I’ll admit it. I’ve fallen head over heels in love with the W Hotel Suzhou, one of China’s newest, hippest and most high-tech retreats. If that sounds surprising coming from this lover of crystal chandeliers, marble columns and old-world charm, imagine how surprised I was. Suzhou, the hotel’s hometown, a 30-minute bullet-train ride from Shanghai, casts its spell immediately. One look at its ancient gardens, rivers and canals, and winding cobblestone streets, and I’m hooked.

Falling for the W Hotel Suzhou takes longer. We’re as different as night and day. I appreciate contemporary design hotels, but the 379-room W Hotel Suzhou is more than a hipster’s haven. It’s a paean to all that’s revolutionary and rebellious. Opened in September 2017, it’s part of the upscale W Hotels chain created by Marriott in 1994. Designed for the young and the restless, the brand has over 50 hotels in hip hotspots like Bali, Barcelona, Singapore and South Beach. As the W Hotels website proudly proclaims: “We have been disrupting the hospitality scene and boldly coloring outside the lines of luxury for more than 15 years.”

Not exactly my scene. But, as the Bard once said, the course of true love never did run smooth. In hotels, as in life, the ones we think we’ll never like often turn out to be the ones we love.
madly. Here’s the tale of my ultimately fulfilling, if initially rocky, romance with the W Hotel Suzhou.

After racing around Shanghai, visiting the riverside Bund, strolling the tree-lined French Concession and taking in contemporary works at the China Art Museum, I’m ready for a little R and R. What better place than Suzhou with elegant classical gardens to stroll and lazy rivers to cruise?

More Fun Asia, a local tour company with international connections, whisks me from Shanghai to Suzhou in a big white van. As the countryside rolls by, I chat with four fellow travelers: a publicist and a writer from New York, a book editor from London and a magazine editor from Vancouver.

We arrive at the W Hotel Suzhou after a 90-minute drive, only an hour longer than the bullet train takes. The hotel occupies a good chunk of the Suzhou Center, a huge glass mall in Suzhou Industrial Park, a joint venture between Singapore and China. The glass-fronted mall faces glittering Jinji Lake, its banks lined with corporate skyscrapers, trendy restaurants and a giant Ferris wheel.

Entering the hotel, we’re bombarded with the throbbing techno beat coming from the WOOBAR, which extends across the hotel’s ground-floor lobby, or, in W Hotels parlance, the “Living Room.” As sound reverberates through every cell of my body, I feel like I’m being invaded by poltergeists. I gaze heavenward. Oh…My…God….

Cheery English-speaking front-desk personnel, in tuxedo-like black and white outfits, make check-in painless and pleasant. Strolling toward the elevators, I attempt to outrun the relentless beat. Yet, even at a near-sprint, I can’t help but admire the stunning lobby. Designed by the Rockwell Group of New York’s Union Square West and Madrid, Spain, the hotel is a contemporary take on Suzhou’s classical gardens with their lakes, pavilions, walls, gates and decorative stones.
To me, the hotel looks more like a series of stage sets. The front desk area, behind shimmering glass and metal curtains, is like a set from a TV award show. The WOOBAR, opposite, with purplish-colored lighting and sensuously curved walls, could be an upscale lounge from the Emerald City in the *Wizard of Oz*.

Not surprisingly, David Rockwell, the hotel’s lead architect, comes from a theater family—his mother was a vaudeville dancer and choreographer. Along with hotels, restaurants, hospitals and airport terminals, Rockwell has designed sets for both Broadway and Academy Award shows. In fact, he’s worked on upwards of 20 Broadway shows, including “The Rocky Horror Picture Show,” “Kinky Boots” and “Legally Blonde.” In 2016, Rockwell won a Tony for designing the musical, “She Loves Me.”

Padding down hushed corridors, I begin to feel the peace normally associated with luxury hotels. But it’s short-lived. Opening my door, I’m once again bombarded with techno music, this time from the living-room TV. I switch it off, then sprint a few feet and extinguish the bedroom TV, too.

*Aaahhh*... Peace and quiet. At long last.

I’m booked into a suite, which is surprisingly affordable, incredibly spacious and positively stunning. The foyer dining area has a big round table in a stylish matte-black finish and bright-red padded chairs. Tucked into a corner is a desk with stationery and other accessories. On the half-wall between the foyer and the living room, a moon-shaped light, recalling circular moon gates in Suzhou’s gardens, emits a pleasing lime-green glow.

I love big open spaces, so the living room immediately gets high marks. With a bank of floor-to-ceiling windows, the room seems to float on Jinji Lake, a splendid illusion capturing all the beauty of the great outdoors. Couches, with vinyl-like taupe and blue upholstery and low backs, look stylish.
but uncomfortable. That’s an illusion, too. Not only is the material smooth to the touch, but the design is extremely comfortable.

On a long counter beneath the 49-inch smart TV, I find a high-tech coffeemaker and an electric tea kettle. The well-stocked W Mixbar offers premium spirits, red and white wines, champagne and craft beers. International soft drinks include Coca-Cola, Voss Water, Red Bull—and Pussy, a 100% natural British energy drink that’s probably here as much for its shock value as its taste.

In the bedroom, another moon-shaped green light illuminates my W Signature bed, plump and inviting with a queen-size pillow-top mattress, crisp linens and a fluffy duvet. Visible through another bank of big windows is Jinji Lake. Steps away, a large oval bathtub, with its own TV, provides more splendid lake views.

I step into the WC, one of two in my suite, with a nifty electronic toilet featuring bidet-like water jets and sprays. Just beyond is a large enclosed shower with a rainforest showerhead and separate wand. And beyond that is a cavernous dressing room with at least 10 feet of steel-and-glass shelving.

The W Hotel Suzhou also has 24-hour room service as well as three restaurants. For all-day dining, there’s The Kitchen Table. Toro Loco, billed as Suzhou’s first authentic Spanish restaurant, serves up tapas and grilled meats in a bi-level space adorned with lacy black screens and red hanging sculptures of the world-famous Joselito Ibérico hams.
Our group heads to Su Yan, the hotel’s stylish Chinese restaurant, decorated with macramé and other references to Suzhou’s famous silk trade. In a private dining room with big windows overlooking Jinji Lake, we sample small plates of exquisitely crafted Chinese dishes, featuring some of the planet’s freshest seafood and shellfish from nearby lakes and rivers.

The next morning, I awake with a huge grin on my face. Through big windows at my feet, Jinji Lake shimmers in the early-morning sunshine. I feel as if I’ve awoken on a beautiful beach.

Breakfast is in The Kitchen Table, a 220-seat dining room with bold graphics on the walls and colorful oversized Windsor chairs. Half the buffet is devoted to Chinese dishes—dumplings and spring rolls; steamed and sautéed vegetables; beef, chicken and pork dishes. Broth with noodles and congee, Chinese rice porridge, are also available.
English breakfast fare, including bacon, sausages, baked beans, pancakes and made-to-order omelets, dominates the other half. A juice bar serves smoothies and fresh-squeezed juices, and there’s plenty of fresh fruit.

I’m like a kid in a candy store. One day I have a multicourse Chinese breakfast; another day a full English breakfast with bangers and beans; another day I mix it up with both cuisines. I’m eating far more veggies at breakfast than I ever do in the States. And, hey, I’m lovin’ it!

Our tour group spends the day visiting Suzhou’s classical gardens. Between stops, we compare notes. Everyone raves about the hotel’s stunning design and spaciousness. But no one likes the WOOBAR’s techno music. I’m surprised. My companions, in their 20s and 30s, are a couple of decades younger than me. But it’s about lifestyle—not age. Active travelers, we appreciate peace and quiet when the long day is done.
FIT® gym COURTESY W Hotel Suzhou

After a good night’s sleep, we’ve acquired a sense of humor about the WOOBAR. Returning in late afternoon, a couple of tour members peel off to sample the lounge’s craft beers. The rest of us shrug our shoulders and head down the corridor, boogeying to the techno beat.

Other attractions await us at the W Hotel Suzhou. On the 36th floor is WET®, Suzhou’s highest pool. FIT® has TechnoGym treadmills, cycling machines and boxing machines plus on-demand yoga workouts by Tara Stiles of New York’s Strala Yoga. The AWAY® Spa features Givenchy amenities and a Detox Beauty Bar offering salads, detoxifying beverages and healthy mocktails.

My Canadian tour mate and I explore the Suzhou Center, reached from the hotel’s third floor. With designer boutiques, sportswear emporiums and scores of restaurants, it’s a typical upscale mall. Then we turn a corner and see skaters gliding across a regulation-size rink complete with bleachers for hockey games and ice shows. Around another corner is Mr. Mont Ski Park with indoor hills for practicing your turns. By the time we reach the Saga Pony Club, where a horse and rider gallop round and round a glassed-in ring, we’re practically hyperventilating with excitement. “Oh, my gosh,” gushes my young Canadian companion. “Have you ever seen anything like this?” Clearly, we’re not in Kansas anymore.

Was that the moment I fell for the W Hotel Suzhou? Or was it during the incredible Chinese dinner in Su Yan? Or perhaps after my luxurious bubble bath overlooking Jinji Lake? Given the hotel’s many offerings, plus the Suzhou Center’s recreational, dining and shopping choices, you could stay at the W Hotel Suzhou for a couple of weeks, maybe longer, and love every minute.
Only the WOOBAR keeps me from sealing the deal. But, as luck would have it, our tour leader arranges a tasting of the bar’s Spring Cocktail Collection and afternoon-tea menu. The five libations, all artistically presented, include naughty birds, with lychee-infused vodka, peach purée and Earl Grey tea syrup, and yuzu ink, a striking all-black cocktail with vodka imbued with Asian sour-citrus fruit, Guinness stout syrup, lime juice and egg white. Served with pastries and petits fours, including cute little pink bulldog cakes, the drinks are incredibly seductive.

Meanwhile, the WOOBAR’s techno beat pounds on and on. But I’m actually starting to like it. Maybe it’s the cocktails talking. Or maybe the music suits the bar better than the front-desk area. Who knows?

After five blissful days at the hotel, however, here’s one thing I’m absolutely sure of: There’s a whole lot to love about China’s new W Hotel Suzhou.

**IF YOU GO**

**W Hotel Suzhou.** Building 7, Suzhou Center, Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP), Suzhou, Jiangsu 215021, China. (86) (512) 6988 7777. [www.whotels.com](http://www.whotels.com)
Monique Burns is a longtime travel writer and editor, and a European Correspondent for Jax Fax Magazine, a travel magazine for U.S. travel agents. A former Travel & Leisure Senior Editor, she travels frequently to Europe, but can sometimes be found in far-flung locales like India and Asia. After more than 30 years in the travel business, she still appreciates the world’s many cultural differences and can honestly say that she’s never met a place she didn’t like.