUXURY HAS BECOME A COMMODITY FOR everything from handbags to haircuts, elite hotel chains like the Four Seasons and the Ritz-Carlton have begun to seem ho-hum to the growing ranks of super-rich travelers. Yet despite pent-up demand, less than 1% of the 19 million hotel rooms on earth are deemed "ultraluxury." That's an emerging category defined not only by price but also by the distinctive décor in every room, attentive, personalized service

and exclusivity—why would you want to hang out with people who aren't as rich as you are? These are the places at which you can call a hotel butler in the morning, say, "I need a helicopter at 3 o'clock," and actually get one.

Dubai's Burj Al Arab may have put down the first marker in the ultraluxe game. Perched on its own man-made island and featuring a helipad and underwater restaurant, this opulent glass palace, which opened in 1999, has 1,800-sq.-ft. (170 sq m) rooms that start at \$1,000 a

night. Now it's time for one-upmanship, as hoteliers and entrepreneurs race to build ever more exotic getaways that transcend mere luxury stock. Investors have green-lighted more than 30 other super-high-end projects in the past three years, according to lodging consultant Bjorn Hanson of PriceWaterhouse Coopers. The challenge? "It's about creating a luxury that is truly designed around the individual's needs," says Horst Schulze, former president of the Ritz-Carlton. "To accomplish that is an art." Schulze launched the more exclusive Capella hotel line in Austria and Ireland this summer and is planning outposts in Jakarta, Düsseldorf and Cabo San Lucas.

Demand has never been greater, given the growing supply of Russian oligarchs, hedge-fund honchos, Chinese capitalists and overpaid CEOs. "The amount of money in private hands is unprecedented," says



Raising the bar Capella Hotels is one of several companies trying to redefine luxury by combining exclusivity with ultramodern amenities



Scaled down. The Turks and Caicos' Amanyara resort has just 40 guest cottages, so you won't be crowded at the bar, left, or in the 164-ft. (50 m) infinity pool

Andrew Harper, editor in chief of *Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report*, a Baedeker for the wealthy. In this new Gilded Age, he says, the business is in class, not mass. "There have always been people who could afford the presidential suite, but now it's a legitimate market."

Global tourism is thriving, and the luxury segment, the top 15% of the market by price, is driving it. With rates as high as \$25,000 a night, these are the most profitable rooms in a hotel, and they consist-

'You have to give your guests a warm, genteel, caring kind of feeling.'

—ADRIAN ZECHA,
FOUNDER OF AMANRESORTS

tently have the highest occupancy rates. Revenues from luxury rooms grew more than 10% from 2005 to 2006, outpacing overall room revenue, which gained 8%, according to Smith Travel Research.

For the globetrotters who define this niche, a chain hotel, no matter how ritzy, just won't do. "The resort sector was a little tired and cookie cutter," says America Online founder and former chairman Steve Case. His own frustration as a traveler led him in August to invest in Cacique, an

\$800 million, eco-friendly resort planned for Costa Rica's northwest coast. To stand out in the crowded luxury field, a boast about sheets with a thread count of 1,200 isn't enough. So Case and other hotel developers are trying to create a new model for luxury. Unlike the typical, walled-off resort, Cacique's hotel rooms and vacation homes will surround an authentic village where locals will both live and work. Tanzania's Singita Grumeti Sasakwa Hill Lodge reimagines African safaris by housing guests in a \$3,000-a-night colonial-style English manor after their long days on the Serengeti Plain spying lions and cheetahs.

Ultraluxe proprietors talk less about amenities and more about personalization, experience and authenticity. Service is everything. "We have to anticipate your needs," says Atef Mankarios, former CEO of the St. Regis and Rosewood Hotels, who is overseeing a development planned for Punta de Mita, Mexico. At the recently opened Fouquet's Barrière Paris, where rooms start at about \$800 per night, guests are encouraged to fill out a "favorites" form before they arrive. The hotel then welcomes them with fruit, chocolates, music or flowers to suit their tastes. "You have to give your guests a warm, genteel, caring kind of feeling," says Adrian Zecha, whose

18 minimalist Amanresorts—from Bhutan to Morocco to Jackson Hole, Wyo.—epitomize the new ideal of understated luxury. His Amanyara retreat in Turks and Caicos, which opened in 2006, features 40 teak-lined cabanas, and guests are welcomed not at a formal reception desk but by open-air pavilions set among ponds and reflecting pools.

Elegance without arrogance is the mantra at Capella Castlemartyr in County Cork, Ireland, which opened in early August on 220 lush, wooded acres (90 hectares). With 100 rooms, "our approach is that of a small country hotel," says general manager Peter Bowling. Except that this one has dozens of private assistants who can arrange shark fishing for the adventurous. But if you just want to take a walk, that's fine too. They'll lend you a pair of Wellington boots to keep your feet dry and send the hotel's two Irish setters, Earl and Countess, with you.

For all its homey touches, Castlemartyr, managed by Schulze's West Paces Hotel Group, is nevertheless a getaway that most mortals can only dream of. The Pratesi Italian linens on the beds and 50-in. (130 cm) HD TVs in each room are there to remind you that the \$4,400 you might spend each night still entitles you to some old-fashioned cossetting. —WITH REPORTING BY CHRIS THORNTON/CASTLEMARTYR