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First in the lineup is a game changer: Harvest, the market-inspired, farm-to-table restaurant by Chef Roy Ellamar. From innovative starters like beet-top pesto to the grass-fed

Angus Filet Mignon from Painted Hills, Oregon, each bite is fresh and flavorful. Next, there's the first Italian offering from James Beard Award-winning chef Julian Serrano, LAGO. With small plates designed to share, guests can savor bold flavors while enjoying exceptional views of the fountains. Also from Julian Serrano, Picasso is an absolute must with fine regional cuisine from both France and Spain, and Picasso paintings adorning the walls.

And of course there's Le Cirque, known the world over for quintessential French cuisine; in an intimate but spectacular setting designed by Adam D. Tihany, even the most discerning food lover will

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—
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SOMMELIERS**

—
4,000+
SELECTIONS

—
250
**OPTIONS BY
THE GLASS**



fawn over exceptional dishes like Maryland Blue Crab and Russian Osetra Caviar. Not to be outdone, the eponymous restaurant of Michelin award-winning chef Michael Mena features inspired seafood dishes such as the mouthwatering Lobster Pot Pie. And finally, what good is award-winning cuisine without the perfect wine pairing? Bellagio puts wine front and center with 15 sommeliers on staff, over 4,000 selections property-wide, and 250 wines offered by the glass.

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A pool at the Soneva Jani, a resort in the Maldives, page 98.

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MARCH 2017

90 Peace in the Valley

WHERE Sacred Valley, Peru

WHAT High in the Peruvian Andes lies the fertile paradise that gave rise to the Incan empire. Even today, it remains a place of almost divine communion between the land and its people.

WRITER Stephanie Danler, author of the critically acclaimed novel *Sweetbitter*, was on a quest to eat guinea pig, a specialty in the Andes. "My boyfriend, Matt, has no fear when it comes to any outdoor activity, but he looked at the crispy, fire-roasted animal—served with its head on—and said, 'I don't think I can do this.' He made it through a couple bites," she says. "I found it tasty. You have to try it when in Cuzco."



PHOTOGRAPHER

Nick Ballon, who grew up in London, is currently working on a book called *The Bitter Sea*, a visual exploration of the landlocked country of Bolivia's painful longing for its coastline, which it lost to Chile in a war more than 130 years ago.

98 Turquoise Dream

WHERE The Maldives

WHAT Why go halfway around the world for a beach? Because, as four new resorts prove, nowhere else combines sea, sand, and splendor quite like these islands in the Indian Ocean.



WRITER

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Maria Shollenbarger had to travel twice to the Maldives from Singapore, where she "mostly" resides, to see all of the hotels in this story. "I realized that these islands are so much more than the conventional story," she says. "There's deep culture and deep concern for the environment, all across the country."

PHOTOGRAPHER "I can safely say that being alone on a \$36,000-per-night private island is something that may never happen again in my lifetime," says Sean Fennessy. Based in Melbourne, he's looking forward to a two-month trip across the U.S. later this year. His last assignment for T+L was to swim with whales in Tonga.

106 Bordeaux Nouveau

WHERE Bordeaux, France

WHAT The region produces some of the greatest vintages of all time, but it's never taken very kindly to visitors—until now. From the city of Bordeaux to the grand old châteaux beyond, France's premier wine-making region is showing a fresh face to the world.

WRITER Author of the *New York Times* best seller *The Only Street in Paris: Life on the Rue des Martyrs*, Elaine Sciolino is at work on her fifth book, *The Seine: A Journey into the Soul of France* (W.W. Norton & Co.).



PHOTOGRAPHER

"I love Bordeaux—the city and the wine region," says London-based Martin Morrell. "It has a laid-back, sophisticated, and convivial atmosphere."

ON THE COVER

The Beekman hotel atrium in New York City, page 22. Photograph by Floto + Warner.

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Hôtel Saint-Marc, in Paris, page 52.

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The Hotels Issue

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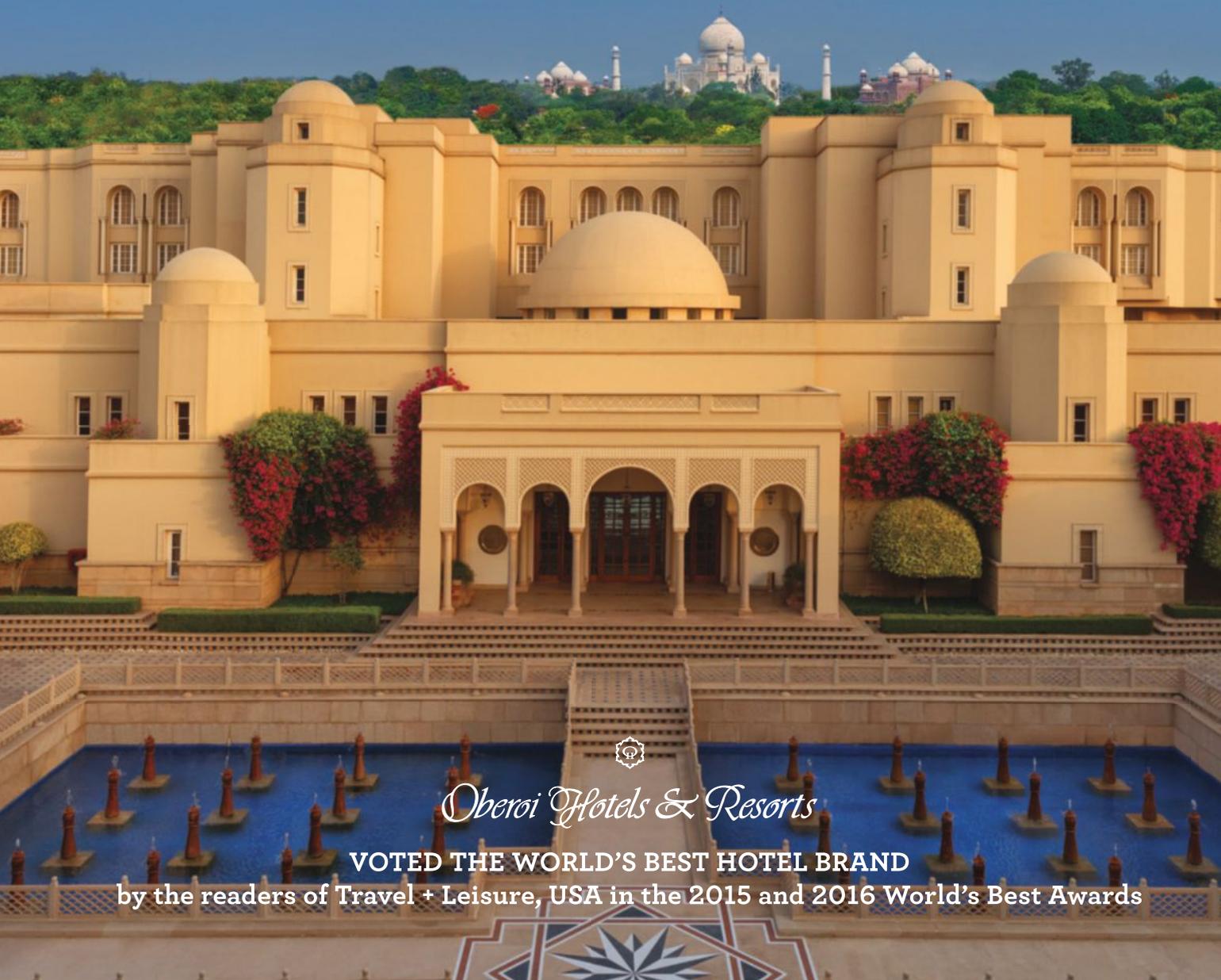
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Why do we love hotels? Personally, I have many reasons,

from the design ideas I get from them to the childlike joy I feel knowing that I don't have to make the bed. But the thing I most appreciate about hotels is the access they provide to great destinations—the way a hotel can open up places that you otherwise simply wouldn't be able to experience, or at least experience in any degree of comfort. (My camping days are long behind me, I'm afraid.)

I just got back from an incredible trip to Peru, and the hotels my husband and I stayed at were much more than places to rest our heads. On the Sacred Valley–Machu Picchu–Cuzco circuit, we checked in to a trio of terrific properties from Inkaterra—one of them, Hacienda Urubamba, is profiled in this issue (“Peace in the Valley,” page 90). They all offer guests a range of compelling excursions, from hiking trips and farm visits to bird-watching and orchid-hunting, and they provide expert guides to help you make the most of those experiences.

At Lake Titicaca, we stayed at a lovely small retreat called Titilaka, where the cornerstone of any stay is an all-day boat trip to visit the people who live on the lake's famous floating islands of reeds and to meet the traditional community of knitters and weavers on the island of Taquile. Throughout the trip I was struck by how much I liked the hotels as hotels, but what made me really love them was how central they were to my experience of the country. They connected me to people, places, and things and helped enrich my knowledge and understanding.



This issue is packed with hotels we love, and I think you'll find that the positive interplay between properties and the environments in which they place you is a critical part of why we believe they're worth it. Here's hoping you find a hotel (or a few) to lead you to your next adventure.

Nathan

  @nathanlump
nathan@travandleisure.com

P.S. Speaking of hotels, if you haven't yet rated places you've recently stayed in our annual World's Best Awards survey, now's the time. Go to theworldsbest.com by March 6 to share your opinions with us and your fellow travelers. You'll also be entered to win some great prizes.



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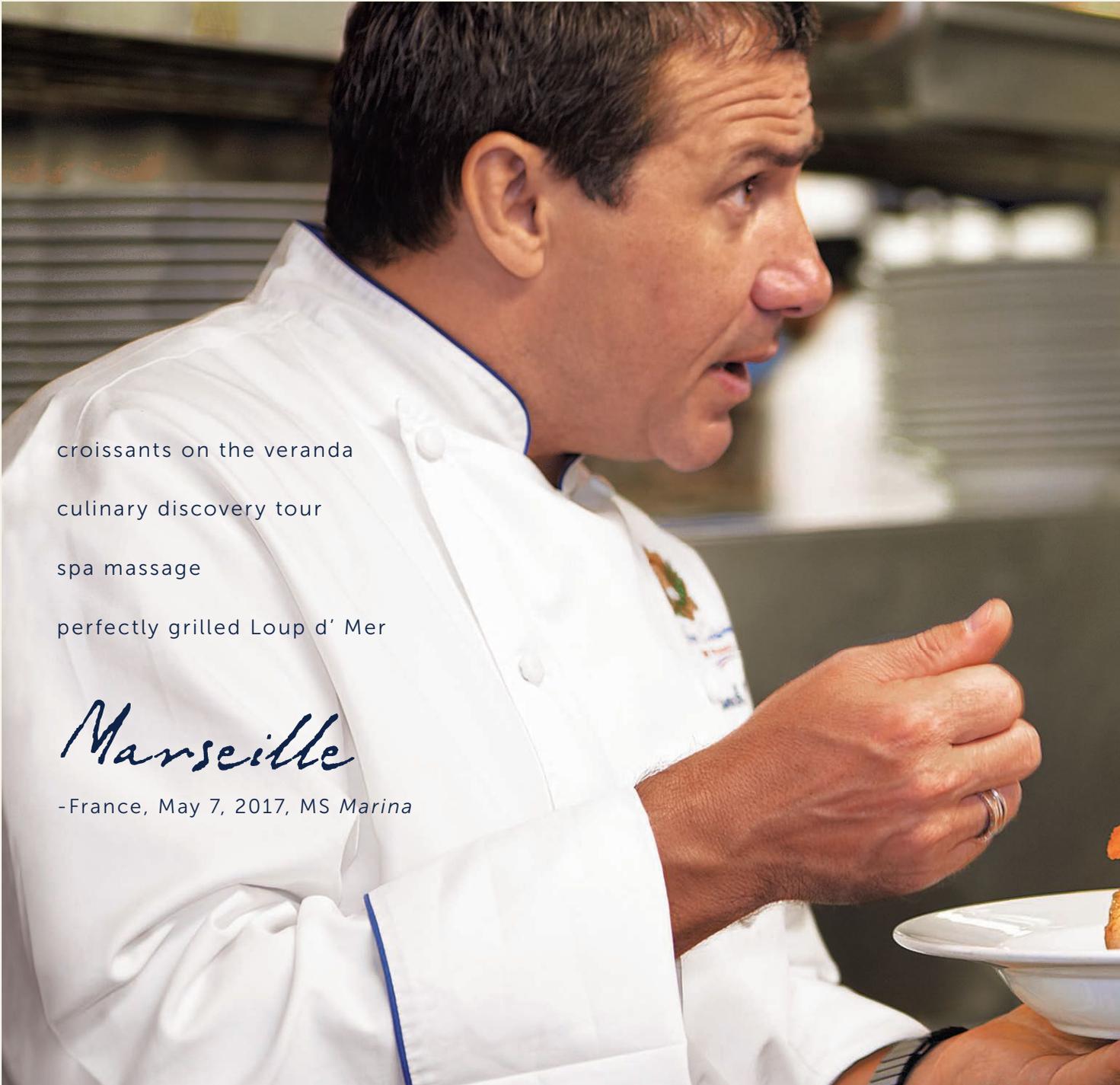
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The check-in desk
at New York City's
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• THE HOTELS ISSUE

9 REASONS TO LOVE HOTELS NOW

A great hotel can be the highlight of your trip, the key that unlocks a location, even a destination in itself. Which is why we celebrate the latest trailblazing properties: the ones that elevated design, redefined wellness, whetted our appetites, and reminded us that true hospitality is always in style. Plus, on page 34, we present the 2017 It List—the best openings of the past year.

no. 1

Because you can spend the night with some of your favorite chefs.

Over the past decade, every celebrity chef under the sun established a restaurant in a hotel (and then promptly left the cooking to someone else). Now some culinary stars are turning that idea on its head by opening their own properties—albeit on an intimate scale. James Beard Award winner Alex Roberts recently reopened **Restaurant Alma** (almampls.com; menu from \$58; doubles from \$166) along the riverfront in Minneapolis. The restaurant, which serves a three-course prix fixe—perhaps yellowtail crudo to start, then chicken and foie gras with leeks and black-truffle sauce—is complemented by seven contemporary bedrooms with



Smoked apricot with lilac cream, posset with mulberries, and hojicha tea at SingleThread, in Sonoma County.

gold-accented bathrooms. Last summer, British chef April Bloomfield unveiled **Coombeshead Farm** (coombesheadfarm.co.uk; menu from \$61; doubles from \$215), the inn she co-owns in Cornwall, England, with Tom Adams of London's Pitt Cue. The 18th-century farmhouse has five spare but comfortable rooms; in the open kitchen, guests can watch the team preparing that night's communal farm-to-table feast, like lamb sweetbreads with capers and sorrel salad cream. And at **SingleThread** (singlethreadfarms.com; menu from \$294; doubles from \$700), in Healdsburg, California, Kyle Connaughton creates 11-course, Japanese-influenced menus that highlight produce grown by his wife, Katina, on their nearby farm. Expect dishes like turbot with matsutake mushrooms, leeks, brassicas, and sansho peppers. On the second floor of the inn, there are five rooms with furnishings of by-of-the-moment design firm AvroKO. —JEFF CHU

no. 2

Because safari tents have never been this glamorous.

It's not even really a tent. At **ASILIA THE HIGHLANDS**, in Tanzania's Ngorongoro Conservation Area, you'll stay in a geodesic dome near the Olmoti volcano. Cooled by solar-powered fans and warmed by wood-burning stoves, the eight futuristic, canvas-and-plexiglass suites are inspired by Masai bomas. asiliaafrica.com; from \$430 per person, all-inclusive.



Coombeshead Farm, in Cornwall, England.



WHERE WORK HAPPENS



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The bar at the Beekman hotel, in downtown New York City.

no. 3

Because the right hotel will lead you to new places.

Years ago, it would have seemed odd for a visitor to New York City to book a hotel in the Financial District, which basically used to shut down on the weekends. Now the area is one of the most exciting places to be for travelers and New Yorkers alike. Sparked by the post-9/11 building boom, shops, markets, and restaurants continue to move in, catering to an increase in residents and businesses (including *Travel + Leisure*'s parent company, Time Inc.). The neighborhood has one of the biggest hotel debuts in town: the **Beekman, a Thompson Hotel** (thompsonhotels.com; doubles from \$619), is set in an 1881 landmark that took more than four years to bring back to its original architectural

splendor. Over a century ago, Edgar Allan Poe wrote several novels here, when the site was home to a library. The public spaces evoke a moody den, with dark walls and glass cases displaying curiosities. On a recent Friday, the lobby bar, which sits in a restored, nine-story Victorian-era atrium, was packed with visitors and locals.

The 287 guest rooms, which are arranged around this central atrium, feature a quirky mix of art and furniture (fringed lamps, oversize leather headboards); it feels like you're staying with a wealthy, eccentric relative. Downstairs, Tom Colicchio's Fowler & Wells serves refined American classics like diver scallops and pork with apples, while Keith McNally's French bistro, Augustine, turns out a killer *steak frites*.

The Beekman is within walking distance of some of the city's best new attractions, like the Santiago Calatrava–designed Oculus, a transit hub and shopping mall. There are more than 100 stores inside, and it connects to a branch of the Italian-food emporium **Eataly**, where Osteria della Pace serves the city's best spaghetti carbonara (eataly.com; entrées \$23–\$41). Nearby is **Blacktail** (blacktailnyc.com), a Cuban-themed bar inside the Pier A complex. And the **Four Seasons Downtown** recently opened with Yabu Pushelberg–designed rooms and Wolfgang Puck's Cut steak house (fourseasons.com/newyorkdowntown; entrées \$31–\$88). There are also eight more hotels in the works. Centering a vacation around the Financial District might have seemed ludicrous in the past, but it's now a real—and very attractive—possibility. —STEPHANIE WU

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AN INVITATION TO INDIA

Over the last 30 years, India has seen increased visibility on the world stage, and cemented its place as one of the globe's premier travel destinations. Over that same period, one of the subcontinent's finest hotel groups has grown, too. Founded with just one hotel outside Mumbai by Captain C.P. Krishnan Nair—who named the brand after his wife—The Leela group

now boasts nine hotels and resorts in prime locations all over India, from urban centers to balmy getaways, with several more in the works. A top choice for five-star travel to the subcontinent, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has been ranked fifth among the 15 World's Best Hotel Brands by *Travel + Leisure* readers in the 2016 World's Best Awards.

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Visiting India is a trip of a lifetime, and for guests of The Leela, trips are taken to the next level with experiences that honor the richness of one of the world's most diverse and dynamic destinations. This is especially evident at the Palaces of The Leela, which have redefined luxury at locations in New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Udaipur. With lavish interiors and jasmine-scented hidden gardens, authentic Ayurvedic spa treatments and refined cuisine, the Palaces help capture the essence of their settings,

while offering an array of modern, high-tech comforts. At their core is stellar service that is as much about anticipating a wish as fulfilling one.

SURPRISE AND DELIGHT

The Leela difference can be felt in every aspect of a stay—from the way each hotel celebrates its location and showcases natural materials and Indian craftsmanship, to the way every guest is treated with honor, respect, and regard, and showered with a host of thoughtful luxuries. With these elements at their heart, the nine Leela outposts continue to surprise and delight discerning guests with touches that reveal the multilayered richness of India.

To experience more of The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, visit theleela.com.



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no. 4

Because...beaches.



The pool at
Le Barthélemy.

Le Barthélemy

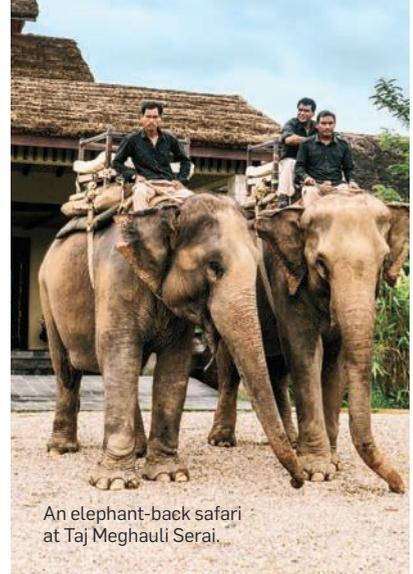
The first newly built hotel on St. Bart's in 20 years is fresh, modern, and decidedly unfussy. Pops of Caribbean pink and blue in the 46 rooms create a cheerful island vibe, but touches like rain showers and Hermès toiletries wouldn't feel out of place in Paris's 16th Arrondissement. Outside, you'll find an infinity pool and cushy loungers dotting the deck and sand. Sit with a bottle of rosé and watch kiteboarders skip over the surf, kids splash in the shallows, or some fabulous celeb swan by in her Eres. lebarthelemyhotel.com; doubles from \$636.

Park Hyatt Mallorca

Built into a hillside in Canyamel, this striking Spanish resort was modeled on a Mallorcan village. Its central plaza is flanked by a grand reception villa that opens onto reflecting pools, restaurants, and a scenic promenade. Stone pathways wind around hidden courtyards, then up to the beautifully appointed guest rooms on the hill. Some of the island's best coastline is minutes away. It's the perfect spot for sun, Rioja, and the languorous rhythms of Mediterranean life. park.hyatt.com; doubles from \$369.

Helena Bay

Set on more than 750 acres of forest-framed New Zealand beachfront, the latest lodge on the North Island's pristine northeastern coast sleeps just 10, ensuring the main house (including the heated outdoor pool, library, multiple dining spaces, and spa) never feels crowded. The spacious villa suites, all just a few steps from the shore, have colorful furnishings and decks overlooking the South Pacific. "Estate to plate" dining stars, along with an impressive cellar of local and international vintages. helenabay.com; doubles from \$2,100.



An elephant-back safari at Taj Meghauri Serai.

no. 5

Because you don't need to go to Africa to see some pretty amazing wildlife.

Ted Turner's Vermejo Park Ranch in New Mexico is one of several vast Western properties in the media mogul's recently launched Ted Turner Expeditions ecotourism company. Guests of the elegantly rustic seven-bedroom **Casa Grande** (tedturnerexpeditions.com; doubles from \$850) can roam nearly 600,000 acres of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in search of bison, elk, bears, and more of the park's 76 indigenous species of mammals. In Nepal, **Taj Meghauri Serai, a Taj Safaris Lodge** (tajhotels.com; doubles from \$300, including meals), on the western side of Chitwan National Park, serves as a launchpad for expeditions into Terai lowlands to spot Indian rhinoceroses and, if you're lucky, leopards and Bengal tigers. After a Jeep excursion, guests can withdraw to their riverside villas, complete with plunge pools. Above the Arctic Circle, in a Norwegian animal sanctuary known as Polar Park, the innovative retreat **Wolf Lodge** (polarpark.no; from \$8,770 per night, including breakfast and dinner for up to 12) lets you get up close and personal with socialized wolves who like to kiss and cuddle. Available for exclusive use, the Scandinavian pine lodge has floor-to-ceiling windows for prime-time views of both the animals and the northern lights.

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Josephine Estelle, the Italian-American restaurant in the Ace Hotel New Orleans.

no. 7

Because this is the sexiest new beach spot in years.

Every aspect of **MAR ADENTRO** is spectacularly designed. Instead of the hacienda-style architecture so common in this part of Mexico, you'll find sugar-cube-like buildings. The only pop of color in the all-white rooms comes from the views of the Sea of Cortés. And the biggest statement is **Nido**, a restaurant that looks like an upside-down bird's nest. *maradentro cabos.com; doubles from \$326.*



The lobby of the 21c Museum Hotel Oklahoma City.

no. 6

Because these hotels will make you want to explore America.

High-design hotels are putting unlikely destinations on sophisticated travelers' maps and cementing smaller cities as cultural hubs. At the **21c Museum Hotel Oklahoma City** (*21cmuseumhotels.com; doubles from \$219*), rotating exhibitions make the industrial-chic lobby and restaurant feel more like a gallery. The hotel currently features the surreal photos of Serkan Ozkaya (such as a human-horse hybrid wearing a raincoat and holding a cat). "Contemporary art has the power to transform a community," says 21c Museum Hotels cofounder Steve Wilson. "Cities known as 'second-tier markets' are often bursting with enthusiasm for the arts and culture that larger cities traditionally offer." This enthusiasm has spread to upstate New York's Catskills, a popular retreat for stylish urbanites. The interiors of **Scribner's Catskill Lodge** (*scribnerslodge.com; doubles from \$105*) are airy and minimally adorned—all the better for showing off the mountains.

Though it's not the first cool hotel in Marfa, Texas—that artists' enclave where even Beyoncé has vacationed—the **Hotel Saint George** (*marfasaintgeorge.com; doubles from \$185*) is the plushiest place in town, with a marble-meets-cement lobby and gallery-worthy local art. And in New Orleans, which was in need of a modern landmark hotel, the **Ace Hotel** (*acehotel.com; doubles from \$269*) has arrived in the Warehouse District with Art Deco lighting, chesterfield couches, and a gold-accented bar. Since the brand has helped change the image of cities from Portland to Pittsburgh, we're expecting that it will prove the theory that the right hotel is a harbinger of good things to come. —EIMEAR LYNCH

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF 21C MUSEUM HOTELS; FRAN PARENTE; DAVE LAURIDSEN



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The grounds at Aja Malibu.



The Hacienda at Chablé.

no. 8

Because there have never been so many ways to achieve nirvana.



The onsen at Amanemu.

Amanemu, Ise Shima National Park, Japan

If you want to collapse in total privacy, this 24-suite, four-villa resort is an exquisite ship in a bottle made for silent observation. The crowning glory of Aman's newest creation is its gently lit, mineral-rich onsen, with different pools at varying temperatures. Pavilions with plush daybeds, a Watsu pool for hydrotherapy, and four spa-treatment rooms round out the Zen experience, as does the property's traditional Japanese design, including narrow corridors, small courtyards, and views of maple trees and cherry blossoms. aman.com; doubles from \$770.

Chablé, Yucatán, Mexico

This 40-villa resort, which is spread over 750 acres of jungle near Mérida, celebrates Mayan culture in a way that feels authentic and not at all gimmicky. The 15-room spa is centered around a large cenote, and offers a wide range of experiences, from a "Tree of Life" ritual incorporating massage and sound healing to three *temazcales* (pre-Hispanic versions of a sweat lodge), where ceremonies are performed by local shamans. At night, guests can sample tequilas and farm-to-table cuisine overseen by chef Jorge Vallejo of Mexico City's standout Quintonil restaurant. chableresort.com; doubles from \$780.

Aja Malibu, California

Ready to indulge in a digital detox? A seven-day, all-inclusive stay at this New Age spa—which is set on property once owned by Teddy Roosevelt—is called the Magick Process. The ultimate goal: getting your seven chakras aligned, through a combination of ancient and modern healing practices. You won't be allowed a cell phone, and there's no formal gym, but there is plenty of hiking, acupuncture, infrared saunas, "wisdom workshops," and plant-based, bio-dynamic cuisine. Days begin at seven, follow a strict schedule, and end (meaning lights out) by 10 p.m. ajamalibu.com; from \$10,000 per week, per person, all-inclusive.

FROM TOP: JESSICA SAMPLE; COURTESY OF AMAN; KARYN MILLET

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no. 9

Because the grandes dames are getting face-lifts (and they look great).

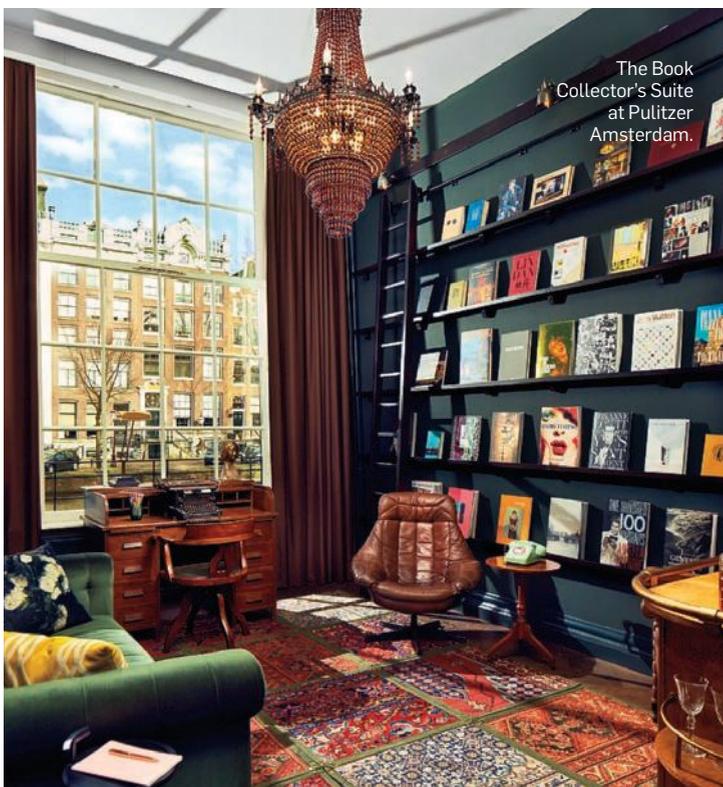
This past year was one of reinvention for many beloved classic hotels showing their age. Cramped rooms, spotty Internet, and a stuffy vibe all had to go in the name of attracting new customers, satisfying the old ones, and keeping up with the competition. The **Ritz Paris** (ritzparis.com; doubles from \$1,107) succeeded after its four-year closure and \$440 million revamp. The Hemingway Bar still stands, but the new Ritz Bar offers bistro fare and inventive cocktails by 26-year-old Aurélie Pezet, the hotel's first female bartender. And the enlarged rooms are now equipped with high-speed Wi-Fi, quiet heating and air-conditioning, and televisions embedded in the mirrors. The **Peninsula Beijing** (peninsula.com; doubles from \$317)



The Windsor Suite at the renovated Ritz Paris.

reduced its room count to create the most spacious accommodations in the capital (from 525 to just 230). Traditional elements—like hand-embroidered floral wallpaper and blue-and-white paintings inspired by Ming dynasty porcelain—complement the up-to-the-minute technology: check-in and checkout, concierge services, and room controls are all done via tablet. In Amsterdam, the 45-year-old **Pulitzer** (pultizeramsterdam.com; doubles from \$295), which is spread over 25 historic town houses, has been reimagined by designer Jacu Strauss.

The 225 rooms nod to eclecticism, with décor ranging from delft porcelain to furniture by contemporary darlings Maarten Baas and Piet Hein Eek. Equally stylish is the renovated **Viceroy L'Ermitage Beverly Hills** (viceroyhotelsandresorts.com; doubles from \$413), a longtime celebrity favorite. The property recently amped up the luxe with touches like Venetian cut-glass mirrors, suede-covered walls, and abstract paintings by French artist Yves Klein. And the **Four Seasons Resort Lanai** (fourseasons.com; doubles from \$1,150)—a Hawaiian A-list hideaway now owned by billionaire Larry Ellison—debuted a crisp look that utilizes plenty of teak, koa, mahogany, slate, and stone. The result is a modern, tropical fantasy that perfectly frames the lush gardens and Hulopoe Bay, the white-sand beach at its doorstep. — JOHN WOGAN



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Imagine relaxing not just by the sea but over it, soaking in the essence of the first overwater bungalows perched atop the calm, turquoise waters of Mexico's Maroma Beach—voted by the Travel Channel as one of the Top 10 Beaches in the World.

Offering an oasis of luxury, El Dorado Spa Resorts features the exclusive Palafitos-Overwater Bungalows at El Dorado Maroma, a sprawling property with new overwater bungalows of exceptional design, modern amenities, and stunning views of the area's renowned sunrises and sunsets.

Ideal for a honeymoon or romantic rendezvous, every bungalow is over 800 square feet in size and includes an array of exceptional features: a private infinity pool overlooking the ocean, an indoor spa tub for two, and glass-bottom floors that allow for an up-close view of undersea life. Each bungalow features ladder access to the ocean and a dreamy "Aguas del Amor" outdoor shower.

Overwater Luxury

Situated on one of the most scenic white stretches of sand in Mexico's Riviera Maya, this adults-only resort offers nearly 130 rooms on the beach as well as the 30 bungalows atop the waves. For the utmost in luxury, couples staying at Palafitos-Overwater Bungalows can be pampered with personalized full butler services and private beach picnics.

Savor gourmet fare along with awe-inspiring views at the Overwater Grill and Wine Bar, or dine intimately with 24-hour room service in the comfort of your room or bungalow, all included with your stay as part of the Gourmet Inclusive® Experience. Prepare to be spoiled at the resort's overwater Náay Spa, where local Mayan healing traditions incorporate native minerals and practices into relaxing treatments.

In addition to El Dorado Maroma, El Dorado Spa Resorts features three adults-only properties across the Riviera Maya—El Dorado Royale, El Dorado Casitas Royale, and El Dorado Seaside Suites. Discover what makes each resort a unique statement of romantic luxury.



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The 2017 It List

Our favorite new and radically redone hotels of the year. Read more at tandl.me/itlist.

U.S. & Canada

THE ASBURY (P. 80)

Asbury Park, New Jersey

This colorful property is Jersey's hot new gathering spot. There's an inviting lobby café and bright-yellow pool chairs to lounge on during the day; at night, options include outdoor movies and a packed rooftop bar. *From \$175.*

THE BEEKMAN (P. 22)

New York City

You could just have a drink in the restored atrium, but you should spend the night to appreciate this architectural wonder from all angles—and at all times of day. *From \$619.*

THE DEWBERRY

Charleston, South Carolina

Once a midcentury office building, the Dewberry is handsome and sleek, with a vintage edge. They've even improved upon Southern hospitality: squint at a menu and you're offered reading glasses; ask for honey and they'll fetch your preferred kind. *From \$300.*

FOUR SEASONS RESORT (P. 30)

Lanai, Hawaii

Head here for the away-from-it-all feel that Lanai does best, but with plenty of amenities—two pools, four restaurants, and an excellent spa. The interiors are clean-lined, putting the focus on the lush vegetation and ocean views. *From \$1,150.*

MONTAGE PALMETTO BLUFF

Bluffton, South Carolina

This spot still has a gorgeous Lowcountry look and activities like

horseback riding and golf. But it got an upgrade last year: a new inn that serves as the hub, with guest rooms, a restaurant and bar, and a stellar spa. *From \$305.*

THE PONTCHARTRAIN

New Orleans

Amid a wave of fashionable openings, the Pontchartrain best captures NOLA's spirit and history. The 1940s glamour of vintage keys and chandeliers juxtaposed with seemingly incongruent pieces, like a portrait of Lil Wayne, make it elegant and cool in equal measure. *From \$179.*

THE ROBEY

Chicago

You'd be hard-pressed to find another Windy City hotel to rival the Robey's alchemy of great aesthetics, prime location, and thrumming atmosphere—all for a such a wallet-friendly price tag. *From \$135.*

SINGLE THREAD INN (P. 20)

Healdsburg, California

Acclaimed chef Kyle Connaughton transfers the Japanese approach of his kitchen to the hospitality at his luxury inn. The food is hyper-seasonal, and the rooms are outfitted with understated high-end amenities, like Ratio coffee-brewers and Zalto wineglasses. *From \$700.*

SURFJACK HOTEL & SWIM CLUB

Honolulu

Combine one of Oahu's best retailers (Olive & Oliver), most exciting chefs (Ed Kenney), and a handful of top artists (like Matthew Tapia, profiled on p. 42), and you've got a Waikiki first: a

hotel that truly taps into the island's creative spirit. *From \$207.*

21C MUSEUM HOTEL (P. 26)

Oklahoma City

With more than 14,000 feet of exhibition space, this boutique hotel in the century-old Model T Ford plant has filled the city's void for an artsy place to stay. And since the galleries, lounge, and restaurant have taken off with locals, it has an energy that doesn't wane midweek. *From \$219.*

VICEROY L'ERMITAGE (P. 30)

Beverly Hills, California

This discreet gem has a fresh new palette, and the lounge has made way for a light-filled French bistro. But the real sell is the suites: with dressing rooms, cushy couches, and deep soaking tubs, they're like an A-list home away from home. *From \$413.*

Africa & the Middle East

ANANTARA AL JABAL AL AKHDAR

Nizwa, Oman

Skirting the rim of a canyon 6,562 feet above sea level, this is a dramatic departure from Oman's beach-resort circuit. The locale makes even simple pursuits—vertiginous swims in the infinity pool or dinner on a glass platform cantilevered over the chasm—thrilling. *From \$560.*

ANDBEYOND MATETSI RIVER LODGE

Matetsi Private Reserve, Zimbabwe

At this renovated lodge on a

123,500-acre reserve, you're in reach of all the activities offered on the Zambezi. But even if you never leave your room, the scenery—a watery landscape teeming with wildlife—will keep you enthralled. *From \$995 per person, all-inclusive.*

ASILIA THE HIGHLANDS (P. 20)

Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania

It's the first camp near the northern gate of the Ngorongoro Crater, so while most visitors queue at the southern end in the early morning, Asilia guests can sleep in, then take a leisurely descent to the crater floor. *From \$430 per person, all-inclusive.*

LEEUESTATES

Franschhoek, South Africa

Anajit Singh's latest property in South Africa's wine country is a beautifully landscaped, 17-room gem with its own wine cellar (tastings are gratis for guests), a spa, and a farm-to-table restaurant. *From \$659.*

SANCTUARY CHIEF'S CAMP

Okavango Delta, Botswana

Ultra-personal service is the star at this freshly overhauled safari camp. That, and the new Geoffrey Kent Luxury Suite, which comes with a private fire pit, lounge, and bar, plus a dedicated butler and guide. *From \$1,180 per person, all-inclusive.*

SIX SENSES ZIL PASYON

Seychelles

On this eco-chic private isle, the mood is light: soft marine décor, swings by the tubs, vast pool decks. The *pièce de résistance* is the spa, shoehorned between the

archipelago's iconic black boulders, with a yoga pavilion so close to the water the sea spray cools you during poses. *From \$1,340.*

Asia

AMANEMU (P. 28)

Mie Prefecture, Japan

This new hot-spring resort near the Grand Shrines of Ise is opening up an area that's previously been hard for foreigners to penetrate. It's unique within the Aman family in that it offers a classic *onsen* experience, blending the traditional *ryokan* with Aman's sense of space. *From \$770.*

CANYON RANCH

Kaplankaya, Turkey

The brand's first international outpost has panoramic views of the Aegean, a sleek design, and local flavors on display in the cuisine. Hammam treatments are authentic, with a cleansing scrub on a heated marble table followed by an olive-soap massage. *From \$472, including meals.*

KATAMAMA

Bali, Indonesia

The MO here skews more modern than the typical thatched-roof bungalow, but locally made details—lemongrass-infused gin, hand-dyed bathrobes—keep the look warm, not sterile. Private rooftop Jacuzzis and an adjoining beach club balance serenity with fun. *From \$275.*

OBEROI SUKHVILAS

Chandigarh, India

Oberoi's newest addition is Mughal-inspired from top to bottom, with intricate hand-painted murals and gold leafing throughout. It sits on a former orange grove, so guests can pluck fruit from the trees as they wander the grounds. *From \$320.*

THE PENINSULA (P. 30)

Beijing

After a yearlong renovation, the Peninsula is a draw for more than just its location. Rooms now start at 646 square feet and have suite-like layouts, with décor that nods to both China's storied past and its tech-forward present. *From \$317.*

SANTANI

Sri Lanka

The first destination spa in Sri Lanka is all about wellness—and not the ascetic Western kind that's all juicing and boot camps. Santani's approach is more subtle, with ayurvedic spa treatments, meditation, and health food that includes goat-cheese tortellini and chai crème brûlée. *From \$710.*

SONEVA JANI (P. 98)

Maldives

If you've ever fantasized about staying in an overwater bungalow, add this to your bucket list. Twenty-four palatial

villas jut into a gin-clear lagoon; all have private pools, and some even have waterslides(!). *From \$3,085.*

ST. REGIS VOMMULI (P. 98)

Maldives

You come here for two reasons. One, for the impeccable St. Regis service. And two, because the look of this private-island resort will leave you speechless. Gently sloped villa roofs are meant to evoke manta rays, while the Whale Bar, which serves small plates and cocktails, opens to panoramic sea views. *From \$1,770.*

TAJ MEGHAULI SERAI (P. 24)

Chitwan National Park, Nepal

Taj Safaris' latest lodge has a prime location, so rhino-spotting excursions are relatively effortless. After a few hours astride an elephant, unwind with a private plunge pool, an alfresco massage, and a Tharu meal. *From \$300, including meals.*

Australia & New Zealand

HELENA BAY (P. 24)

North Island, New Zealand

The setting of this resort is immaculate, from the sheltered bay to the perfectly pruned gardens. The kind of conscientious care you'll get is clear from the staff-to-guest ratio alone: 53 employees for a maximum of only 10 visitors. *From \$2,100.*

QT

Melbourne, Australia

A refreshing irreverence makes QT Melbourne unique in the city. The lobby's wingbacks and stuffed peacock set the tone; rooms are industrial-lite. Expect the unexpected—like saucy comments from the elevator voice—and exuberant service that verges on the theatrical. *From \$258.*

Caribbean & Bermuda

HAMILTON PRINCESS

Bermuda

In addition to revamping the rooms during its renovation, this Fairmont property upped its cultural cred with a restaurant from Marcus Samuelsson and an eclectic art collection with works by Warhol, Nelson Mandela, and Banksy. *From \$279.*

KIMPTON SEAFIRE RESORT & SPA

Grand Cayman

Catering to both couples and families, this property takes full advantage of its Seven Mile Beach location. Guest rooms—in colors inspired by flora on site—are all angled to face the sea, and the lobby has spectacular floor-to-ceiling windows. *From \$500.*

LE BARTHÉLEMY HOTEL & SPA (P. 24)

St. Bart's, French West Indies

This Grand Cul-de-Sac newcomer is at once glamorous and unpretentious. An army of genial French staffers will stock a gourmet picnic basket for you, or tote rosé to your lounge chair overlooking the Caribbean. *From \$636.*

SHORE CLUB

Turks and Caicos

This hotel is the first on Long Bay Beach, a more private alternative to popular Grace Bay. Come for a romantic escape (the ocean-inspired scheme is glamorous, not kitschy) or a group vacation (the 6,239-square-foot penthouse has a huge terrace and hot tub). *From \$925.*

Europe

COOMBESHEAD FARM (P. 20)

Cornwall, England

The five rooms are simply decorated, because—let's be honest—you're here for the food. The 18th-century farmstead has just a single communal table, where chefs April Bloomfield and Tom Adams serve incredible dishes like pork cracklings in cider sauce. Guests can even take baking or butchery workshops. *From \$215.*

IL SERENO LAGO DI COMO

Lake Como, Italy

Il Sereno is a restrained antidote to Como's gilded grandes dames. Designer Patricia Urquiola had everything from bathtubs to uniforms made with local materials like *ceppo di gré* stone and Como silk. The layout puts all eyes on the water, with a 450-foot shoreline and lakeview terraces in every room. *From \$798.*

PARK HYATT (P. 24)

Mallorca, Spain

This may be the Balearics' most stunning retreat yet. Its design was inspired by Mallorcan hamlets, and the pink stone buildings, serpentine pathways, and rows of colonnades have an ancient feel. *From \$369.*

THE PULITZER (P. 30)

Amsterdam

The update of this hotel's 25 landmarked town houses was not just a polishing of floors and some new cushions. The designer, Jacu Strauss, spent the night in every room to dream up a unique look for each. The result is colorful and whimsical, but tasteful. *From \$295.*

THE RITZ (P. 30)

Paris

It was all worth the wait. Four years after closing its doors for renovation, the new-and-improved Ritz has kept the Belle Époque glamour but added some modern necessities: speedy Wi-Fi, new plumbing, and a one-of-a-kind Chanel spa. *From \$1,107.*

RITZ-CARLTON

Budapest

Just two blocks from the Danube, this Ritz captures Budapest's blend of elegance and modernity. The club lounge has an exceptional beverage program: expect Hungarian wines and local pressed juices. *From \$309.*

SOHO HOUSE

Barcelona

Catalan architecture cements the sense of place, but dedication to comfort makes this six-floor club a place you want to linger. Fluffy robes are a given; here they've upped the coziness ante with a heated towel rack, wool eye mask, and hot-water bottle under the covers. *From \$274.*

Mexico & Central & South America

ATIX HOTEL

La Paz, Bolivia

Contemporary and indigenous influences abound, like a façade of timber and Comanche stone and works by artist Gastón Ugalde. The restaurant, Ona, is among the city's best, thanks to a staff recruited from Latin America's top kitchens. *From \$143.*

CHABLÉ (P. 28)

Yucatán, Mexico

Just an hour from the coast, Chablé marries Méridan hacienda hospitality with beach-resort-style amenities (like the glamorous, palm-tree-lined pool that could've been plucked from Tulum). *From \$780.*

EXPLORA VALLE

SAGRADO (P. 90)

Sacred Valley, Peru

Explora's philosophy emphasizes nature, and their latest addition is designed accordingly: Wi-Fi, TV, and mini-bars are replaced with soothing spaces ideal for relaxing after a day spent exploring craggy peaks and Incan ruins. *From \$1,950 per person, for three nights, all-inclusive.*

MAR ADENTRO (P. 26)

Los Cabos, Mexico

A reflecting pool wraps around this striking seaside property, anchored by Nido, a restaurant ensconced within a woven-twig ovoid structure. The rooms are divided among stark white cubes that appear to float along the edges of the pool. *From \$326.*

NEKUPE (P. 46)

Nicaragua

The service alone is first-class, as you'd expect at a luxury inn with just four villas and four suites. But consider the activities—trail rides, monkey-watching treks, skeet shooting, and more—and the unreal views, and it's a singular way to experience the region. *From \$750.*

The Spirit of South Australia

From wildlife wonders and wine-tasting pleasures to stunning natural settings stretching from the beach to the outback, the state of **South Australia** has all the ingredients for the perfect **Down Under adventure.**

Whatever you dream of for your Australian getaway, you'll find it in South Australia. And with an expertly-curated itinerary from **Swain Destinations**—and direct flights on **Air New Zealand** to Adelaide via Auckland—it's never been easier to explore.

Since 1987, Swain Destinations has been connecting savvy travelers to top locations around the globe—though it's always had a soft spot for founder Ian Swain's native Australia. Savor some of the handpicked highlights of South Australia with this immersive **9-day itinerary**, which can be completely customized to create the ultimate bespoke journey.



DAY 1

The journey begins in South Australia's spirited capital of **Adelaide**, a city of charming laneway bars and boutiques, culinary discoveries, and festivals galore. Get your first-day bearings with an on-foot exploration of the vibrant markets, cafés, and restaurants for which Adelaide is becoming known. ▼

DAY 2

Old World charm meets world-class wine in the **Barossa Valley**, South Australia's most noted wine region, where vineyards bearing famous names like **Penfolds** and **Henschke** stand between historic hamlets. Today's private excursion brings you through the scenic Torrens Gorge into the Valley, for a day of tastings, winery visits, and strolls through quaint villages like Tanunda or Handorf. ▼

DAY 3

It's worth getting up early today for the dawn 4x4 drive out to a nearby conservation park where, following a short walk into the bush, you'll enjoy a gourmet picnic breakfast among families of snacking kangaroos. One unforgettable option: the **Ultimate Penfolds Experience**, which includes access to some of the hidden-away corners of the renowned wine estate. ▼

DAY 4/5

Spend these two days taking in the flavors of the **Clare Valley**, one of Australia's oldest wine regions. Set north of Adelaide, the Clare Valley is best known for its Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Shiraz—all of which you'll taste on private tours to some of the area's top producers. In the evenings, savor gourmet meals at spots like **Thorn Park by the Vines**, a luxury inn and restaurant. ▼

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DAY
6

Pack up your Barossa and Clare Valley souvenirs for the short flight to **Kangaroo Island**, home to 21 wildlife-filled national and conservation parks. From a base at the sleek **Southern Ocean Lodge**—a mainstay on annual “best hotel” lists—you’ll take off on the Lodge’s unique guided excursions, each designed to highlight a signature aspect of the island. Cap off the night with a southern sky stargazing session on the Lodge’s dedicated platform. ▼

DAY
7

Choose your own adventures today from the Lodge’s list of guided offerings. Spy sea lions at sunrise, while a naturalist describes the habits of these unusual creatures. Take in the views with a coastal walk along the limestone cliff-tops of **Hanson Bay** (watch out for that ocean wind, blowing free between here and Antarctica!). As the sun sets, the signature **Kangaroos & Kanapes** event will have you sipping bubbly on a historic part of the Island, as kangaroos and wallabies graze nearby. ▼

DAY
8

Back on the mainland, enjoy a small group excursion that starts with a 4x4 drive to a secret location in the **McLaren Vale wine region**, where you’ll savor both the views and local wines and cheeses. Visit a winemaker, drive along the beach at **Gulf St. Vincent**, and climb over the Willunga Hills into the Inman Valley, stopping for lunch in another private natural setting. ▼

DAY
9

In the heart of the McLaren Vale sits the family-owned **d’Arenberg winery** and the **d’Arenberg Cube**—a dramatic five-story multi-function attraction modeled after a Rubik’s Cube, opening later this year. Following a 30-minute scenic flight in the open cockpit of a restored Waco biplane, you’ll spend the day at d’Arenberg learning about and tasting their wines, and even playing winemaker during an interactive, hands-on wine blending session. A chef-led wine pairing lunch caps off the experience—and your unforgettable South Australian adventure. ■



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Hello Tomorrow



Sibton Park, a manor house built in 1827, is one of the most inviting lodgings of Wilderness Reserve, in Suffolk, England.



To the Manor Reborn

Traditional English country-house hotels are trading their stiffness for an increasingly informal vibe.

Clive Aslet checks in. →

With its thatched roof and a portico with wooden columns made from actual knobbly tree trunks, the charmingly humble Hex Cottage, on the edge of a forest in Suffolk, would have appealed to Hansel and Gretel. Inside, the décor is appropriately rustic, with rough-hewn tables and chairs, unpainted plaster walls, brick floors, and a wood-fired range that you have to keep lit if you want to have hot water. When I arrived, I felt beside the door for a light switch, only to realize that there wasn't one. I fought a moment of panic when I realized there would also be no power supply for my laptop or cell phone.

Welcome to the new breed of English country-house hotel. In the 1980s, both Britain and the U.S. fell hard for the rural-aristocratic look, following the successes of *Brideshead Revisited* on television and the "Treasure Houses of Britain" exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In response, owners of traditional English estates—many of which, like the fictional one in *Downton Abbey*, had been battered by history—began restoring their properties to their former splendor and opening them to guests. That trend has shown no sign of subsiding in the decades since, but properties like Hex Cottage—part of Wilderness Reserve, a collection of cottages, farmhouses, and manor houses on 5,000 pristine acres—reflect a shift toward quirky, laid-back country-house experiences. At →



the new Soho Farmhouse in Great Tew, in the Cotswolds, guests stay in a group of 40 cozy cabins by a stream. Likewise, the effortlessly cool Pig hotels have turned historic buildings throughout southern England into rustically stylish inns centered around hyper-local, often foraged food. In Cornwall, Sir Ferrers Vyvyan has turned a cluster of old cottages on Trelowarren, his family's 15th-century estate, into eco-friendly lodgings. In Yorkshire, Lord Masham has reimagined Swinton Park, his ancestral castle, as a hotel and cooking school, with luxury camping in yurts and tree houses on the grounds.

The owner of Wilderness Reserve is billionaire businessman Jon Hunt, who uses the financial return from renting out the traditional buildings to subsidize conservation efforts such as planting trees, installing nesting boxes, and creating ponds for wetland birds. There are 10 clever dwellings for guests to choose from. These include the Gate Lodges, a pair of bijou 18th-century gatehouses connected by an ultramodern underground living space you'd never guess was there. A gardener's bothy has been converted into the partially glassed-in, eight-bedroom Walled Garden,

inspired by the estate's original vegetable garden. Moat Cottage, a Tudor farmhouse, really does have its own moat.

All of the properties offer optional butler service, and some, like Hex Cottage, come provisioned with local delicacies. Good pubs, castles, churches, seaside villages, bird sanctuaries, and the Snape Maltings Concert Hall can all be found a short car ride away. But the best course of action is to borrow one of the Pashley bicycles and roam the estate.

At the center of Wilderness Reserve is Heveningham Hall, whose history illustrates the vicissitudes that have struck so many English country houses. Built in the late 18th century, it was once a swaggeringly glamorous mansion, but by the 1980s it had fallen into disrepair thanks to a series of disasters, including a fire that gutted the east wing. Hunt purchased it in 1994 as a family home and spent years restoring it to its former glory, while executing a never-realized plan by Lancelot "Capability" Brown, one of the great English landscape architects of the 18th century, on the surrounding grounds. Though it remains a private residence, it hosts several public events, including an annual fair.

I found a similar tale of transformation at Holkham estate, on North Norfolk's coast. It is home to →

From top: Moat Cottage, a property at Wilderness Reserve accessed by a private drawbridge; the Ancient House, part of the Victoria Inn, in Norfolk.

Right: Sheep gather in one of Wilderness Reserve's many misty meadows.

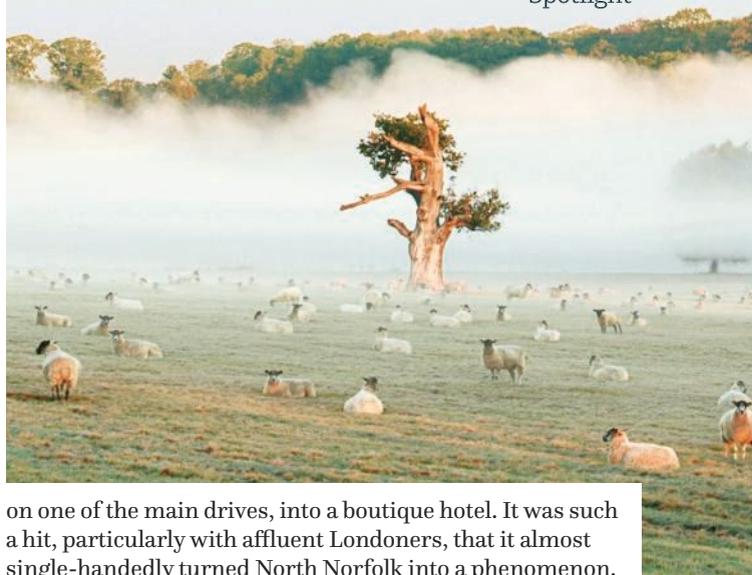
Below: A canopy bed is the centerpiece of the single bedroom at Hex Cottage, at Wilderness Reserve.

Holkham Hall, one of the grandest of all English country houses, which was famous in the Georgian age as the home of Thomas Coke, first Earl of Leicester, one of England's great politicians and agricultural reformers. Surrounding the imposing Palladian mansion, which is approached by avenues of stupendous length, is an Arcadian landscape where fallow deer graze beside obelisks and temples. The grounds were designed by William Kent, another great English landscape architect of the 18th century.

↓
The Details
What to see and do, page 117

The interior has just as much power to amaze, beginning with Marble Hall, a soaring space ringed by ancient Roman statuary and columns of Raspberry Ripple-like alabaster. The richness and scale made me nearly quail to enter. I felt like a pygmy treading in the footsteps of giants.

Today, the family of the eighth Earl of Leicester owns Holkham. Early in the last decade, Lord and Lady Leicester transformed the Victoria Inn, a lodging house erected in 1837



on one of the main drives, into a boutique hotel. It was such a hit, particularly with affluent Londoners, that it almost single-handedly turned North Norfolk into a phenomenon. Now they have transformed it again, into an estate hotel like the ones that were common in previous centuries, when many landed estates ran inns to provide quality accommodations to visiting farmers, businessmen, and tourists. The Victoria's restaurant is now a step up from a classic pub (a back bar serves delicious Adnams bitter, made with malted barley from Holkham), without the froufrou of a high-end dining establishment. "Don't expect an amuse-bouche with dinner," said Holkham's estates director, David Horton-Fawkes. Many ingredients come from the grounds, including venison and other game in season (Holkham has a celebrated wild-bird shoot). Much of the waitstaff is made up of young people from nearby villages. Dogs are welcome.

"Very flat, Norfolk," observed Amanda in Noël Coward's *Private Lives*. This makes Holkham, like Wilderness Reserve, ideal for biking. You can ride to the 9,200-acre Holkham National Nature Reserve, one of the largest in England, where you will find marshes, pine trees, sand dunes, and beaches. If you'd rather stroll, you can wander through Venetian gates into the Walled Garden. Once, its produce fed the big house, providing hothouse luxuries, such as grapes and peaches, never tasted by the masses.

Holkham Hall itself is open to the public, which is welcome to peruse its paintings, tapestries, furniture, and textiles. One of the courtyard buildings houses a museum celebrating Holkham's long-standing association with farming. Next to it is an excellent, recently revamped shop and café. But who wants to stay indoors? On fine days, the park is crowded with walkers and bicyclists. What you can't do, however, is tour the estate by automobile, as cars are mostly banned. The internal combustion engine doesn't belong to the world of places like Holkham and Wilderness Reserve. When visiting, we know that eventually we'll have to return to the tempo of modern life. But time seems suspended in these private kingdoms, where for a brief, precious moment, nature and beauty transcend electronic gizmos and infernal machines. ■

The best course of action is to borrow one of the Pashley bicycles and roam the estate.



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That Hawaiian Look

Honolulu artist Matthew Tapia's hand lettering is the buzz of Oahu—and one more reason to check out the island's red-hot culture scene.

You could spend several days in Honolulu without realizing you're surrounded by Matthew Tapia's designs. But they're everywhere: he's done street murals, signage at the restaurant the Pig and the Lady, a piece at the Honolulu Museum of Art, and, perhaps most prominently, the widely Instagrammed pool at the new Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club (surfjack.com; doubles from \$207).

Tapia was born and raised on Oahu. He worked odd jobs—security guard, stock clerk—before his art was discovered by the owner of clothing brand Ecko Unltd. during a small show at the local mall. He was invited to do a project for the company, which led to four years of developing his skill as a lettering artist at Ecko in New York City. Once he returned home to Honolulu, he landed a steady stream of freelance gigs with Nike and other brands.

In 2015, the Surfjack reached out to see whether he would be interested in painting a phrase at the bottom of its pool. Tapia chose WISH YOU WERE HERE, because “guests looking down from their balconies would be invited to come down to the communal area,” he says. There were logistical difficulties: working around the schedule of the construction crew, daily pool cleanings, and the blazing midday sun. “It was a month of overnights,” he says. “But it was worth it in the end. I had no idea people would respond the way they have.”

His retro lettering at the bottom of the pool has become the de facto symbol of the boutique hotel, bringing well-timed attention to Oahu's art scene—the island will host its first art biennial this spring. “Hawaii has always been cut off from the rest of the world,” Tapia says. “But the amount of talent that's come out of here is mind-boggling. It's got to be something in the water.” — *Stephanie Wu*



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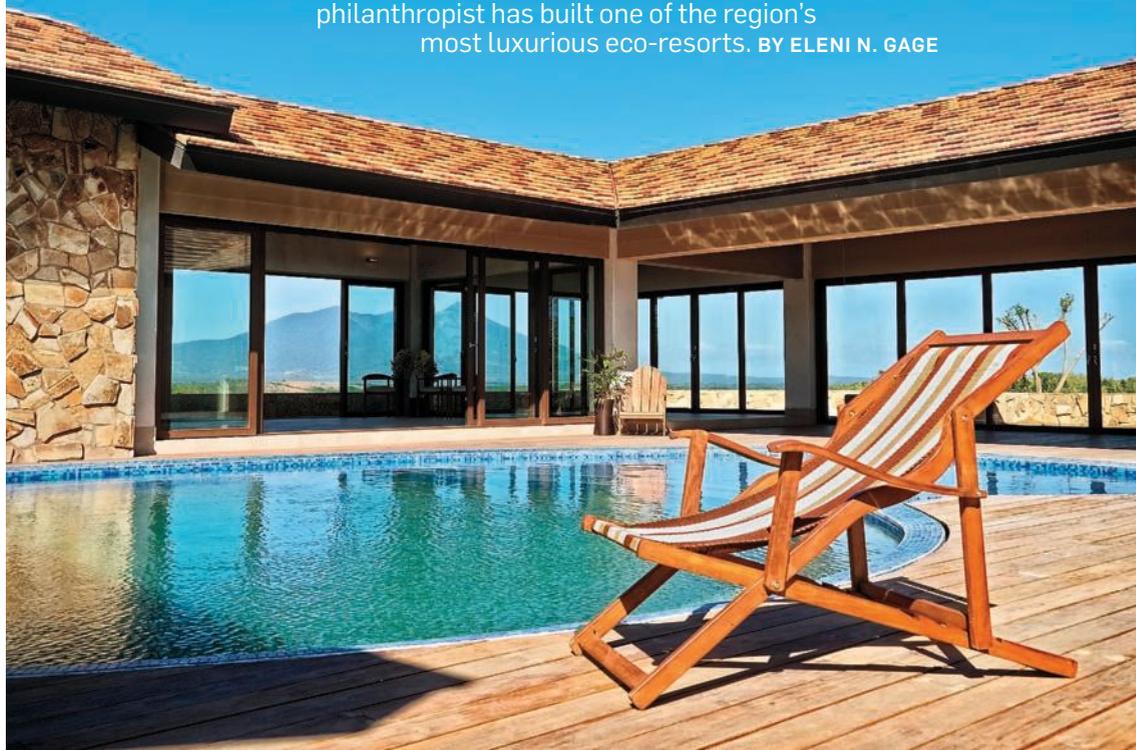
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Nica by Nature

On 1,300 acres filled with howler monkeys and organic gardens, a Central American philanthropist has built one of the region's most luxurious eco-resorts. BY ELENI N. GAGE



Above: The pool deck at Nekupe Sporting Resort & Retreat, about an hour from Managua.

How do you like your *gallo pinto* in the morning?” Don Alfredo Pellas Jr. asked me over dinner my first night at Nekupe. This is not your usual small talk. The national dish of Nicaragua, *gallo pinto* is a ubiquitous rice-and-beans combo that comes however a cook makes it; it’s not something you order according to taste, like sunny-side-up eggs. But this was not my first Nicaraguan breakfast rodeo—I married a Nicaraguan coffee trader; we once lived in the country and now visit often. To my surprise, I realized I did have a preference: “Crispy.”

“Excellent,” Don Alfredo replied. “We’ll tell the chef that tomorrow you’ll have it *bien tostado*, but also to prepare a bowl that’s a little softer, and maybe one with bacon. A *gallo pinto* tasting.”

Also not usual: the fact that one of the most prominent philanthropists in Nicaragua, part of a long line of sugar barons and bankers, was mulling over my *gallo pinto* preferences. But Nekupe is the realization of a long-held dream for Don Alfredo and his wife, Doña Theresa, and this level of personalization—down to the rice and beans—is what they want their guests to expect. It begins 10 days before you get there with an e-mail that includes a suggested itinerary of activities (Cooking class? Yoga with a view of the volcano?) as well as a detailed list of questions (How do you take your coffee?). As the general manager, Silvia, told me, “If a guest always has pistachio ice cream at home, they should have it here, too.” When my husband, Emilio, and I arrived at our villa, there was a photo of my family from when we lived in Nicaragua on the bedside table—the management had found →



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Above: Horseback riding is one of many guest activities at Nekupe, which has views of the Mombacho volcano. Right: The veranda of the Caoba Grand Suite.

it on my website. And when the honeymooners who arrived right after us checked in, they found a gift from their registry waiting in their room.

The “mi fabulous resort es su casa” philosophy dovetails with the history of Nekupe; Don Alfredo and Doña Theresa bought the land six years ago as the site of a weekend home for themselves and their two kids, a little more than an hour, and a world, away from their primary residence in Managua. A conservationist and sport-shooting enthusiast (clay pigeons, not real ones), Don Alfredo was looking for a place he could shoot, surrounded by trees, birds, and volcano views, and where Doña Theresa could ride horses. They thought they’d build a little house—“one kitchen, two bedrooms, a living room,” as she described it—but the property took on a new form as they acquired a neighboring 300-acre teak plantation to prevent it from being clear-cut. They created three artificial lakes and reforested the area by planting more than 14,000 trees to attract butterflies and birds—more than 12 percent of the 700 animal species found in Nicaragua live here, including howler monkeys, sloths, and *tortolitos*, or lovebirds, which mate for life. “It got so big, we said, why not open it to the public?” Doña Theresa recalled. Now it’s a largely solar-powered, four-suite, four-villa resort with a clubhouse and chapel situated on a 1,300-acre nature reserve. Three greenhouses (irrigated with water from the river), plantain and wheat fields, and a 13,000-square-foot organic garden provide most of the resort’s produce; a henhouse supplies all the eggs. The spa opens this spring.

The Pellases’ vision was twofold. First, to promote Nicaragua. Twenty-five years ago Don Alfredo and Doña Theresa started the American Nicaraguan Foundation, which works to mitigate poverty in the country by partnering with other NGOs on everything from health care to solar-power infrastructure. With Nekupe, they wanted to create a place that would introduce visitors to Nicaragua and offer them what Don Alfredo calls



a “transformative” experience, perhaps inspiring guests to get involved in philanthropic endeavors in the country. (The resort, working with the foundation, has built 19 houses in the neighboring village of Nandaime and supports local schools with education and nutrition programs.) The second goal was to create what Don Alfredo hopes will be “the premier location for sport in all Latin America”—a boutique resort along the lines of camps the Pellases stayed at in Mozambique, Botswana, and Tanzania and estancias they’d visited in Argentina—with a focus on bird-watching, horseback riding, sport-shooting, tennis, yoga, and wellness.

A ranch hotel in the country is a new idea in Nicaraguan tourism, but then Nicaraguan tourism itself is relatively new, as the nation stabilized only after its revolution and the war that followed in the 1990s. Now it’s arguably the safest country in Latin America, Wi-Fi is ubiquitous, and U.S. dollars are happily accepted. A few notable luxury properties have opened in recent years, but Nicaraguan resorts tend to come in two varieties: beachfront luxury along the Pacific coast, as at Mukul (opened in 2013 by Don Alfredo’s brother, Don Carlos), or more-casual options that serve as jumping-off points for adventure travelers. Nekupe, which means “heaven” in the indigenous Chorotega dialect, considers adventure to be part of the luxury—along with rain showers, nouveau Nicaraguan cuisine, and attention paid to your every whim.

To that end, all guests are assigned a ranger to guide them through horseback riding, howler-monkey spotting, massage-booking, and more. Ours was a 25-year-old Canadian named Philippe Hardy who let us take a joyride in the ATV we →

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THE HOTELS ISSUE

Check-In

used to zip around the resort and arranged afternoon cocktails on a lookout platform from which we could watch the sun set behind Mombacho, the volcano. (I've never felt more like Michelle Obama than when Phil would notify other staffers about our whereabouts through his Secret Service-style headset. "No interruptions, please," I heard him say as we drank our sundowners. "They're having a romantic moment.")

Emilio and I each had certain activities we were more excited about than the others. I've never had any interest in holding a gun, so I had envisioned myself lounging in a deck chair while my husband shot at geometric paper targets. But I'm a good sport, and when I politely followed the directions of our shooting instructor, Don Nicolas, I learned that I'm also a crack shot with a pistol.

The entire weekend was exhilarating. But dawn yoga, galloping through rivers, and shooting clay pigeons isn't for everyone. "Of course you're welcome to spend the whole time sitting by the pool, drinking a beer," Phil told us. "But there's so much to see and do, you'd be missing out." To test the resort's appeal with less-adventurous types, and to keep from getting excommunicated from the family, we invited my mother-in-law and grandmother-in-law to join us for lunch, warning them that the last 20 minutes' drive to the hotel is on a dirt road, over running water in a few spots.

More than 12 percent of the 700 species found in Nicaragua live here, including sloths and lovebirds.

When my in-laws arrived at the clubhouse restaurant, we were still shooting. "Tell them to sit and wait," Emilio said to Phil. But Don Alfredo knew that when it comes to Nicaraguan mothers and grandmothers, attention must be paid. "Open a bottle of champagne for the señoras," he commanded.

Nicaraguans, or at least the Nicaraguans I'm related to, describe everything in one of two ways: *horroroso* (horrible) or *divino* (heavenly). One bottle of champagne and a delicious lunch later, the ladies had recovered from the shock of the drive ("*Horroroso!*") and were raving about the avocado soup, local short ribs, and, best of all, the "regal" service. ("*Divino!*") They adored Nekupe, and I did, too. But easy as it is to love a shower with a view and sunset cocktails, the most transformative moment for me came right after my evening massage, when I walked into the women's locker room. Like every other space on the property, it's designed to bring the outdoors in, and the windows were open to the rock garden outside. When I entered the room, the walls seemed to be shimmering. As I moved closer, I realized that dozens of pearlescent luna moths had landed on them, drawn by the lights. Some might find luna moths, lovely as they are, *horroroso*. But for me it was absolute magic, and one of the many moments when Nekupe lived up to its name. It was *divino*. ■

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Spring style this year is all about a playful approach to color and texture, with luxe materials done in a bold, retro palette. Paris's Hôtel Saint-Marc, a jewel box in the Second Arrondissement, has mastered that mix—it's the perfect stage for showing off the season's best bags (and one seriously great shoe).

FASHION EDITOR MELISSA VENTOSA MARTIN

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THE HOTELS ISSUE

The Look

Loewe Barcelona Stitches bag, \$2,850 (loewe.com).

Céline Clasp bag in crocodile, \$23,400 (Neiman Marcus Beverly Hills, 310-550-5900).



In one of the Hôtel Saint-Marc's lounge areas, velvet sofas and a pastel rug are plush counterpoints to a brass-wrapped chair and chrome-and-glass tables. hotelsaintmarc.com; doubles from \$305.



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THE HOTELS ISSUE

The Look

La Maison Moreau Vicomte bag, \$4,795, and Chancelière bag, \$3,425 (*Boutique Moreau Paris, 33-1-40-07-52-24*).



Stella McCartney shoulder bucket bag, \$1,585 (*Stella McCartney Los Angeles, 310-273-7051*).

Givenchy by Riccardo Tisci bag, price upon request (*Givenchy Madison Avenue, 212-650-0180*); **L'Artisan Parfumeur** Tenebrae perfume, \$210 (*artisanparfumeur.com*).



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Brazil's Quiet Side

Three fantastic hotels are luring travelers away from the beach and into the mountains.

BY CATESBY HOLMES

Though last year's Olympic Games prompted a wave of interest in Brazil, most travelers still stick to a fairly standard itinerary. But there's more to the country than its famous coastline and cosmopolitan cities. Those willing to venture just a few hours (and many winding miles) inland from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo will discover a whole other side to this oft-pigeonholed South American nation—a lush, mountainous region of cloud-obscured peaks, cow-dotted pastureland, and pockets of the ancient Atlantic Forest.

In this scenic setting, three quietly ambitious hotels are cultivating a stylish new vision of Brazilian *turismo rural*—going beyond the dude-ranch-style experience with high-end amenities, farm-to-table dining, and luxury-minded nature excursions. Sylvan charm is a common factor, but delve a little deeper and each property has a distinct personality, so travelers of every stripe can find what they're after. With the dollar going further than ever here, escaping the beaten path is remarkably affordable. And bucolic as they are, inland Brazil's hotels aren't just detours—check in and you'll find they're worthy destinations all on their own. →

The reading room at Fazenda Catuçaba, in the Brazilian state of São Paulo.




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One Place, Three Stays



RESERVA DO IBITIPOCA

Even intrepid drivers will have to white-knuckle it down the rutted, 15-mile dirt-and-brick road from Lima Duarte, but it's worth it to reach Reserva do Ibitipoca, which sits in a valley on a nature reserve four hours northwest of Rio. Modeled after an 18th-century *mansão de fazenda*, or farm manor, the 12-room eco-retreat strikes a balance between historic charm and modern luxury. The hallways and public spaces are adorned with works commissioned from local artists—replicas of old maps and watercolors of indigenous flora—while rooms feature Egyptian-cotton linens, claw-foot tubs on heated bathroom floors, and iPads preloaded with the spa menu and pictures of the endangered monkeys that live nearby.

Here, sustainability is more than just a buzzword: solar panels heat the water, and much of the food is grown on site. But the hotel's cofounder, philanthropist Renato Machado, has a larger mission. He bought the first parcel of the farmstead—now 10,000 acres—35 years ago to reforest the Ibitipoca hills and preserve wildlife corridors linking the terrain to the neighboring Ibitipoca State Park. In 2008, he opened the hotel to showcase the region's beauty. Machado is invested in the social and economic health of the community, too: three longtime staffers are now co-owners of the property.

The state of Minas Gerais is a rural one known for its hospitality and hearty food—the Brazilian

Clockwise from top left: Reserva do Ibitipoca's resident parrot; an outdoor tub and shower; a woodstove in the main dining room.

analogue of the American South. Ibitipoca exemplifies this spirit with group outings on horseback and morning yoga classes that cultivate a sense of community among guests. Dinner is also convivial, served at a communal table in the wood-clad dining room or by candlelight outdoors. Musical performances fill weekend evenings. Even Antônio, the resident parrot, is friendly, greeting new arrivals with an outstretched wing. Still, there's plenty of time and impetus for solo reverie—I got lost in thought while reading to a soundtrack of crickets on the wraparound porch. Guests seeking true solitude can stay a night at the hotel's mountain-top cabin. ibiti.com; doubles from \$500. →



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One Place, Three Stays

FAZENDA CATUÇABA

Rusticity is its own sort of luxury at Fazenda Catuçaba, which dispenses with traditional service and modern conveniences (say goodbye to Internet, TV, and cell reception) in favor of more soul-satisfying immersion in nature.

Arriving at this mid-19th-century farmstead just over 100 miles from São Paulo, I was treated as an old friend who'd come to stay awhile: warmly welcomed (with fresh-squeezed juice), escorted to one of five simple but elegant blue-and-white cottages (some with fireplaces, all with mountain views), provided a menu of activities (hiking, rock climbing, rain-forest tours, milking the cows), informed of dinner-time (8:30 p.m.), and then left to my own devices. The food, much of which comes from the Fazenda's organic gardens, is unpretentious, flavorful, vegetable-centric, and delivered without fanfare, accompanied by French wines. The staff is local, and they'll happily help you if you need them—sometimes the service is downright exceptional, like when they whipped up and served me a lavish mid-hike picnic in the woods.

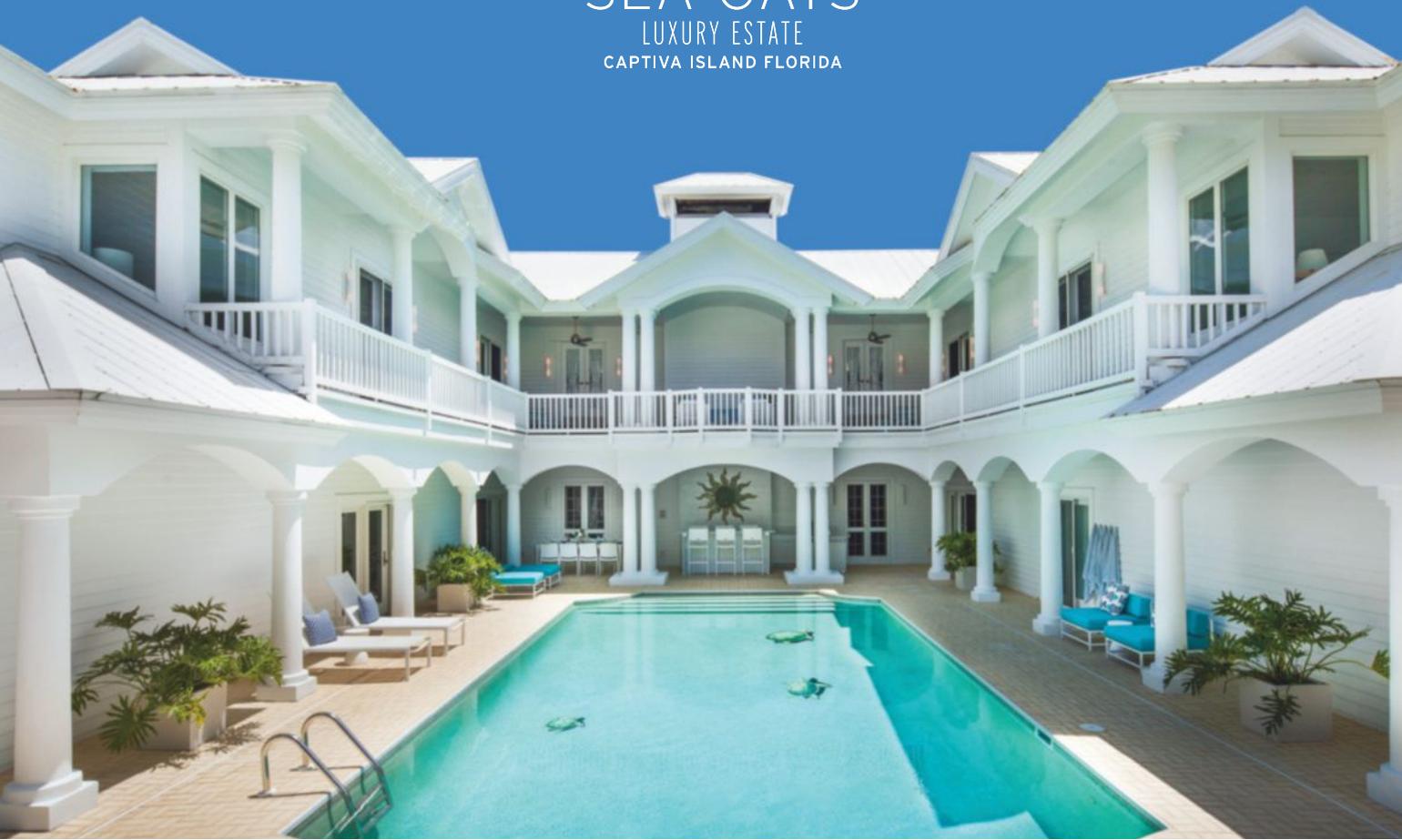
This level of serenity and independence may not be for everyone, but it's a true escape for, say, honeymooners or anyone who could use some forced relaxation and time unplugged. The real world has rarely felt so far away as it does in the rhythms of life here: a steamy hike followed by a dip in a cool lake, a trek on horseback through magnificent mountain terrain, a cold glass of Alsatian white at sunset, and, at the end of the day, retiring to a spacious, minimalist room with a king-size bed and soaking tub. Catuçaba is about connecting—with nature, with friends, with yourself. Eventually, sans smartphone and Netflix, in your wooden chaise longue encircled by emerald hills and crowing roosters, that's exactly what you'll do. *catucaba.com; doubles from \$940. →*



From top:
The patio at
Fazenda Catuçaba;
harvesting vegeta-
bles from the
property's garden.



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One Place, Three Stays



From top: A lounge at Botanique includes a telescope for stargazing; Botanique's library.

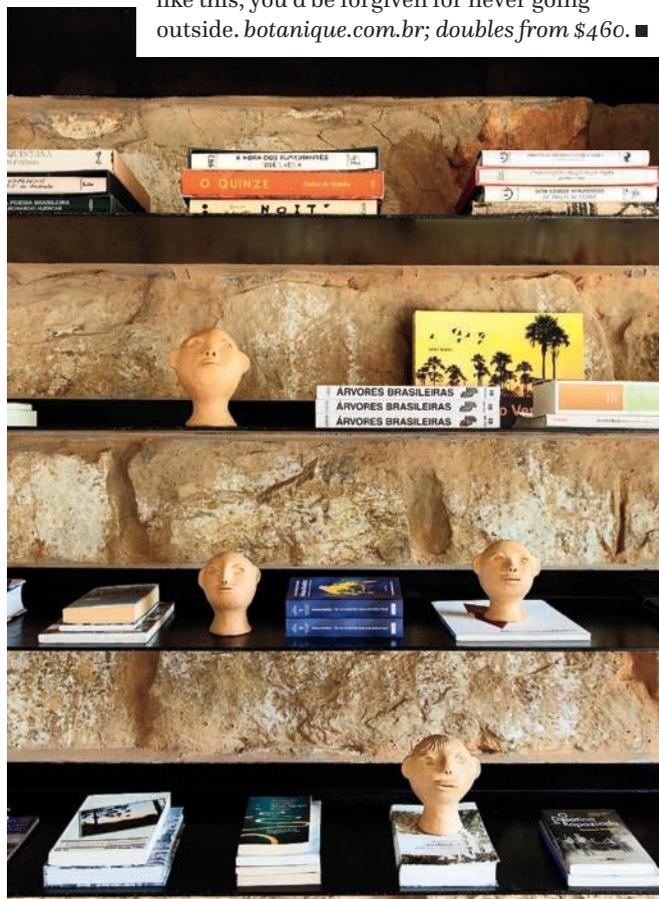
BOTANIQUE HOTEL & SPA

When it opened a few years back, Botanique quickly became a high-fashion destination, drawing socialites and celebrities to the Mantiqueira Mountains with promises of relaxation, anonymity, and haute cuisine.

These days, the vibe is intentionally lower-key (though many well-heeled São Paulo residents still arrive by helicopter—otherwise it's a two-hour drive). The service, however, remains as superb as ever, with a staff who pride themselves on predicting guests' every whim. Local spirits were arranged on the bureau before I'd even thought to reach for a drink. Breakfast in bed was by design rather than special request. The modern glass-and-stone building's 17 guest rooms are expansive and luminous, with floor-to-ceiling windows, white cowhide rugs on reclaimed-wood floors, and accent walls of rough-hewn boulders. Bathrooms are decked out with Brazilian chocolate slate and claw-foot tubs, and clever design details—like the one-way screens that allow guests to have both privacy and uninterrupted views—are a signature.

The real centerpiece, though, is the 9,700-square-foot spa, where a glass-walled sauna overlooks the valley floor almost a mile below. A saltwater hot tub mimics the effects of a soak in the Dead Sea, and many treatments incorporate native ingredients, like the mineral-rich mud from neighboring Minas Gerais that's used in a full-body exfoliating scrub.

A wellness focus too often implies skimpy spa cuisine, but the food here rivals many São Paulo restaurants. That's thanks to chef Gabriel Broide, who lights up talking about foraging in the jungle for new plants and pushing local cheese makers to experiment. His enthusiasm comes through in dishes like a velvety *sous vide* brook trout or Black Angus ribs served with roasted hearts of palm and fresh-banana vinaigrette. Word has it there are horses, a hiking trail, and a waterfall you can pedal to on one of the hotel's mountain bikes. But with pampering like this, you'd be forgiven for never going outside. botanique.com.br; doubles from \$460. ■



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Beijing Rising

Travel + Leisure and the Peninsula Hotels hosted a cocktail party at Chrystie during the 2016 International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) in Cannes, France.

Executives and general managers from The Peninsula Hotels, leading travel advisors and professionals, and Travel + Leisure staff came together to celebrate the rebirth of the Peninsula Beijing. Guests posed in front of the photo booth with Chinese accessories and pulled Chinese fortune sticks, hoping to win a two-night stay at one of The Peninsula Hotels around the globe.

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WHO // The Travel + Leisure Travel Academy, a group of travel professionals elected by the Travel Advisory Board.

WHAT // TA Mexico – 5-day program with stays at Hotel Solar de las Animas in Tequila and Grand Fiesta Americana in Puerto Vallarta. The travel agents advised tourism boards and hotels during a series of focus group meetings and a roundtable trends lunch.

HIGHLIGHTS // A tour of the agave fields and tequila tasting and blending at Mundo Cuervo; site visits, beachside lunch, and poolside at Four Seasons, St. Regis, and W hotel in Punta Mita; private dinner on the beach hosted by Grand Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta; tour of the town of Puerto Vallarta followed by dinner at Café des Artistes hosted by Puerto Vallarta Tourism Board.



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WHOLE OTHER COUNTRY

The Possibilities of an Island

Obonjan, a summer resort on a tiny speck off the coast of Croatia, is part of a wave of seasonal retreats that mix rowdy good times with fervent self-improvement. **Irina Aleksander** tries her hand at both.



A guest makes use of a stone diving platform, an artifact of Obonjan's previous life as a camp for Croatian boy scouts.

As the ferryboat chugged west from the Croatian port of Šibenik, a narrow stretch of land came into view. Rising from the Adriatic Sea, it looked like the proverbial desert island that city people have in mind when they talk about running away to one, with lush, overgrown greenery framed by undisturbed pebble beaches. Docking at Obonjan, however, was a

bit like discovering a busy ant colony in what looked like virgin field grass—if that ant colony were made up of millennials in bathing suits working on laptops, all swaying to the faint but steady thump of electronic music. Upon arrival, I was handed a cocktail and an hour-by-hour itinerary of “fun” science talks and a yoga class named after a Nirvana song (“Come as You Are”). A twentysomething redhead named Lorna was excited about a training session with a man named Chakabars Clarke. “Chakabars is, like, super famous for his philosophy on veganism,” she said. “And he’s really big on social media.”

Until very recently, Obonjan truly was uninhabited. Developed in the 1970s as a camp for Croatian boy scouts, it had been sitting →



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What is Xiidra? Xiidra is a prescription eye drop used to treat the signs and symptoms of dry eye disease.

Important Safety Information

The most common side effects of Xiidra include eye irritation, discomfort or blurred vision when the drops are applied to the eyes, and an unusual taste sensation (dysgeusia). To help avoid eye injury or contamination of the solution, do not touch the container tip to your eye or any surface. If you wear contact lenses, remove them before using Xiidra and wait for at least 15 minutes before placing them back in your eyes.

It is not known if Xiidra is safe and effective in children under 17 years of age.

Please see the following page for Brief Summary of Safety Information and discuss with your doctor. Visit Xiidra.com for Full Prescribing Information.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit <http://www.fda.gov/medwatch> or call 1-800-FDA-1088.



Patient Information

Xiidra™ (ZYE-druh)
XIIDRA (lifitegrast ophthalmic solution) 5%

.....Brief Summary:

Read this information before you start using Xiidra and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking to your doctor about your medical condition or your treatment.

..... What is Xiidra?

Xiidra is a prescription eye drop solution used to treat the signs and symptoms of dry eye disease. It is not known if Xiidra is safe and effective in children under 17 years of age.

..... What should I tell my doctor before using Xiidra?

Before you use Xiidra, tell your doctor if you:

- are using any other eye drops
- wear contact lenses
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if Xiidra will harm your unborn baby.
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Xiidra passes into your breast milk. Talk to your doctor about the best way to feed your baby if you use Xiidra.

..... How should I use Xiidra?

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist for additional instructions about the right way to use Xiidra. Use Xiidra exactly as your doctor tells you.

- To help avoid eye injury or contamination of the solution, do not touch the container tip to your eye or any surface.
- If you wear contact lenses, remove them before using Xiidra and wait for at least 15 minutes before placing them back in your eyes.
- Use 1 drop of Xiidra in each eye, 2 times each day, about 12 hours apart.
- Use Xiidra right away after opening. Throw away the single use container and any unused solution after you have applied the dose to both eyes. Do not save any unused Xiidra for later.

..... What are the possible side effects of Xiidra?

The most common side effects of Xiidra include eye irritation, discomfort or blurred vision when the drops are applied to the eyes, and an unusual taste sensation (dysgeusia).

Tell your doctor if you have any side effects that bother you. These are not all the possible side effects of Xiidra. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

..... How should I store Xiidra?

- Store Xiidra at room temperature between 68°F to 77°F (20°C to 25°C).
- Store Xiidra in the original foil pouch to protect it from light.
- Do not open the Xiidra foil pouch until you are ready to use the eye drops.
- Return unused single use containers to their original foil pouch to protect from excessive light exposure.

Keep Xiidra and all medicines out of the reach of children.

..... General information about the safe and effective use of Xiidra.

The risk information provided here is not comprehensive. To learn more, talk about Xiidra with your health care provider or pharmacist. The FDA-approved product labeling can be found at http://pi.shirecontent.com/PI/PDFs/Xiidra_USA_ENG.pdf or 1-800-828-2088. Do not use Xiidra for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give Xiidra to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

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abandoned until 2015, when Sound Channel, a British music-festival organizer, began turning it into a summer resort. Swimming and sunbathing are part of the draw, but Obonjan also offers talks about technology and philanthropy, Reiki, hypnosis, meditation, tarot readings, and stargazing. The goal is to attract a certain multitasking young professional who, having tired of debauched weekends, prefers to let loose with green juice, yoga, and a healthy dose of self-improvement.

Obonjan belongs to a new breed of seasonal resorts that are to “vacation” what co-working spaces are to “job.” In Ibiza, hotelier Claus Sendlinger opened La Granja, a members-only farmhouse with Slow Food workshops, full-moon rituals, and artist roundtables. Utah’s Summit Powder Mountain, a “next-generation alpine town,” hosts lectures, cooking classes, and fly-fishing excursions. You could think of these gatherings as part summer camp, part networking event.

Cofounder Dan Blackledge talks about Obonjan with the earnestness of a start-up CEO. “You can come and just swing in a hammock,” he said. “Or you can use the platform to try to better yourself.”

The 136-acre island is an unlikely locale for such a venture. With its imposing pine trees, gravel roads, and swarms of overzealous Slavic bees, it resembles a forgotten Eastern European village. Under Blackledge’s supervision, it has become a kind of modish utopia, its hand-built stone structures repurposed into farm-to-table restaurants and the Zen Den, an organic tea bar and wellness center. Accommodation for 700 guests—who can stay for days or months—is in eco-friendly bell tents and lodges with real beds, macramé wall hangings, and Turkish towels that double as blankets and sarongs during the day. The tents have no soap or bottled

water, but there are iPhone chargers above the beds. Instead of money, visitors wear watchlike bracelets that serve as credit cards. That most attendees are experienced festivalgoers (and also British) gives Obonjan the feel of Glastonbury crossbred with a 1970s Catskills colony.

Much of the programming has the inspirational whiff of a TED talk, with titles like Ecstasy and the Art of Losing Control, Applied Yogic Science and Technology, and Best Lessons from Buddhist Monks. My first day, I decided to try Mindful Drawing. My classmates included a project manager, an art student, and two storklike Hungarian women. “I’m Lisa,” said our instructor. “I teach yoga, and I’m also a textile designer.” Lisa had the friendly manner of a schoolteacher, except that she wore sparkly blue eye shadow and a bikini. After handing out colored pencils, Lisa led a brief meditation and then told us to draw with our eyes shut. “Let the breath guide your hand,” she said.

Most of us ended up with childlike doodles, but that wasn’t the point. Obonjan’s activities are less about productivity than about connecting with other people. “Weren’t you in my Mindful Drawing class?” one of the Hungarians, U’dyt, asked when she saw me eating alone later. She and her friend Kati invited me to watch the sunset, and I joined them that evening on the island’s southern tip. Kati, a model, manages an Airbnb apartment in Budapest. U’dyt designs a line of clothing and objects called Contentment. “The idea is to feel content all the time, which is a little less abstract than happiness,” she explained.

Nearby, a few dozen people were crawling around with their eyes closed as part of Wild Fitness, a workout based on primal movement. “I like the concept here,” U’dyt told me. “I can be on holiday but also be useful. Plus, I wanted to try glamping.”

In the evenings, there is always music, which during my visit was provided by European DJs I’d never heard of and the Hot 8 Brass Band, flown in from New Orleans to perform in the stone amphitheater. Some came to the Hot 8 concert after attending a talk by members of Love Specs, a Malawi-based charitable organization whose initiatives include selling heart-shaped sunglasses to aid →

Docking at Obonjan was a bit like discovering a busy ant colony in what looked like virgin field grass.



The event's accommodations include bell tents, which sleep up to four guests.

A session of sunset yoga gets under way at Obonjan's western harbor.



African farmers. “I think I’m going to volunteer in Malawi!” I heard a young woman in a peasant skirt announce while the band launched into a blend of ’90s hip-hop and funk.

As the concert turned into a boozy dance party, I left to catch *Thinking Outside the Love Box*, a workshop on “conscious relationships.” Most talks take place at the Pavilion, an open-air structure with a wall of potted succulents and seating made of recycled crates. At the front was Jason Chan, a London psychologist. “Personally, I’m a bit of a junkie for anything having to do with personal growth,” Chan said, by way of an icebreaker.

Chan suggested we introduce ourselves by naming our favorite foods and our relationship challenges. “My favorite food is avocado,” Chan began, “and what I find challenging is the feeling of being trapped.”

“My favorite food is broccoli, and I really struggle letting anyone in,” said a woman named Sophie.

A young woman in the back practically whispered: “My favorite food is hummus, and I’m very insecure.”

While Chan doled out the basic tenets of attachment theory, the class grew from six to 30—including the glamorous British model Poppy Okotcha and her boyfriend, architect Toby Burgess, who once delivered a TEDx talk at Burning Man entitled “The Architecture of Joy.”

At times, Obonjan reminded me of a cruise ship. Sequestered at sea, I would see the same people during breakfast at Bok, one of the restau-

rants, that I would see later at the Zen Den and the afternoon meditation sessions. Some evenings everyone gathered at the Pavilion for movie nights and stand-up acts, including a British comedian who riffed on kitchen appliances like NutriBullet and SpiraLife. “People are dying,” he joked, “and I’m turning my carrots into noodles.”

If there’s any discord at Obonjan, it is between those who come for the wellness and those who come for the music, which often blares into the wee hours. Fern Ross, a yoga teacher from London, told me she relied on sleeping pills and earplugs to get up for her morning classes. Asking her neighbors to keep it down proved unproductive. “Why don’t you go *find yourself*?” one told her.

Blackledge, who has hired experts to study the island’s acoustics, promised to resolve such kinks by the 2017 season. He also hopes to add artist residencies, conservation projects, and tree houses.

My favorite discovery at Obonjan was a man named Mirko, the island’s superintendent and formerly its sole inhabitant. With his leathery skin, thick mustache, and scraggly dog Jimmy by his side, Mirko has the look of a reclusive fisherman. When I asked if he minded his new neighbors, Mirko shook his head. “I like to be alone,” he said, sipping one of Bok’s macchiatos, the foam coating his mustache. “But I learn to be alone with people.”

On my last day, I caught a talk by Zoe Cormier, the author of a scientific exploration of hedonism called *Sex, Drugs, and Rock ’n’ Roll*. Cormier’s lectures had been drawing impressive crowds that chose to forgo prime beach hours in favor of ogling diagrams of the clitoris and videos of dancing cockatoos—proving, perhaps, that Obonjan’s organizers were correct in their bet that the new generation of travelers is as interested in learning about pleasure-seeking as in the act itself.

By evening, I had decided to skip the rest of the itinerary and finally go to the beach. En route, I encountered U’dyt, who was in a deflated mood. She had spent the morning photographing pieces from her line, but Kati, her model, had grown tired of their working vacation and retreated to the tent for a nap.

The beach was empty except for a few Croatian women. The wind had picked up, whipping the pines and sending Obonjan’s crickets into a frenzied chorus. As the sun dipped below the horizon, I lay wrapped in one of U’dyt’s blankets, a large white flannel sheet stamped with the word **CONTENTMENT**, and did absolutely nothing. ■

Obonjan’s 2017 season runs from June 23 to September 3. obonjan-island.com; from \$62 per person, per night.

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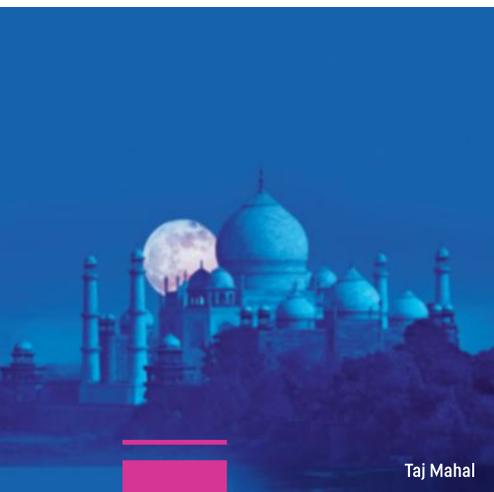
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INDIA

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India's vibrant, diverse cultures and rich history are among the top reasons visitors are drawn to the subcontinent. Visit these **UNESCO World Heritage Sites** to soak up all that and more.



Taj Mahal



INDIA is home to an impressive 35 designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites, from icons like the Taj Mahal to 13th-century sun temples and colonial-era churches. There are also several protected natural sites to explore, including lush national parks and reserves. From north to south, here are eight of India's can't-miss World Heritage Sites.

NORTH

Nothing can prepare you for the breathtaking experience of seeing the **Taj Mahal** for the first time. Built in the 17th century by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, in memory of his beloved wife, the white marble monument and surrounding fountains and pools shimmer with centuries of love.



Monuments of Hampi

Six historic forts—dating from the 8th to 18th centuries—make up the collective World Heritage Site of the **Hill Forts of Rajasthan**. Wander past ancient defense walls and through the remains of what were once hubs of courtly life.

SOUTH

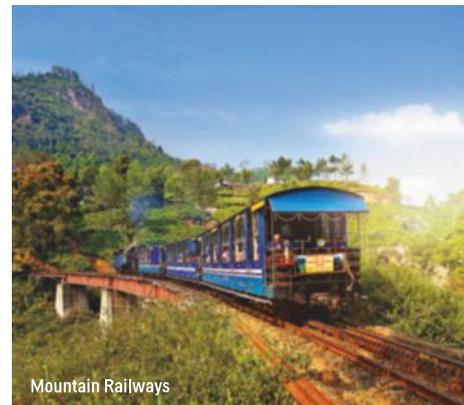
Founded by the Pallava kings in the 7th and 8th centuries, the **Monuments at Mahabalipuram** are a group of carved-rock sanctuaries dotted along the scenic Coromandel coast. Marvel at temples, open-air reliefs, and thousands of unique sculptures.

India boasts several World Heritage-designated **Mountain Railways**, including the Nilgiri track running through the lush Blue Mountains of Tamil Nadu. Completed in 1908, the 28.6-mile single track reaches heights of over 7,000 feet.

EAST

The eastern state of Assam is home to **Kaziranga National Park**, where tigers, panthers, elephants, bears, and the world's largest population of one-horned rhinos live relatively undisturbed by human interference.

Overlooking the Bay of Bengal, the **Sun Temple at Konarak** is a majestic monument to the Sun God. Crafted by the 13th-century Kingdom of Orissa, the temple evokes a godly chariot as it makes its way across the heavens.



Mountain Railways

WEST

On the site of a former Portuguese colony, the **Churches and Convents of Goa** represent diverse architectural styles from Mannerist to Baroque. Don't miss the Basilica of Bom Jesus, built in 1605 and housing the remains of St. Francis Xavier.

Set in the Tungabhadra basin, the **Monuments of Hampi** are all that remains of the last capital of the Kingdom of Vijayanagara. The sumptuous palaces, temples, and bazaars left visitors awe-struck during the 14th to 16th centuries.

Learn more about the World Heritage Sites of India, and plan your next visit, at incredibleindia.org.

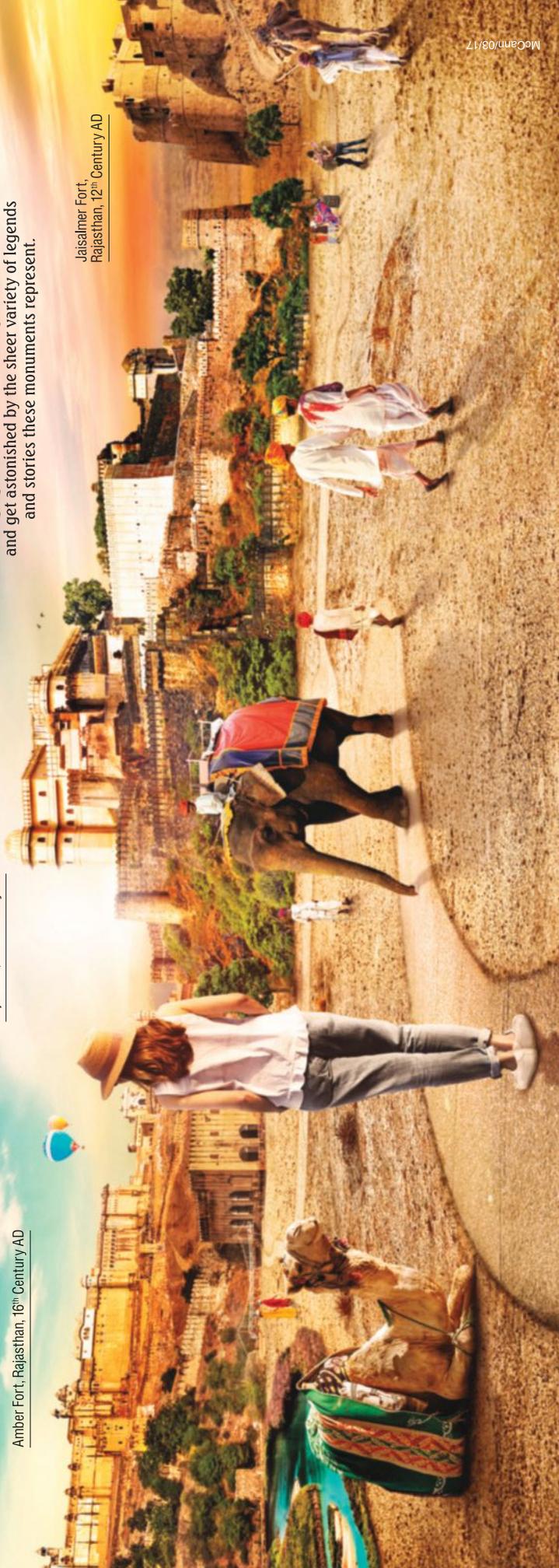
How do you like your forts? Ancient? Majestic? Or Mystical?

This land is dotted with magnificent forts and palaces. Each belonging to different eras and dynasties. Take this trail and get astonished by the sheer variety of legends and stories these monuments represent.

Kumbhalgarh Fort,
Rajasthan, 15th Century AD

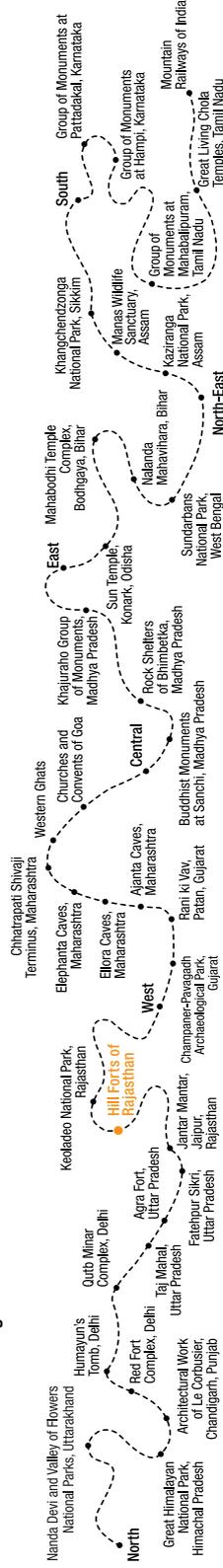
Amber Fort, Rajasthan, 16th Century AD

Jaisalmer Fort,
Rajasthan, 12th Century AD



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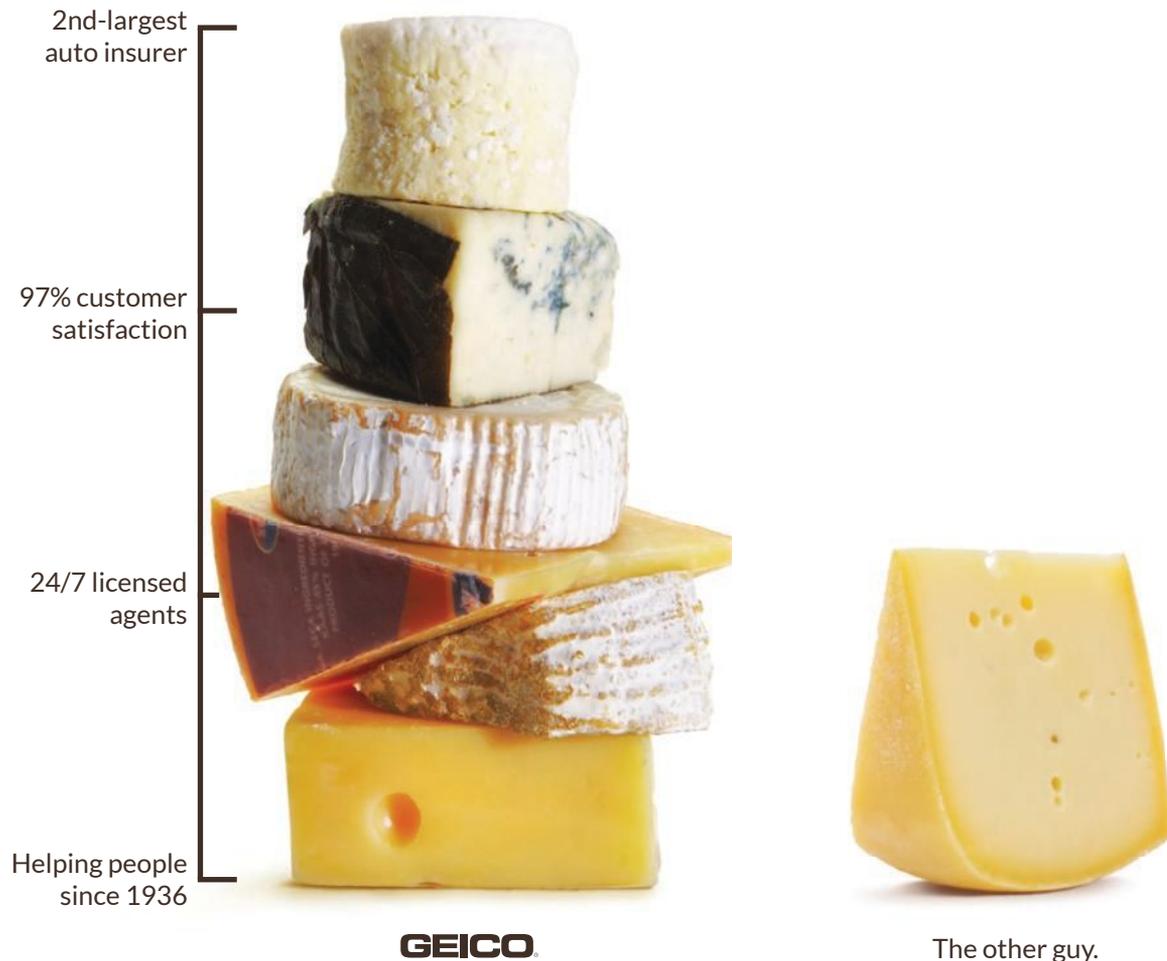
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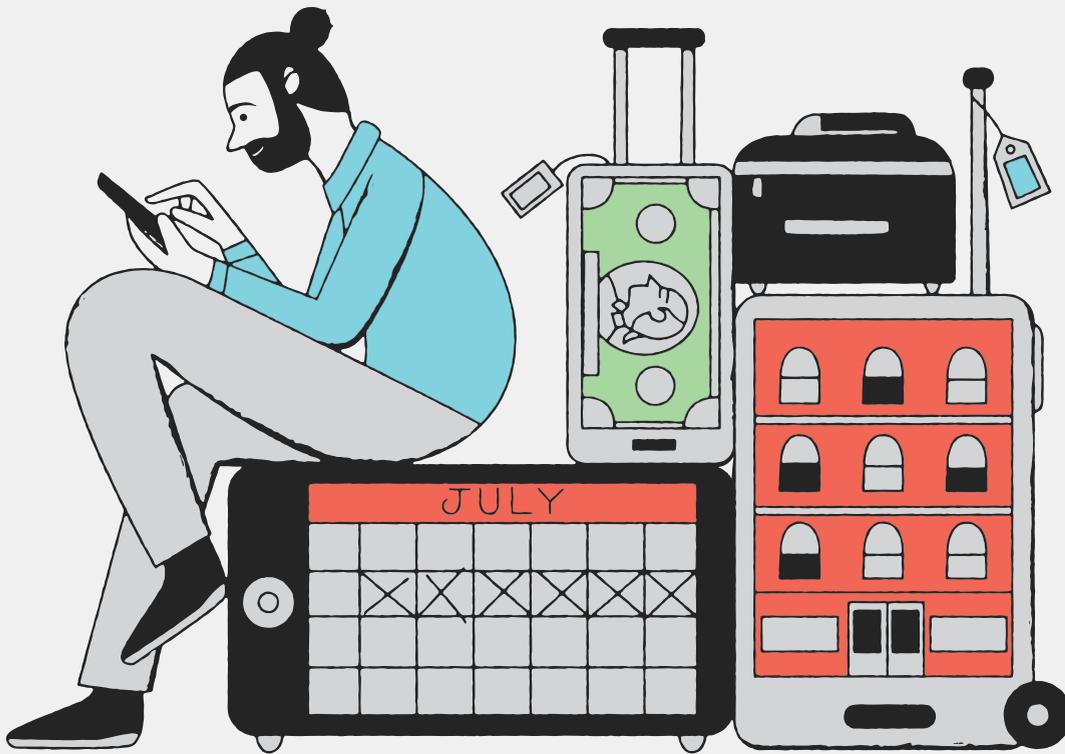
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Upgrade travel smarter



check-in or a room on a higher floor. They will also try to request a free upgrade on your behalf. That's a service most online travel agencies can't provide. fb.com/snaptravel.

Hotelwatchdog

From the founders of Airfarewatchdog, this new website combs dozens of options in any given city and uses a proprietary algorithm to do comparison shopping based on cost, proximity to popular attractions, and guest ratings on TripAdvisor (its parent company). The site will present a list of 20 "expert-analyzed" hotels that its bots deem to have the best value. Or you can choose to see every hotel in your destination and then sort by rating, price, and neighborhood. hotelwatchdog.com.

AsYouStay

A typical hotel stay has you checking in around 3 p.m. and checking out by noon. This new last-minute-travel app is looking to upend that tradition by giving guests more flexibility to choose when they arrive and depart. AsYouStay has partnered with more than 50 properties in New York City, including the Park Lane and the Paul Hotel, and a dozen hotels in Miami's South Beach, with properties in Chicago and San Francisco coming later this year. *Android, iOS; free.*

YOUR NEW (AND IMPROVED) HOTEL STAY

The ground keeps shifting beneath the hospitality industry, as technological advances and evolving customer demands conspire to rewrite the rules of the road. Here's what hotels are doing to meet the needs of today's travelers, and what that means for your next booking.



How to Book Now

With more and more ways to search for hotel rooms, finding the right one has only gotten harder. These three companies aim to streamline the process—and save you money.

—CHRISTOPHER TKACZYK

SnapTravel

Tell this start-up what you're looking for via Facebook Messenger, and a bot will present you with three hotels in seconds, sometimes with better rates than you'd find on websites like Kayak or Expedia.

Use the filter to adjust preferences for location and star rating, or a pinch-and-zoom map for a particular neighborhood. Do you want a room with a view, free Wi-Fi, or a hotel with a pool? Just tell the bot.

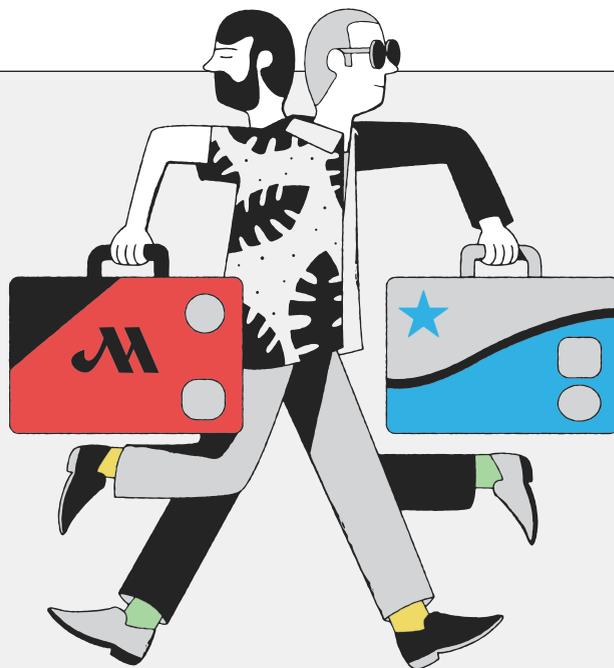
But SnapTravel isn't just a bot. It also has

teams of customer-service reps available 24 hours a day to answer unusual requests that its computers can't address.

On the day of your arrival, a human will call your hotel directly to ensure any special requests will be guaranteed, such as early

GOT MARRIOTT AND STARWOOD POINTS? DO THESE 6 THINGS.

The merger of the two companies has created the world's largest hotel operator with more than 6,000 properties globally. For now, it will continue to offer two loyalty programs, so here's how to get the most out of both of them. —BRIAN KELLY



1 Link your accounts to match status and transfer points.

If you're a member of both programs, link your accounts. Your status will be matched, and you'll be able to transfer points between programs at a 3:1 ratio—that is, three Marriott Rewards points for every one SPG Starpoint. If you're Starwood Platinum, you'll immediately become Marriott Platinum (which normally requires 75 nights). More important, Marriott's RewardsPlus program will also qualify you for Silver Elite status on United Airlines.

2 Pick which account you'll accrue points in.

Even if you're elite in both programs, you can only credit nights to either Marriott Rewards or SPG, which is an important consideration if you're tempted to try out your newfound elite status.

3 Look at both points currencies to find the best value.

You can transfer points between the programs for free as many times as you'd like. When redeeming points for free nights, Marriott Rewards has nine categories of hotels, while SPG has seven. Since SPG has fewer categories, it's hard to match them up evenly, but, in general, Starwood offers better value at lower-end hotels and Marriott offers the better value for top-tier properties. When looking at comparable Marriott and Starwood properties, choose the one that has the best conversion value.

4 Buy a vacation package to get a hotel stay and airline miles.

Marriott has hotel-and-air packages that include seven nights of hotel accommodation and also a deposit of airline miles into your frequent-flyer account. Marriott has an arrangement with United

in which you get more miles versus other airlines, and United miles can be extremely valuable—especially for international first- and business-class awards. For example, for 250,000 Marriott Rewards points (or 83,333 SPG Starpoints), you can stay for seven nights at the Lisbon Marriott Hotel and also get 110,000 United miles.

5 Convert your SPG Starpoints into airline miles.

SPG has 36 airline partners that allow you to turn your points into miles, and you'll earn an extra 5,000 points for every 20,000 transferred. Which partner is the best? It all depends, but I recommend looking into the frequent-flyer programs of foreign airlines. I recently got huge value from

first-class redemptions on Korean Air and Singapore Airlines.

6 Cash in your Starpoints for SPG Moments.

SPG Moments are experiences that are offered via auction or fixed price and give great access to concerts, sports, and special events. Some of my best redemptions using SPG points have been at Madison Square Garden, where SPG has a luxury box that offers mid-court or mid-rink seats with VIP service, including full meals plus beer and wine. One of my best uses of points was taking my dad to see his favorite team, the New York Knicks. For 45,000 SPG points we got VIP box seats with a retail value in the thousands.

Get more from Brian Kelly, the Points Guy, on travelandleisure.com.

How to Get a Suite Deal

Terror attacks, political turmoil, and fear of Zika have resulted in big hotel discounts. This is where to find them.

—CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT



London

After the controversial Brexit vote, the pound slid against the dollar, making the United Kingdom more affordable. The Langham is offering four nights for the price of three until September 30. The Athenaeum is offering seven nights for the price of five for stays booked by April 30.



Paris

A weaker euro and continued terrorism worries have made the City of Light a destination for luxury-seeking visitors on a budget. Le Bristol's "I Love Paris" offer includes a room upgrade, cocktails, and dinner at Michelin-starred Brasserie 114 Faubourg, all for \$1,150 per night.



Rio de Janeiro

A lot of new hotels were built to accommodate the influx of tourists for the 2016 Summer Olympics, and now there's an abundance of empty rooms. The Miramar Hotel by Windsor in Copacabana is offering a fourth night free and free breakfast through July 31.



Miami

Fears of the Zika virus have softened tourist demand, prompting some deals at oceanfront hotels. The Fontainebleau Miami Beach is offering the fourth night free and \$300 in dining and spa credits through April, and the Shelborne is offering summer rates of \$149 per night.



The Caribbean

Following a dip in tourism owing to the Zika scare, hotels throughout the Caribbean are dropping prices to attract visitors. Kimpton's new Seafire Resort & Spa, on Grand Cayman, is offering a fourth night free on summer stays booked by March 31.



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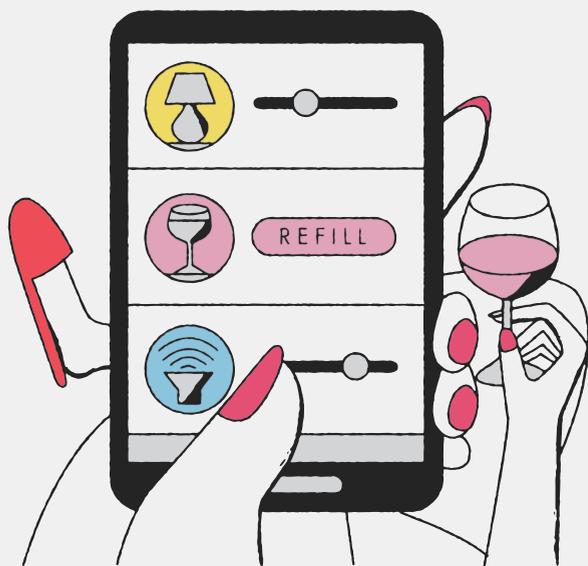
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SERVICE NOW: ALEXA vs. ARTISTS

While technology is replacing people at many points in a guest's stay, automation has freed up companies to devote resources to ever more personalized services—and the rise of hyper-localism has only helped hasten the shift. Here's a look at where hotels are heading on both ends of the spectrum. —LILA BATTIS AND GRANT MARTIN



HIGH-TECH

Virtual Check-In

Tech-minded travelers can check in via app at the Conrad Chicago, then use its virtual-reality concierge to preview popular attractions like the Willis Tower Skydeck, or find the hottest new restaurants and see what's onstage in the local theater scene. [conradhotels.com](#); doubles from \$235.

Text Requests

The Asbury, on the New Jersey shore, streamlines your stay with texting: order a rosé refill right from your poolside deck chair, or let the valet know you're leaving, and you'll find your car waiting curbside. [theasburyhotel.com](#); doubles from \$175.

Smart Rooms

Later this summer, Amazon Echo-enabled automated hotel rooms will debut at the Wynn Las Vegas. Set your alarm, shut the curtains, crank the AC, and switch off the lights—all without leaving your bed. [wynnlasvegas.com](#); doubles from \$199.

Doing Their Homework

Visitors at the Clement in Palo Alto, California, are greeted by an iPad-wielding personal concierge who has prepared a list of suggestions of things to do based on a guest survey, preferences, and length of stay. [theclementpaloalto.com](#); doubles from \$799.

Tour Guide App

Guests doing the art circuit in Philadelphia can download the Logan's smartphone app to take a tour of the hotel's curated contemporary art collection. [theloganhotel.com](#); doubles from \$219.

Chatbot Concierge

Guests at the Cosmopolitan, in Las Vegas, are given a card bearing a phone number for Rose, the world's first bot concierge, whom they can text for (almost) anything they might need, including restaurant reservations or hard-to-get Cirque du Soleil tickets. [cosmopolitanlasvegas.com](#); doubles from \$220.



LUDDITE

Artists-in-Residence

For the renovation of the Hilton Curio Collection's Renwick Hotel, in New York City, Brooklyn artists Ben Cowan and Gregory Siff were hired to paint murals in rooms to honor former guests Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. [therenwickhotelnewyork.com](#); doubles from \$399.

In-House Tattoo Artist

For two weeks this July, guests at the W New York–Union Square can get a long-lasting souvenir from famous ink master Joey Peng. [whotels.com](#); doubles from \$325.

Lobby as Hangout

British artist Max Lamb was commissioned to design furniture for the social-hub lobby of the Ace Hotel London Shoreditch. The lounge-like space is divided into multiple rooms and has a 16-seat table, which locals often use as a shared workspace. [acehotel.com](#); doubles from \$180.

Instrument Lending Library

Close to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, in Cleveland, the Kimpton Schofield Hotel has a complimentary loaner program that lets guests borrow guitars for private jam sessions in their rooms. [theschofieldhotel.com](#); doubles from \$159.

Neighborhood Guide

In addition to the craft-microbrew happy hour, guests get a leather backpack at the Journeyman Hotel in Milwaukee. It's loaded with suggested itineraries for exploring nearby neighborhoods. [journeymanhotel.com](#); doubles from \$179.

Regional Flavors

The experimental M Beta hospitality laboratory at the Charlotte Marriott City Center hired city native Chris Coleman to run Stoke, its farm-to-table restaurant serving Carolina cuisine. Even the lobby gift shop sells items made by locals. [marriott.com](#); doubles from \$169.

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A ROOM OF HER OWN

Gone are the days of the Barbizon Hotel for Women. Or are they? Some hotel operators are beginning to target the needs and desires of solo female travelers with new room design, extra security features, and luxury bath products.

— JESS MCHUGH



When Carolyn Pearson started Maiden Voyage eight years ago to provide advice and connect solo women travelers so they wouldn't have to dine alone, many hotels weren't even thinking about that demographic. But with women now making up nearly half of all business travelers in the U.S. and Europe, more hotels are changing their strategy. "The industry is starting to wake up, and some hotels are asking, 'How do we get involved?'" Pearson says.

Of course, most of the amenities that female business travelers look for are shared by their male counterparts—clean rooms, strong Wi-Fi, and reliable security, to name a few. Some might criticize "women's only" zones that

seem to rely on pampering over practicality. One travel expert isn't sold on the idea. "It's insulting," says Michelle 'Mick' Lee, the founder of Women in Travel and a member of T+L's Business Travel Advisory Board. "With all of our efforts to achieve equality, hearing about items only for females (hair dryers, nylons, etc.) hits me as borderline insulting unless it is followed up by items for men and services for all." That hasn't stopped several hotels from rethinking their rooms with women in mind in a variety of ways.

CHAMBER ROOMS

In Chicago, every room at the new Virgin Hotel has a lounge and a dressing room that can be closed off from the private bedroom by a

sliding wooden door with a peephole. Guests can order room service and have it delivered without interacting with hotel staff.

ADDED SECURITY

The Hamilton Crowne Plaza in Washington, D.C., has a women's floor accessible via a special key card. "Safety is a big concern, especially knowing how easily hotel employees can just come into your room," says Sarah Cloninger, author of travel blog *Road Warriorette*.

MORE CLOSET SPACE

The Virgin Hotel was designed to have larger closets with a sliding shoe rack. Walk-in closets have long been a staple of luxury brands, such as Ritz-Carlton and Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts.

ALL-FEMALE STAFF

The Grange Hotel, in London, has "female friendly" Superior and Executive rooms that are exclusively serviced by an all-female staff "to give our guests added peace of mind," according to the hotel.

WOMEN-ONLY FLOORS

The Ellis Hotel, in Atlanta, has an entire floor that can be booked only by female travelers. Access requires a special key.

LUXURIOUS AMENITIES

Each of the rooms at the Ellis is stocked with L'Occitane beauty products and extra-soft slippers and bathrobes. And, taking it perhaps a bit too far, the Ellis even pipes floral-scented air into the women's floor.

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Art of Aloha HAWAII

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100 Percent Hawaiian

Uncover a treasure trove of art and culture on every one of the Hawaiian Islands. Many resorts boast cultural directors who can help you delve deeper into the authentic heart of Hawai'i.

➤ HAWAII ISLAND

The largest of the Hawaiian Islands is home to a vibrant community of artists and craftspeople. Browse the art galleries of downtown Hilo, as well as charming towns like Holualoa and Hawi, keeping your eye out for paintings, jewelry, glassware, and hand-carved koa wood bowls to take home.

➤ MAUI

Step back in time and experience 19th-century whaling culture in Lahaina, once a bustling port for whaling ships and sailors. As you wander through town, look for the numerous bronze plaques marking historic sites. Inland, head to the upcountry town of Makawao, where you can learn about *paniolo* (cowboy) culture and take a horseback ride in the fertile highlands.

➤ KAUAI

Follow the 10-mile Kōloa Heritage Trail on the island's South Shore, where points of interest include Kihāhouna Heiau, the site of an ancient Hawaiian temple, as well as the Sugar Monument, commemorating Hawai'i's first sugar mill. Stop along the way for a picnic and a swim at gorgeous Po'ipū Beach Park.

➤ O'AHU

At the Polynesian Cultural Center on the island's North Shore, learn to weave a lei, crack open a coconut, or catch an evening show with over 100 performers. Or enjoy the spectacle of fire-knife dancing—reminiscent of a Samoan warrior ritual—at lū'au dinner shows throughout Hawai'i.



MAUI ESCAPE ASTON KAAPALI SHORES

Check into Aston Kaanapali Shores. These beachfront digs on Maui combine the comforts of home with resort-style amenities and allure. Relax in a spacious studio or one- or two-bedroom suite with a fully equipped kitchen, separate living area, and private balcony—or lounge by two freshwater pools with cabanas and poolside dining. Dive into activities from lei-making and hula to scuba and yoga, while the kids enjoy Camp Kaanapali beach explorations, nature walks, and more. kaanapalishores.com | 866-774-2924



KAANAPALI SHORES

A Taste of Hawai'i

Experience the soul of Hawai'i through its food. Get the inside scoop on the Islands' ever-evolving dining scene with the following Q&A featuring Joseph Rose, Chef de Cuisine of Japengo Steak and Seafood and SWIM restaurants at Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa.

Q: HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR DISHES A PERSONAL TWIST?

I let the ingredients speak for themselves. We have this beautiful grass-fed beef from Kaua'i that we cook with rendered beef fat, garlic, and thyme for a roasted meaty flavor.

Q: WHICH LOCAL INGREDIENTS DO YOU USE?

We source island-grown produce like micro-greens and baby carrots, and exotic fruits such as mountain apple and breadfruit. And the fresh fish is spectacular.

Q: A TRADITIONAL HAWAIIAN DISH TO TRY?

I go for lualau, which is salted pork and butterfish wrapped in taro leaves.

Q: YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT THE HYATT REGENCY WAIKIKI?

Our farmers' market on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It attracts a lot of vendors selling local produce, chocolates, and crafts.

Q: ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE HAWAII'S FOOD SCENE?

Eclectic. Hawai'i is such a melting pot of cultures so you can get just about anything: Japanese, Filipino, native Hawaiian. It's a pretty dynamic scene.



Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa

The ancient spirit of aloha comes alive at this welcoming island retreat, set between the beauty of Waikiki Beach and the dynamic city center.



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FALL IN LOVE AGAIN

For couples, Outrigger Waikiki Beach Resort and Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort on Oahu both offer complimentary Hawaiian-inspired beachfront vow renewal ceremonies. The rising sun, blue ocean, and soft sand are your witnesses as a ceremonial leader offers up chants, prayers, and rituals steeped in Hawaiian tradition. *Hōi huo ke aloha*—to fall in love all over again—is the theme of the ceremony, which honors couples with the words and wisdom of the ancients.

MUSIC, DANCE, AND CRAFT

Signature Experiences at Outrigger Waikiki Beach Resort include forays into the richly textured cultural expressions of Hawai'i. Take a 'ukulele lesson with a local teacher, learn to dance the hula, or make a ti leaf lei. Craft a kukui nut bracelet to take home, or make a Hawaiian petroglyph greeting card. The daily schedule at the resort offers opportunities to practice easy traditional crafts, and perhaps to "talk story" with local artisans.

HEARTFELT CONNECTIONS

From sunrise to sunset, Outrigger Resorts' Signature Experiences enfold you in the spirit of Hawai'i. At each resort, guests can participate in an authentic Sunset Ceremony, while at the weekly Manager's Reception you can connect with hosts and staff over cocktails and local bites. You're welcomed with a special gift upon arrival, such as a carefully crafted lei of shells, and presented with a locally inspired amenity upon departure, with wishes for a safe and happy journey home.

GENUINE HAWAII

At Outrigger Resorts, you can have your sugar-soft sand, your rolling waves, and your cocktails by the pool. But there's so much more *Hawai'i* to experience here, too: from warm, inviting culture to expressive music and rich local traditions. That's the spirit behind Outrigger Resorts' Signature Experiences, a new series of cultural activities, programs, and amenities that connects you to the people and sense of place at each beachfront destination. From music and dance to expressions of the heart, every endeavor adds a layer of richness and authenticity to your Hawaiian getaway.



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Timeless Allure

THE REAL HAWAII

With Starwood Hawai'i, you'll find yourself living luxuriously on or just steps away from some of the world's most beautiful beaches. But you're not just anywhere—you're in Hawai'i, a destination steeped in history and tradition. At each one of Starwood's 11 hotels, you'll get a chance to savor the distinct sense of place and unique allure of the surrounding island, whether it be O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i, or Hawai'i Island.

AMBASSADORS OF CULTURE

Cultural specialists are on hand at many of Starwood's properties to offer stories and facts about Hawai'i's vibrant heritage. These knowledgeable advisors act as your link to the host culture, introducing activities and experiences that can only happen in Hawai'i. Daily offerings might include Hawaiian arts and crafts such as lei making and basket weaving; outdoor pursuits like nature walks or stargazing; or the magic and spectacle of a fire-knife dance or cliff-diving ceremony.

HANDS-ON DISCOVERIES

At The Westin Ka'anapali Ocean Resort Villas on Maui, the Pu'uhonua Cultural Center is the place to explore Hawaiian culture and partake in activities such as 'ukulele lessons and coconut-frond weaving. On Kaua'i, at The Westin Princeville Ocean Resort, guests can experience the lovely Lei Aloha ceremony, which includes conch-shell blowing, a lei exchange, *honi* (kiss or greeting), and *mele* (song).

FANTASTIC FEASTS

There's something truly magical about the luaus at Starwood resorts, which feature meticulously prepared local foods, accompanied by authentic Hawaiian music and dance. At The Royal Hawaiian, a Luxury Collection Resort, an elaborate "Aha'aina" feast and three-act show takes place every Monday evening amid the backdrop of Waikiki Beach and Diamond Head. And at the Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay, a weekly dinner performance of "Haleo – The Voice of Life" showcases skilled local musicians and dancers, traditional crafts, and stories rich with the history of Hawai'i Island.



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KAUA'I



O'AHU



MAUI



HAWAI'I ISLAND



LEFT TO RIGHT: THE ST. REGIS PRINCEVILLE RESORT; MOANA SURFRIDER, A WESTIN RESORT & SPA; THE WESTIN MAUI RESORT & SPA; SHERATON KONA RESORT & SPA AT KEAUHOU BAY

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PEACE *in the*

VANTU





HIGH IN THE PERUVIAN ANDES LIES THE SACRED VALLEY,
THE FERTILE PARADISE THAT GAVE RISE TO THE
INCAN EMPIRE AND, EVEN TODAY, REMAINS
A PLACE OF ALMOST DIVINE COMMUNION
BETWEEN THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE.

by **STEPHANIE DANLER** *photographs by* **NICK BALLON**

Hiking the Incañan,
the most demanding
of the more than 20
Sacred Valley activities
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IN OUR FIRST NIGHT IN THE SACRED VALLEY, WE BLANKETED OURSELVES IN DOWN AND LEFT THE WINDOWS OPEN TO THE CHILL OF THE ANDES. NEAR DAWN, WE WOKE TO GOLD-FLECKED FINCHES TRILLING IN THE FIELDS. THE SACRED VALLEY ISN'T SOMEWHERE YOU GO TO SLEEP IN. YOU GO TO WATCH THE WAY THE LIGHT AND CLOUDS INTERACT, THE WAY DIFFERENT PEAKS ARE SHADOWED, THEN EXPOSED.

My boyfriend, Matt, and I had come to this storied place in the mountains of Peru for a week. We were staying first at the Explora Valle Sagrado, a resort on an old corn plantation outside the village of Urquillos that is set up to help guests get outside and experience the area as fully as possible. Our first activity, at eight that morning, was an easy bike ride along the Urubamba River. After multiple cups of coffee and seconds on avocado toast and bowls of papaya, we met our guide, Luis, who made sure we were equipped. We could refill our water bottles with filtered water all over the property, he told us. At reception, there were snacks—cashews, almonds, dried mango, bitter dark chocolate, and “power balls” (quinoa, honey, dates, amaranth) to scoop from overflowing bowls. We were encouraged to dip into the huge containers of pasty white sunblock—SPF 100.

A bus took us to Taray, which sits just across the river from Pisac, a picturesque Andean village below a beautifully preserved Incan citadel with terraces that cascade down the mountain. From there, we pedaled for 20 relatively flat miles along a dirt trail. We rode past scenes of agrarian life that were so idyllic they almost looked staged: farmers working cornfields by hand or by donkey, women walking llamas. We passed crumbling manors and corrugated-steel sheds that were exquisitely juxtaposed against summits and glaciers. The sky was so broad, the panorama so dynamic, that we kept twisting around on our bikes to see more. Every time I finished an incline, I felt the elevation: a slight vertigo that caught me by surprise.

On breaks, there was hot tea made from *muña*, an Andean herb similar to mint that is excellent for digestion and altitude sickness. When we finished the ride, we found a table set up with raw vegetables, avocado dip, and a bucket of water and beer. This was in a quiet plaza in Urquillos, less a town than a small outcropping of adobe buildings with terra-cotta-tiled roofs. We sat under a towering *pisonay* tree with scarlet-red

blossoms. Luis told us that the *pisonay* was sacred to both the Incas and their descendants, the Quechua, who have inhabited the Andes for the past six centuries. Whenever the Spanish built a church, the Quechua planted a *pisonay* tree nearby.

“For Pachamama,” Luis said, pouring beer onto the roots of the tree before drinking some himself. Pachamama, the benevolent fertility deity of Incan mythology, is the Mother Earth of the Andes. The Quechua perform this toast—called a *challa*—constantly. It’s just one of the many ways they act out their gratitude for their awe-inspiring natural surroundings.

I have a long history of hiking and a fondness for the remote, and I still plan trips around walks. Matt must have recognized this immediately, because within a month of meeting he had me winter-camping in Death Valley. I shivered and grinned in a freezing rain, got up in the pitch-black to watch the sun rise over the salt flats. And while I do cherish time in a lounge chair reading and diving in to the cuisine of a place, the truth is that when I travel I’m often seeking

Opposite: The design of the Explora Valle Sagrado maximizes guests' experience of the surrounding mountains.



Right: Salt evaporation ponds outside the town of Maras that date from Incan times.

some holier connection. A moment of quiet that will leave its mark on me. And that usually leads me outside.

We had arrived the day before, from Los Angeles by way of Lima and Cuzco. Most visitors don't stay in the Sacred Valley nearly as long as we planned to. More often, they spend a night on their way to Machu Picchu, going to Pisac and Chincero on a day trip to take a few photographs and buy textiles, skipping the ruins in the hills above Ollantaytambo, the multiple UNESCO World Heritage sites, and the traditional farms and fields that still power this fertile center of Andean civilization. Recently, though, elegant properties like the Explora Valle Sagrado have begun catering to active travelers like us by offering more intimate, less mediated ways to experience the region's natural splendors.

Everyone brings up altitude sickness when you tell them you're visiting the Andes. Even the flight attendants warned us about it as the plane descended. But I only took it seriously with my first woozy step onto the tarmac in Cuzco, elevation 11,000 feet.

"I think I have it," I told Matt.

"You barely slept," he replied. "You don't know what you have." He was thoroughly energized, as usual. Whether I had it or not, I was definitely in better shape than the woman I saw in the airport bathroom leaning over the sink, heaving, her face drained of color.

Uneasily, I boarded the Explora charter shuttle. As it wound along the curvy mountain roads, I sipped from a canteen of chilled water I'd been given and studied an elegant hotel brochure, *The Art of Travel*, which asked pseudo-philosophical questions like, *¿Por qué exploramos?* Matt, who speaks fluent Spanish, struck up a conversation with the man behind us. I heard the word *arquitecto*.

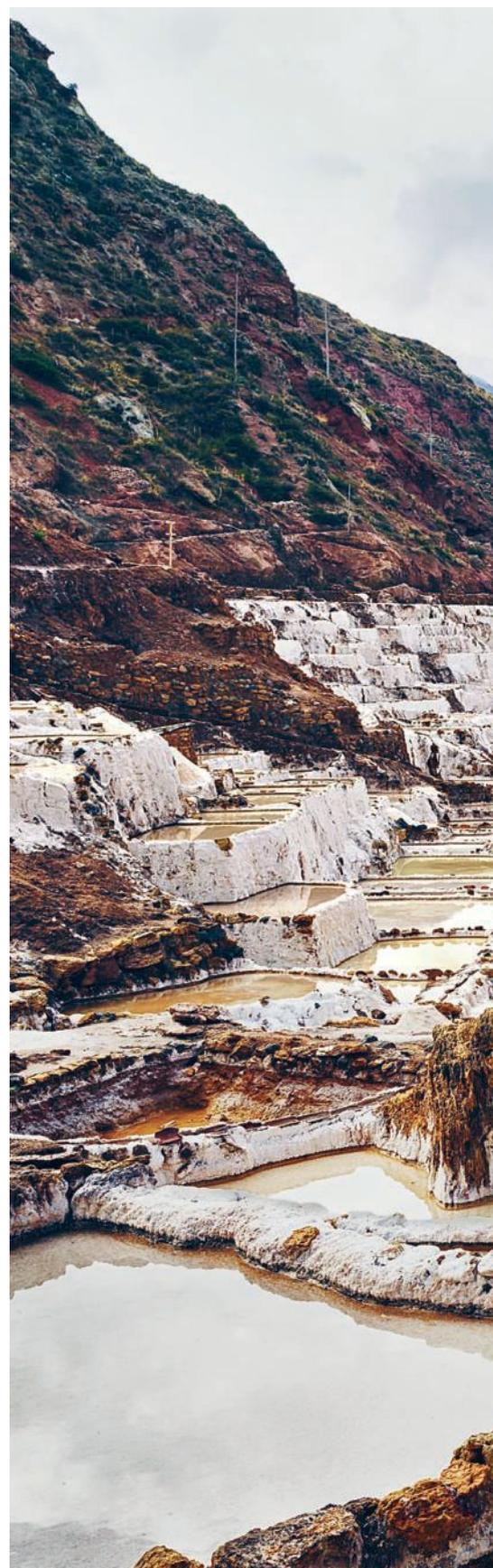
"Architect of what?" I whispered.

"The architect. Of all the Exploras."

The man was José Cruz Ovalle, who has worked for Explora since 1993, when the company opened its first property in Torres del Paine National Park in Chilean Patagonia. He designs his buildings, he told Matt, to be in conversation with nature, to enhance and expand the outside rather than insulate guests from it. Explora applies the same ethic to the overall experience, offering guests unique itineraries, or what it calls explorations, that often follow new trails or routes and access remote parts of the countryside.

Our shuttle stopped high on a hill, allowing us to approach the hotel on foot. Bridges spanning terraces linked us to a low building down below where the lights were coming on. I tried to follow Cruz Ovalle and Matt's conversation about the 15th-century cornfield the hotel sits beside. Corn was akin to gold for the Incas, Cruz Ovalle explained, and this heirloom variety of *paraqay sara*, a large, white-kerneled corn also called the "giant white maize of Cuzco," is still regarded as the best in Peru. The jade of the corn leaves was a color I'd never seen before. Rimming the field were purple-flowering quinoa plants that twitched with birds. Jagged, snowcapped mountains loomed beyond. The sky was dusky, as if stained by the purple of the flowers.

That evening set the pattern for our nights at the Explora Valle Sagrado. We ordered pisco sours at the bar, which came accompanied by endless trays of Andean bar snacks that I couldn't stop eating: crunchy plantains, fava beans, corn kernels, some the size of tiny raindrops, some as fat as a knuckle. Then, in the lounge, a guide found us to sort out our explorations for the next day. *What's your activity level at home? How are you feeling?* The hyper-personalized interaction with an expert makes you feel like you can accomplish anything.





Still, I had second thoughts when Matt announced what he wanted us to do the day after our bike ride: a hike called Incañan that is considered the pinnacle of all Explora activities. It is 11 miles long and climbs more than 3,000 feet, reaching an elevation above 15,000 feet. It features three distinct topographies, passing glaciers, remote Quechuan villages, and Mount Sawasiray, which soars to a majestic 19,088 feet. It is supposed to require three to four days of acclimation. We'd had one. Matt seemed not to care at all.

"It's against our policy," our new guide, Bruno, said carefully. He was beloved by the English-speaking guests because he had perfected the language while living in New York City.

"We can do it," Matt said.

"Well, you seem fit," he said, "but, you know, I had these Americans earlier this month—just like you, city people—and we let them go after three days of acclimation. It took us almost ten hours on the trail and the lady was throwing up the whole time. I think she was fairly...unhappy."

Visions of myself a whitish green, vomiting in front of a group of strangers. Visions of rain and snow and wet socks. I turned to Matt. "No way. I do not want to be unhappy."

"We hike all the time," he said. "It only goes up to fifteen thousand. You hiked fourteeners when you lived in Colorado."

"What is this 'all the time'? And I was sixteen years old!"

Bruno was amused. I grabbed the map.

"Cinco Lagunas sounds pretty. Five lakes. Doesn't that sound pretty?" I reviewed the options. "What's comparable to Incañan?"

"Nothing," Bruno shrugged. "But there's some nice hikes."

"Babe." Matt was about to utter the phrase that is always the nail in my coffin when we travel together. "How many times are we going to get this opportunity?"

It was pouring rain when we got up in darkness at 5 a.m. It bent the quinoa plants, pounded the leaves of the corn. "Pouring," I said, glaring, as we stuffed our backpacks.

We met Bruno and another guide, Moises, as well as two fellow guests who would be joining us. Everyone wore head-to-toe rain gear. "Do you have pants?" Bruno asked about my SoulCycle leggings.

"These *are* pants," I said, gritting my teeth.

It was a long drive to the trailhead, long enough that the rain stopped and the hills greened and I lost my morning angst. I began to feel a nauseated excitement, though it could have just been the altitude.

I stubbornly took the lead as we hit the trail. It only took a few minutes in that bracing air before the muscle memory kicked in, and not just in my legs. It was an emotional muscle memory of going into a space where the only noise is wind. Already above the tree line, we climbed to a high alpine meadow laced with streams and carpeted with moss and petite wildflowers. Alpacas, llamas, and herding dogs dotted the valley floor, tended by women in bright-red woven skirts



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The Details
More about where to stay and what to do, page 116

and bowler hats. We passed diminutive stone cottages with thatched roofs, shelters actively used by herding families. I saw

stacks of dried animal dung that, Moises said, the Quechua use for fuel for cooking. Waste converted to energy: another way these people find harmony with their landscape.

As I struggled with the ascent, Moises mentioned that the children who live in these houses hike an hour and a half each way to school. I noticed that rather than following a well-marked trail, we were ascending the contour lines of the hillside. All of the Explora guides had trained for at least five months prior to its opening, so Bruno and Moises knew every footstep of these mountains, in every kind of weather.

They also knew when to offer up the bag of coca leaves. Coca was a divine plant to the Incas, and even today, chewing coca leaves is a mark of the Quechua's connection to the earth. The leaves are a cure for altitude sickness and a mild stimulant on par with a cup of coffee, but because they are also used to produce cocaine, they have long been controversial. A United Nations ban in the 1960s, since relaxed, outlawed their use, but they have remained an integral part of Quechuan culture. As a lover of all things bitter, I was happy to chew them as we hit the final, steepest section of the ascent.

I was soon overcome by two realizations: The first was that I was feeling quite ill. My head hurt. I was nauseated. If I didn't focus intensely on (Continued on page 121)

WE PASSED SCENES OF AGRARIAN LIFE
THAT WERE SO IDYLIC THEY
ALMOST LOOKED STAGED: FARMERS
WORKING CORNFIELDS BY HAND OR BY
DONKEY, WOMEN WALKING LLAMAS.



Clockwise from above: The reception area at the Explora Valle Sagrado; the interior patio at the Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, in a traditional Andean farmhouse; beet gnocchi with Brazil-nut sauce and *jamón serrano* at the Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, a dish made from produce grown on the property's organic farm. *Opposite:* A Quechua woman follows the route of the Explora Valle Sagrado's Incañan hike.





Turquoise

**Why go all the way to the Maldives for a beach?
Because, as *Maria Shollenbarger* finds at four new resorts, nowhere
else does sea, sand, and splendor quite like this.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SEAN FENNESSY



The master bath in
the Water Villa at Four
Seasons Private
Island at Voavah.
Opposite: Reception
and guest villas
at the St. Regis
Maldives Vommuli
Island Resort.

Dream

F

From the headlines, you wouldn't guess that the Maldives is an excellent place to go in 2017. This island nation of just 375,000 citizens, spread across 26 atolls in the Indian Ocean, has come in for a tough reckoning of late, and not without good reason. Corruption charges have plagued the government since former president Mohamed Nasheed, elected in 2008 in the country's first multi-party democratic vote, was ousted in 2012 and briefly jailed on "terrorism" charges, in what his supporters called a military coup. (He eventually sought asylum in the United Kingdom.) The Maldives is still a democratic republic, but Islamic law plays a major role in both government and society. And when the British Commonwealth threatened to suspend the Maldives last September because of the country's increasingly poor human-rights record, current president Abdulla Yameen responded by voluntarily withdrawing—making it only the fourth country in the 52-nation assembly's history to do so.



And then there are the country's environmental challenges. With a national average altitude of just four to six feet above mean sea level, it's conceivable that, if polar ice melt continues on its current trajectory, by the end of the century a good deal of the Maldives could be underwater.

But it's far from all bad news here. Environmental protection is still high on the government's priority list (the Maldives was quick to ratify the Paris climate agreement), and tourism thrives (more than 1 million visitors came in 2016). The prodigious physical attributes that have long lured honeymooners and sybarites—that amazing sea, displaying the full color-wheel range of blues; those powdery white beaches—are still present and accounted for. If you're keen to see marine life, from thumb-size anemonefish to giant manta rays, it's here in an abundance found in few other places in the world. And if you want to appreciate (or have your kids appreciate) with an equally rare immediacy how imperiled that bounty is by pollution and climate change, the Maldives is one of the best places on the planet for such a field lesson.



Deck seating at the St. Regis Maldives Vommuli's Whale Bar.

This past year, a raft of new resorts—from the Noonu Atoll in the north to Dhaalu in the south—have opened, each with its own take on the castaway luxury that has made the Maldives famous. Chances are there's a singular escape for nearly every type of beach-seeking traveler.

THE GILDED GRANDE DAME

St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Island Resort

Just a 45-minute flight by seaplane from Malé, the capital, lies the newest member of the St. Regis portfolio, which is set on the private Vommuli Island—diminutive at 23 acres, dense with palms and pandani, and easy to circumnavigate on foot along neatly kept sand paths. Seventy-seven palatial villas are spread across the island and along the small lagoon that extends to its north. The Singapore-based architects, WOW, wanted to reference the famous marine environment through the buildings' design: hence the

overwater villas, their subtly sloping roofs clad in silvery shingles, evoke manta rays powering through the sea, and the long, overwater Whale Bar takes the unmistakable shape of a whale shark, its far end open like the massive fish's mouth to allow for prime sunset vistas.

St. Regis hotels often celebrate the opulence of the brand's Gilded Age New York flagship. At Alba, the excellent Mediterranean restaurant overlooking the infinity pool and beach, the materials on display (exotic stone, mullioned glass, chandeliers) might seem at home in Italy or the French Riviera and out of place in the Indian Ocean, yet they somehow make sense. Certainly at night, when Alba is softly lit and irresistibly pretty. (I'm



not sure a marble-clad bathroom in an overwater wood villa will ever feel 100 percent right to me, but the aesthetic effect is admittedly lovely.) Just down the beach is Crust, a sand-floored, six-table, open-air joint that turns out killer pizzas and grilled bruschettas, nothing else, and that is perfection. Likewise the one-bedroom, A-frame beach villas, with their 20-foot-tall picture windows overlooking private plunge pools.

There's an exceptionally cool fitness-recreation complex at the island's center, where a naturopathic doctor administers acupuncture, and manicures and blow-drys can be had in the jewel box of a beauty salon. The main spa, which specializes in ayurveda-inspired treatments (as well as serious ayurvedic detox programs,

overseen by a staff doctor), is a stunning construction, its weaving jetties leading to ultra-private treatment suites, each with an alfresco bath.

What St. Regis seems to get right everywhere is service, and Vommuli is no exception. Starting with my airport transfer, where a video of my butler welcoming me played on an iPad in the car ride, through to the iced watermelon juice I was brought as refreshment for my flight out, there was a warm, highly competent interaction at most every turn. *stregis.com; doubles from \$1,770.*

THE GROWN-UP'S PLAYGROUND

Soneva Jani

When Soneva Fushi opened in the Maldives in 1995, sustainable luxury was a pioneering concept—one that its owner-founder, Sonu Shivdasani, championed with groundbreaking recycling and building practices. Last November (21 years later), Soneva Jani opened in the northern Noonu Atoll, on the largest site ever developed



From far left: Water access from the Gathering at Soneva Jani; the beach at the St. Regis Vommuli; the living room of the Water Villa at the Four Seasons Voavah.



in the Maldives: an oval lagoon some three miles long, ringed on its eastern edge by a cluster of islands. The biggest island, clocking in at around 150 acres, will eventually be home to 32 villas of various sizes, along with two restaurants, a scuba and watersports center, and an ayurvedic spa. Its outdoor cinema is already screening nightly entertainment. (The other two islands are used for intimate “Crusoe” experiences: lantern-lit dinners, spa treatments, and the like.)

Meanwhile, the resort’s 24 overwater villas are open for business, strung like charms on a bracelet along an undulating boardwalk that extends from the main island into the lagoon. These are punctuated by a multistory complex known as the Gathering, which holds two restaurants, a bar/lounge, a boutique, a fitness center, and a mini spa.

Like its predecessor, Soneva Jani favors “soft” luxuries (exquisite organic food, space, privacy) and dispenses with overt ones (anything remotely resembling gilt or marble). The Soneva look is one that a friend once dubbed, aptly, “*Flintstones* chic,” characterized by organic shapes, natural materials, and a real inclination to delight. The villas’

timber walls and plank floors (sourced from Sri Lanka) are dotted with amoeba-shaped portholes peeking onto the horizon or the aquamarine lagoon below. There are daybeds on sturdy platforms, and sprawling indoor-outdoor bathrooms encircled by ingenious jalousie panels for privacy, with steps leading directly into the water. The one-bedroom villas have 20-foot-long infinity pools and second-story lounging areas, and retractable roofs in the bedrooms. The two- and three-bedroom villas have these, too, plus some have waterslides—yes, you read that right—spiraling from their upper floors into the lagoon.

The Gathering is home to a Willy Wonka-esque enfilade of “cold” rooms, for ice cream, cheese, and





Opposite: The Gathering is the communal centerpiece of Soneva Jani. Above: The resort's arrivals dock.

desserts. A juice bar sits across a suspended glass bridge from a vast open kitchen, where the chef does *omakase*-style meals based on guests' proclivities. Next door is a circular dining platform, with a central oculus from which a massive telescope emerges for evening stargazing sessions to enjoy between courses.

Soneva Jani has a way to go before it's completed, but what was up and running when I visited more than delivered on the whimsical, indulgent experience that has long been Soneva's stock-in-trade. Proof positive it pays not to mess with a successful formula. soneva.com; doubles from \$3,085.

THE PARTY ISLAND

Finolhu

“Actually, it’s not a party island.” Or so I was assured more than once during my stay at Finolhu, the words usually just audible over the Rod Stewart/Michael Jackson/Sugarhill Gang blasting out of the sound systems in seemingly every public space—from the spa, with its treatment cabins named after the likes of Karen Carpenter and Barbara [sic] Streisand, to the second story of Baa Baa Beach Bar, a man cave with arcade games, self-serve beer taps, and a beanbag-lined screening room (“Cinema Retro”). There were flame throwers and aerial-silk acrobats performing by the main pool; a woman dressed as a mermaid frolicked periodically in the water. Highway signs inexplicably marked the intersections of paths. A Nikki Beach-style hangout, the Fish & Crab Shack, was set

halfway down the long sandbar adjacent to the island (a dhoni boat ferries people from the resort’s main jetty), where I watched a gaggle of Russians with epic tattoos slurp down champagne next to a *palapa*-style DJ booth. In my own beach villa, the resort literature trumpeted the arrival of a “retro-inspired paradise for fun-loving beach-erati!”

In short, and with apologies to Finolhu’s branding team: it’s a party island. Finolhu is the second resort from the Small Maldives Island Co. (the other is the more family-centric Amilla Fushi, which opened in 2014), owned and operated by two Australians, one of whom earned his Maldives chops as general manager of the One&Only Reethi Rah. Their concept was to import the jet-set glamour of Mykonos and St.-Tropez to the Indian Ocean, flagrantly eschewing the local thatched-roof building vernacular, along with most every other conventional reference to local culture, in favor of man caves, mermaids, and lots of out-of-context antique signage.

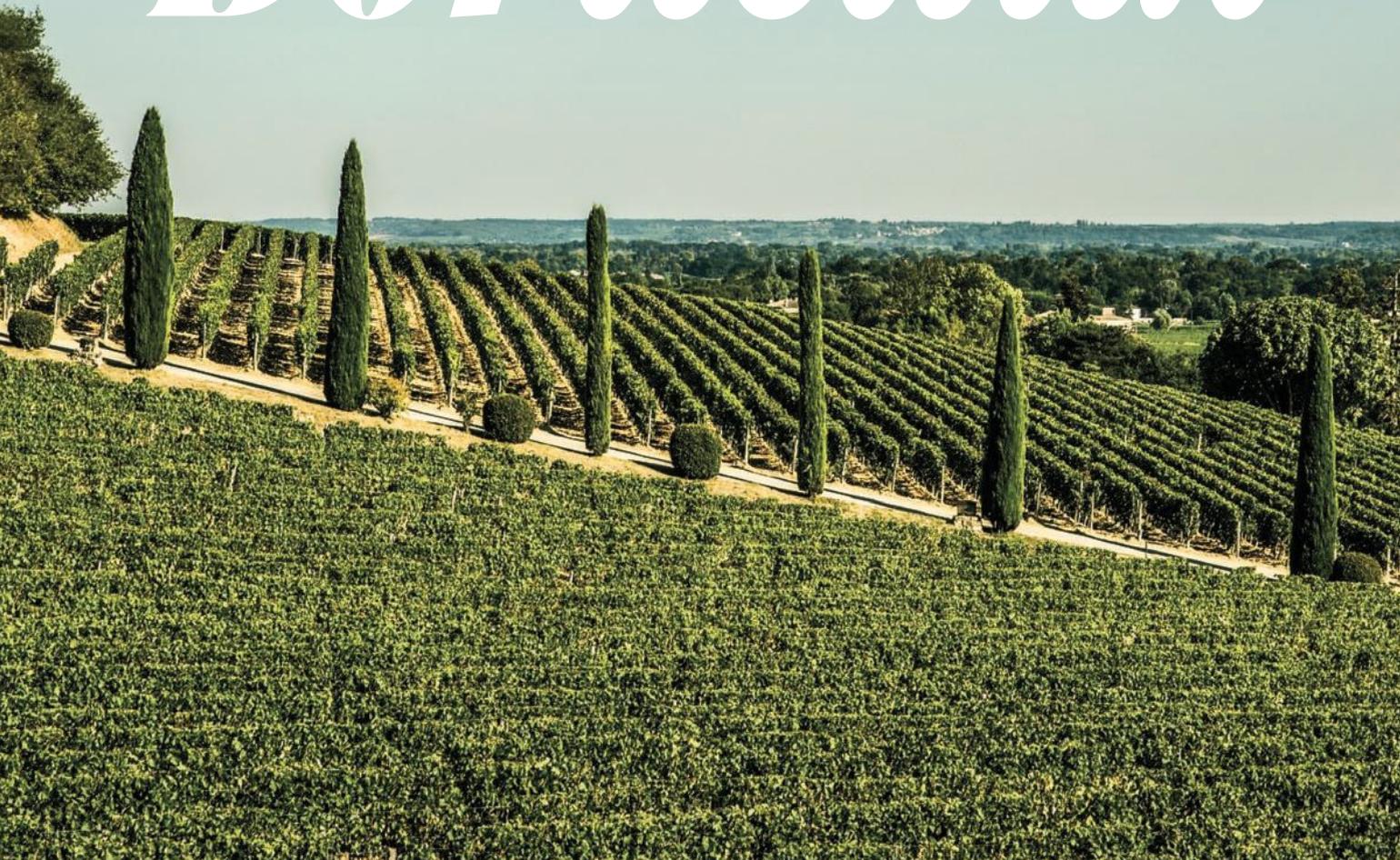
Fair enough, and to each his own. But the thing (Continued on page 120)

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The Details
 More on the destination and how to get there, page 117

IT PRODUCES SOME OF THE GREATEST VINTAGES OF ALL TIME, BUT IT'S NEVER TAKEN VERY KINDLY TO VISITORS—UNTIL NOW. FROM THE CITY TO THE GRAND OLD CHÂTEAUX BEYOND, **Elaine Sciolino** DISCOVERS THAT FRANCE'S PREMIER WINE-MAKING REGION IS SHOWING A FRESH FACE TO THE WORLD.

Photographs by **Martin Morrell**

Bordeaux





NOUVEAU



The neo-bistro Soléna, one of several in the city of Bordeaux that are helping to change its staid reputation.

Opposite: Vineyards in St-Émilion, one of the most venerable wine-making areas of Bordeaux.

I confess I came late to Bordeaux. My experience with wine began as a kid growing up in Buffalo in the 1950s. My paternal grandfather, Gaetano, who emigrated

from Sicily, concocted a rough-edged wine in the backyard every fall. One year red; one year white. He “aged” it for a few months in old whiskey barrels to give it a bigger bite and watered it down for me and my siblings to sample.

During my first decade living in France, I mostly avoided visiting the Bordeaux wine region. To many, the very name means old-fashioned, snobbish, and unaffordable. For centuries, its winemakers have created some of the world’s most prized and expensive wines—Thomas Jefferson was famously devoted—and they devised a system of classifying them that hasn’t changed since the days of Emperor Napoleon III.

I realized that I could spend my whole life sampling Bordeaux wines and never master the vast universe of their history and traditions. I have French friends who so revere them that they can rattle off vintages the way American baseball fans know who scored how many home runs in which World Series. Fantasizing about Bordeaux wines helped journalist Jean-Paul Kauffmann endure his ordeal as a hostage in Lebanon in the 1980s. He kept his memory in shape by reciting daily the famous 1855 classification system. He imagined the aromas and tastes of the wines from the dark and cramped dungeon where he was held chained and sometimes blindfolded. “Sometimes in the deep dark well of reality, a miracle happened,” he wrote after the ordeal was over. “The taste of cedar and black currant from the Cabernet Sauvignon, the plummy aroma of the Merlot, returned to me.”

It was with the Bordeaux mystique in mind that early one morning, under clouds pregnant with rain, I boarded a riverboat to take me up the Garonne into the city of Bordeaux. As I made my way through the slow-

moving waters, it was as if I were being ferried from the 18th century into the future: I passed rows of low, elegant limestone buildings that, in prerevolutionary times, had defined the city as a center of wealth and the most important port in France.

Then suddenly, as if the wine god Dionysus had willed it with his staff, the sun broke through. As we looped around the bend in the river, a modern structure caught the light and shone in glorious gold and silver. This was the Cité du Vin, the \$85 million architectural flight of fancy that opened last June. Part museum, part visitors’ center, part mini theme park, it was born of a collaboration among a number of players, including the city of Bordeaux, the Bordeaux Wine Council, and Crédit Agricole Aquitaine bank. Its stated mission is to promote “the cultural, universal, and living heritage that is wine” to visitors from around the world.

Some say the structure is poetry in motion: a thick, curved appendage representing wine swirling in a glass atop a vast round vase. Others call it a metallic whale with a funny-looking tail. Its two French architects describe it as “an evocation.” No matter. For the residents and vintners of the region, it is the symbol of Bordeaux’s quest to both revive its principal city and to shake off centuries of insularity and moribund tradition. As I traveled around the city and into the vineyards beyond, I could see efforts everywhere to turn the epicenter of old-world wine making into a more modern, global capital of wine.

The Cité du Vin, a sweeping new complex that celebrates wine making both in France and around the world.





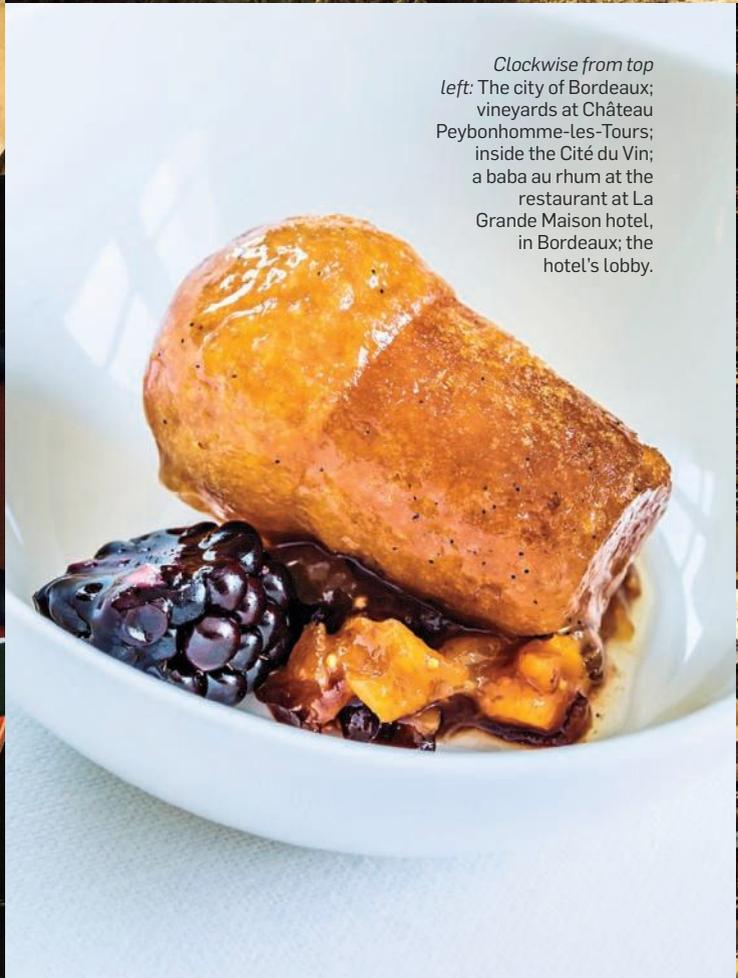
Tomato with
anchovy and citrus
confit at Soléna.
Opposite: The
cellar at Château
la Dominique,
designed by
Jean Nouvel.

“

I FOUND NO HINT OF THE
RED CARPETS, VIOLIN MUSIC,
OR ORCHID-FILLED DINING
ROOMS THAT CHARACTERIZE THE
BEST-KNOWN CHÂTEAUX.

”





Clockwise from top left: The city of Bordeaux; vineyards at Château Peybonhomme-les-Tours; inside the Cité du Vin; a baba au rhum at the restaurant at La Grande Maison hotel, in Bordeaux; the hotel's lobby.



There was a time when the city of Bordeaux, much like the surrounding wine country, was an unwelcoming destination—the kind of place you got in and out of quickly. The first time I visited, years ago, I found a city of darkness with its back to the river and buildings veiled in 100 years of soot.

That was before Alain Juppé, the former prime minister and presidential hopeful now in his fourth term as mayor of Bordeaux, launched a bold urban-renewal project. The city razed the abandoned warehouses along the waterfront to create a pedestrian walkway and bike path. It cleaned the soot from the limestone façades of the Bourse, the Grand Théâtre, and the main cathedral, then insisted other property owners do the same. It installed a 41-mile tram system and banned cars from much of the city center. In 2017, a major renovation of the central railroad station will be complete, and a new high-speed train line will cut the travel time from Paris by more than a third—to a mere two hours.

Rather than use the city as a transit point for vineyard-hopping, visitors are now being encouraged to stay a day or two, as I did. Le Boutique Hotel—a wonderful 18th-century town house with UNESCO status as an architectural treasure—was my first choice. Bordeaux has traditionally suffered from a lack of good hotels beyond the Grand Hôtel, which I found bland. But lately, smaller properties with more character have opened. Le Boutique has a cozy wine bar with an excellent selection, along with eclectic rooms and suites that conjure the wealth and sumptuousness of this historically rich city.

Another reason to stick around Bordeaux now is a wave of neo-bistros led by young chefs—one of the most gifted of whom is Victor Ostronczek of Soléna, a small, stark place on Rue Chauffour that he took over last year. Ostronczek insisted I try nearly everything on the menu, including *gambas* with pea purée and roasted lemon, mixed raw and cooked green and white asparagus with a pistachio vinaigrette, sea bass with a cauliflower emulsion, and *ris de veau* with caramelized onions. I was too full for dessert.

No way, he said, serving me his specialty: a version of baba au rhum wrapped in whipped cream, with fresh strawberries and a quenelle of olive-oil sorbet on the side. I never order baba au rhum—it reminds me of the syrupy-sweet versions I had as a kid. But this baba was in another league—a gastronomic souvenir I will cherish (and order again).

My friend Jean-Claude Ribaut, a Parisian food critic, was also in town and stressed the need to balance the nouveau dining experience with classic

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The Details
Wineries, bistros, hotels, and more, page 116

The Harmony Room
at La Grande Maison.
Opposite: The 17th-
century Château
de Cérons.





“
FOR TOO LONG WE
SHUT OURSELVES OFF
IN THE IVORY TOWERS
OF OUR CHÂTEAUX,
PRETENDING THE
OUTSIDE WINE WORLD
DID NOT EXIST.
”

Bordeaux cuisine at Brasserie Bordelaise, in the old city center. It is always packed with locals who come for the excellent foie gras, oysters, and local sausage. In season, the must-have dish is lamprey prepared by boiling its blood down into a thick sauce with red wine, onions, leeks, cloves, and *lardons*. I found it heavenly.

We hopped the tram for the short trip to the Chartrons quarter, where British, Flemish, and Irish wine merchants once lived and traded. Lately, it has morphed into a cool, gentrified neighborhood of residential lofts, art galleries, restaurants, and boutiques. Part of its charm is that it is still in the stages of becoming: some abandoned buildings stand out in their sooty blackness, while others have been scrubbed to a creamy beige.

It's against this backdrop that the Cité du Vin makes a Guggenheim Bilbao-esque impression. Inside, what's most striking is how much it breaks from the usual Bordeaux chauvinism by focusing on the global impact of wine in history. The ground-floor Latitude20 wine bar stocks 800 wines from more than 70 countries, while on the ninth floor, the Belvédère is the place to go for a glass of non-Bordeaux. There are two restaurants: a snack bar and a more upscale place on the eighth floor with panoramic views and a modern French menu that rotates with the seasons.

At the Cité's core is an exhibition space created by the London-based museum-design firm Casson Mann. Its entrance will dazzle even the most cosmopolitan wine buffs: there, three enormous screens show helicopter footage of wine terrains from around the globe; the films flow over you as you sit and watch. My favorite space was the slightly risqué, 18-and-over Bacchus & Vénus room, where I reclined on a red sofa, gazed up at ceiling projections of paintings lush with the sensuality of wine, and listened to wine-inspired poetry. Ringing the room are peep shows, including one containing an elaborate handblown wineglass in the shape of a penis.

For French officialdom, the museum is a celebration of the greatness of Bordeaux. President François Hollande called it “a success for France,” and Mayor Juppé praised it as “a beacon for Bordeaux.”

IFor the people and the winemakers of Bordeaux, the museum—with its fluid and daring design, its shiny façade that changes color with the time of day—represents even more: a feeling of optimism about the future that's often lacking in France these days. set out the next day on a vineyard tour, to see how the hopefulness of the Cité du Vin has permeated wine country itself. There are some 6,500 wineries spread across 275,000 acres of the surrounding province. It's the country's biggest designated-wine-producing region—three times larger than New Zealand's wine territory and about the same size as Chile's. In 2015, some 640 million bottles of Bordeaux were sold around the world, ranging from the ordinary to the excellent.

(Continued on page 118)

The Details

Our guide to this month's featured destinations, including the best places to eat, sleep, and explore.

BORDEAUX, FRANCE

(Bordeaux Nouveau, p. 106)

HOTELS

Château Cordeillan-Bages

An exquisite hotel with a Michelin two-starred restaurant set on a five-acre vineyard in the town of Pauillac. jmcazes.com; doubles from \$254.

La Grande Maison Bernard Magrez's elegant hotel has silk wall coverings, Carrara-marble bathrooms, and a wine cellar

Restaurant Pierre Gagnaire

Chef Pierre Gagnaire has made it his mission to turn this space into the finest restaurant in Bordeaux, with dishes like citrus-rubbed veal with absinthe and quinoa. lagrandemaison-bordeaux.com; entrées \$69–\$95.

Soléna Standouts of Victor Ostronczek's updated French menu include perfectly cooked asparagus carefully finished with pistachio vinaigrette. 5 Rue Chauffour, Bordeaux; 33-5-57-53-28-06; entrées \$36–\$40.

WINERIES

Château Branaire-Ducru

This 19th-century château is a far cry from the stuffy Bordeaux wine scene—be prepared to be welcomed as if you were family. St.-Julien-Beychevelle; branaire.com.

Château de Cérons Caroline and Xavier Perromat offer picnic baskets full of gastronomic provisions and wine to visitors at their vineyard. It's an intimate experience not to be missed. Cérons; chateaudecerons.com.

Château la Dominique This winery is hard to miss with its wonderful bright-red metallic cellar. The attached Terrasse Rouge offers meals highlighting seasonal specialties. St.-Émilion; chateau-ladominique.com.

Château la Grole Two young vintners produce organic wines on more than 70 acres of land here. St.-Ciers-de-Canesse; vignobles-hubert.com.

SHOPS

L'Autre Temps One of the many quirky antiques shops in the Village Notre Dame, a covered mall located in the happening Chartrons district. Bordeaux; villagenotredame.com.

Petrusse This boutique stocks scarves and shawls in high-quality silk, wool, and cotton. Bordeaux; petrusse.com.

ACTIVITIES

Cité du Vin The modern center sticks out on the Bordeaux skyline. It is a must-visit to understand the global impact of wine (from Bordeaux and other parts of the world). Plus, the wine bar,

Latitude20, stocks 800 vintages from more than 70 countries. lacityduvin.com.

Musée d'Aquitaine A lovely museum taking visitors on a journey through the ages of Bordeaux and Aquitaine, with collections related to archaeology and ethnology. Bordeaux; musee-aquitaine-bordeaux.fr.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs et du Design This former private residence, which houses more than 30,000 works of art, offers a glimpse into what life was like in the 18th and 19th centuries. Bordeaux; madd-bordeaux.fr.

Musée National des Douanes This hyperspecialized museum traces the history of the French customs authority, but the real draw is the magnificent landmark building in which it is housed. Bordeaux; musee-douanes.fr.

seven-day Peruvian itineraries with in-depth visits to the Sacred Valley: a Peru Family Adventure, focusing on outdoor activities for the entire clan, and the Flavors of Peru, designed for epicurean travelers. The company can also create bespoke itineraries to cater to travelers' specific interests. andbeyond.com; itineraries from \$4,850.

Mountain Lodges of Peru This outfitter's new Lares Adventure is a customizable five- or seven-day itinerary along the Sacred Valley's Lares Trek, concluding at Machu Picchu. The journey includes hikes to Incan sites, visits to remote Andean communities, and more, with each night spent at a different luxury lodge along the way. mountainlodgesofperu.com; itineraries from \$2,400.

HOTELS

Belmond Hotel Rio Sagrado

Set along the banks of the Urubamba River, this property consists of 11 suites, 10 rooms, and two villas nestled in verdant, terraced gardens. In addition to horseback riding, rafting, and guided tours of archaeological sites, visitors can also experience the region aboard the company's luxury train, *Belmond Hiram Bingham* (\$560 per person for a round-trip). belmond.com; doubles from \$365.

Explora Valle Sagrado Located on a working corn plantation, this resort is designed to maximize the quiet and grandeur of the surrounding landscape. Guests can choose from among 26 different excursions to various Sacred Valley destinations. →

SACRED VALLEY, PERU

(Peace in the Valley, p. 90)

GETTING THERE

Visitors typically fly in to Cuzco by way of Lima. The valley's southern edge is only eight miles from Cuzco, but many of its destinations, like Pisac and Urubamba, require a 30-minute to two-hour drive. Most Sacred Valley hotels arrange airport transfers, but you can also get there by rental car, taxi, or train.

TOUR OPERATORS

andBeyond The experiential travel specialist offers two

A QUICK TRIP



This year brings the renovation of Bordeaux-St-Jean, the city's central railroad station, and the completion of a new high-speed train line. Travelers will now be able to travel from Paris to Bordeaux in two hours.

stocked with the region's best. Bordeaux; lagrandemaison-bordeaux.com; doubles from \$276.

Le Boutique Hôtel The rooms at this wine-themed property are named after famous local wineries. Don't miss the beautiful interior garden centered around a wine bar. Bordeaux; hotelbordeauxcentre.com; doubles from \$210.

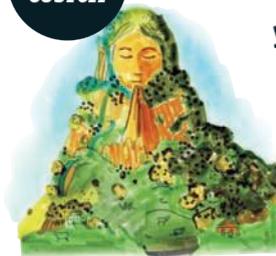
Yndo Hôtel A converted 19th-century mansion in the heart of Bordeaux. yndohotelbordeaux.fr; doubles from \$234.

RESTAURANTS

Brasserie Bordelaise

The go-to place for tourists and locals seeking traditional dishes, like foie gras and fresh oysters. Bordeaux; brasserie-bordelaise.fr; entrées \$13–\$38.

LOCAL CUSTOM



You may notice your guide pouring his beer onto the ground before taking a sip. The toast is called a *challa*, and is an offering to Pachamama, the fertility deity from Incan mythology.

It's not uncommon to see animals on the thousands of acres surrounding England's country houses. Keep an eye out for barn owls, rabbits, otters, fallow deer, and more.



—
WILDLIFE SPOTTING

explora.com; doubles from \$1,950 per person for three nights, all-inclusive.

Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba

The newest hotel from one of Peru's most venerable nature travel specialists. It consists of 12 rooms in the Casa Hacienda and 24 stand-alone luxury casitas on 100 acres surrounded by mountains. On the 10-acre organic plantation, guests can pick their own produce to be used in their meals. *inkaterra.com; doubles from \$462.*

Inkaterra La Casona Whether on your way to or from the Sacred Valley, you will want to spend a night or two in the imperial city of Cuzco, the historic capital of the Inca empire. This boutique hotel, in a lovingly restored 16th-century manor house on the Plazoleta Nazarenas, offers the finest accommodations in town. *inkaterra.com; doubles from \$418.*

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The Sacred Valley is filled with important cultural sites. Ask your hotel or outfitter to assist you with visits to each.

Moray An Incan site consisting of elaborate terraces in concentric circles. The structure is believed to have been formed to grow crops like coca and tobacco.

Ollantaytambo Overlooking its namesake village, this fortress and temple ruin marks the site where Manco Inca, the Incan prince, repelled an attack by the Spanish conquistador Hernando Pizarro.

Pisac The ancient Incan ruins here overlook the Urubamba River

and house one of the rare *intihuatanas*, ritual stones used for astronomical observation.

Salt Pans of Maras

Thought to have been created by the Incas sometime in the 1400s, these salt pools are still in use today.

ENGLAND'S COUNTRYSIDE

(To the Manor Reborn, p. 39)

ACCOMMODATIONS

Victoria Inn at Holkham A renovated inn on the 25,000-acre estate of Holkham Hall, one of the most famous country houses in England. Explore the pastoral property, which is largely off-limits to cars, by bicycle or on foot. *Wells-next-the-Sea; holkham.co.uk; doubles from \$155.*

Wilderness Reserve Choose from a collection of cottages, farmhouses, and manor houses on 5,000 acres in Suffolk. Hex Cottage, the property's romantic hut, sleeps two and has a thatched roof and columns made from tree trunks. *Sibton; wildernessreserve.com; doubles from \$265, two-night minimum.*

ACTIVITIES

Blakeney National Nature Reserve This park is the spot for animal lovers: watch seal pups, go crabbing, or bird-watch along the Blakeney Freshes, a 400-acre grazing marsh. *Morston; nationaltrust.org.uk.*

Holkham National Nature Reserve

One of England's largest nature reserves, occupying more than 9,000 acres of dunes, salt marsh, and grazing marsh beside the sea. *Wells-next-the-Sea; holkham.co.uk.*

Houghton Hall Built in the 1720s for Great Britain's first prime minister, this is one of England's most spectacular stately homes. It's surrounded by a magnificent park and has a collection of contemporary sculptures. *King's Lynn; houghtonhall.com.*

Orford Castle A 12th-century castle in Suffolk where visitors can explore the many passages and halls. Don't miss the display of Roman brooches, coins, and medieval seals in the Upper Hall. *english-heritage.org.uk.*

Orford Ness National Nature Reserve

The place to explore the U.K.'s military history. A stroll along the trails will bring you to multiple military structures, from old administrative bases to atomic test sites. *nationaltrust.org.uk.*

Snape Maltings Developed as a music center by composer Benjamin Britten, this complex of Victorian buildings was retrofitted to also include galleries, shops, restaurants, and a concert hall on the edge of the marshes. It holds many performances and festivals throughout the year. *snape maltings.co.uk.*



—
HISTORIC SAILINGS

Many resorts in the Maldives offer trips aboard a traditional dhoni boat. Be sure to hop aboard for a sunset cruise or snorkeling adventure. It's a great way to take in the country's surrounding crystal-clear water.

MALDIVES

(Turquoise Dream, p. 98)

GETTING THERE

Velana International Airport, located on Hulhule Island, is the main international airport in the Maldives, reachable via cities like Frankfurt, Istanbul, Doha, and Dubai. Many resorts can provide air or boat transfers to their properties.

— ADVERTISEMENT —

Score a business-class mileage ticket to the Maldives and any other destination using points from virtually any credit card or airline. **Awardinsiders.com** will find you seats even when phone agents can't, and save you hundreds of thousands of miles and hours of frustration.

WHEN TO GO

December through April, when the weather is dry and the humidity is low, is peak season for travelers. Low season is between May and November, which typically means more rain but cheaper rates.

Content in this issue was produced with assistance from Amanemu, Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort, and Beyond Matetsi River Lodge, The Asbury, Asilia the Highlands, The Beekman, Canyon Ranch Wellness Resort at Kaplankaya, Casa Grande on Vermejo Park Ranch, Chablé, The Dewberry, Explora Valle Sagrado, Finolhu, Four Seasons Private Island at Voavah, Four Seasons Resort Lanai, Grupo Habita, Hamilton Princess & Beach Club, Helena Bay, Hôtel Saint-Marc, Il Sereno Lago di Como, Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, Katamama, Kimpton Seafire Resort & Spa, Le Barthélemy Hotel & Spa, Leeu Estates, Le Roch Hotel & Spa, Marriott Charlotte City Center, Montage Palmetto Bluff, Nekupe, Oberoi Sukhvilas Resort & Spa, Obonjan Island, Park Hyatt Mallorca, The Peninsula Beijing, The Pontchartrain, QT Melbourne, The Ritz-Carlton Budapest, Sanctuary Chief's Camp, Santani Wellness Resort & Spa, The Shore Club Turks and Caicos, Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Soho House Barcelona, Soneva Jani, St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Island Resort, The Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club, Taj Meghauli Serai, Titilaka, 21c Museum Hotel Oklahoma City, Victoria Inn at Holkham, and Wilderness Reserve.



(Bordeaux, continued from page 115)

There's a ritualized way its most prestigious bottles are sold—a process, called *en primeur*, that creates distance from the consumer. Every spring, the owners of the most prized châteaux invite thousands of wine merchants, experts, and journalists to taste the latest harvest. Each imagines what the wine will taste like when it reaches maturity, and their predictions set its price.

Traditions like these had, in the past, made Bordeaux a stuffy, old-fashioned place to visit. It was hard for a visitor without a wine pedigree to tour the most famous châteaux, and if you were able to snag an invitation, the reception could be cold and formal. I always found the smaller regions, like the Loire and Burgundy, to be less forbidding.

But in recent years, fierce global competition has forced Bordeaux winemakers into the 21st century. Estate owners have had to modernize their methods, rebuild their cellars, and open their doors to outsiders. A “*grands crus*” weekend each May gives the public the chance to taste wines from the

region's 118 top producers, while Bordeaux Fête le Vin, held every other June on the banks of the Garonne, is touted as one of the largest wine-tasting-tourism events in the world. There's now the Urban Wine Trail through the city—a self-guiding itinerary that lets participants sample Bordeaux wines at more than a dozen establishments.

As part of its campaign to democratize the Bordeaux wine world, the Wine Council also promotes themed wine tours of vineyards owned by women or younger vigneronnes or of ones that feature contemporary art or sculpture gardens. I followed its suggestion of a trip to the down-to-earth Blaye region, site of the 17th-century citadel complex built by Louis XIV's military engineer Vauban to defend Bordeaux from maritime invasions. I found no hint of the red carpets, violin music, or orchid-filled dining rooms that characterize the best-known and most promoted châteaux. But I did discover Château la Grolet, where 31-year-old Rachel Hubert uses biodynamic farming methods—no pesticides—on vines set in 74 acres of meadows and woods, and her 35-year-old brother, Guillaume, is experimenting with storing wine in terra-cotta amphorae from Italy.

“Some visitors who come to Bordeaux are label drinkers—they only want to visit the ‘greats,’” Allan Sichel, a Bordeaux wine distributor and president of the Wine Council, told me when I visited him at one of his own vineyards. “The greats are great, and we are very proud of them, but there are so many other wines. I ask them if a wine is twenty times better just because it is twenty times more expensive. I tell them, ‘Visit at least one modest place. For very little money, you can find an excellent Bordeaux—perfect, clean, technically advanced.’”

As worthwhile as the modest places are, much of the new Bordeaux approach is about heralding its wine making with architectural showpieces costing millions of dollars. Foster & Partners, for example, designed a new production facility at Château Margaux with glass walls and a dozen white steel “trees” that act as support pillars. I prefer the cellar designed by Jean Nouvel at the family-owned Château la Dominique vineyard, near the medieval village of St.-Émilion. The façade is clad in red stainless-steel slats made by the same factory that produces metalwork for the artist Jeff Koons. They reflect shadows and sunlight, and evoke the tones of red wine in a glass.

La Dominique's restaurant upstairs has floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook Pétrus and Château Cheval Blanc (with its white spaceship of a wine cellar), two of Bordeaux's most celebrated wineries, and the village of Pomerol. Just outside is the terraced roof garden with a “swimming pool” that is filled not with water, but with thousands of smooth, red-glass oval pebbles. Visitors can walk on the pool and take a pebble as a souvenir. The price tag for the structure was nearly \$12 million—a dramatic upgrade from the dungeon-like cellars of old.

To learn more about the changes in the Bordeaux wine world, I called on Patrick Maroteaux and Jean-Michel Cazes, two crusaders of modernization who happen to be friends. In 1988, Maroteaux bought Château Branaire-Ducru and its accompanying wine domaine after a career in banking. Built in 1824, the two-story, four-bedroom chateau is a Neoclassical gem with perfect proportions. The

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orangerie, with its wood-beamed ceiling and paintings of life in the vineyards, is a particular delight.

Maroteaux is a Bordeaux visionary. He understood years before most other vintners that he needed to modernize his vineyard, mainly by creating a more affordable wine using grapes from younger vines. And while many estate owners keep their homes closed to outsiders, Maroteaux enjoys inviting them in. “For too long we shut ourselves in the ivory towers of our châteaux,” he explained, “pretending that the outside wine world did not exist.” We were meeting not in an antiseptic tasting room but in his living room, decorated in ocher and pale moss green and adorned with family photographs. When it was time for us to taste, Maroteaux himself led me through the ritual. “When I first came here, we were desperately looking for customers,” he explained. “I said to myself, ‘A tourist is a potential customer.’ So I started to accept everyone who asked to come. My wife got into the welcoming spirit—even though we had to serve breakfast to people in their pajamas. I told her, ‘Our business consists of making friends.’”

If Maroteaux operates on a small scale, Cazes, owner of Château Lynch-Bages, in Pauillac, thinks big. He was born into a Bordeaux wine family, and his father was mayor for 44 years of Pauillac, an area in the Gironde department that is home to three of Bordeaux’s greatest wines. He showed me the tiny house with blue shutters where he was born, and the site in Pauillac where the Americans and British dropped bombs in 1944, and where 30 people died in two days. We drove across dirt roads and stopped at a field of vines so that I could touch the soil and feel how porous and moist it was.

Years ago, when Cazes needed more storage space for his wine, his architect proposed razing a large swath of the ghost-town hamlet of Bages that his family owned. Cazes refused; he had grown up there. Instead, he created a “wine tourism village” with its own butcher shop, bakery, bistro, and boutique. Bages Village became fully operational in 2007, and now draws visitors from around the world. “When I die, no one would have ever known what it was,” he told me. “This is the legacy I want to leave behind.” (On the day I looked around, a group of Chinese wine merchants were there on a tour of the *en primeur* tastings.)

“I’m not interested in selling you a bottle of wine,” Cazes told me. “I want you to feel so welcome that you will become an ambassador for my brand. I want you to say, ‘Oh, Lynch-Bages, I’ve been there! I was very well cared for!’” Cazes works with Stephen Bolger, the CEO and founder of Viniv, a small company that teaches clients how to create their own custom blends. The château harvests, mashes, ages, and stores the juice; the clients choose the vineyards and experiment with taste. There is a minimum commitment of one barrel for personalized wine, at an average price of \$20,000. At 288 bottles in a barrel, that’s \$70 a bottle. The process can be done on site or over the Internet.

My last stop in Bordeaux was a picnic with the wine-makers at Château de Cérons. Since 2012 Xavier and Caroline Perromat, a husband-and-wife team, have struggled to revive the 64-acre vineyard and château once owned by Xavier’s family. Xavier’s father, who had been mayor of Cérons for decades, allowed it to fall into disrepair and

accumulated debt. He was so desperate he decided to sell. Xavier convinced his seven siblings—and the bank—to allow him to buy it.

From the moment I struck the enormous iron door knocker of the château, I was back in the late 17th century. The wine cellar, the chimneys, the ceilings, the wall murals—everything was original. While the Perromats are slowly and painstakingly plugging leaks in the crumbling stone walls, sanding and repainting the elaborate woodwork, and updating the plumbing and electricity, they have also restructured the vineyard, pulled up old vines, replanted the best parcels, bought new barrels, and hired a young wine expert.

The couple now invites tour groups to wine picnics on the grounds, a practice that has grown every year since they started in 2013. Visitors fill up wooden baskets from provisions kept in a cupboard in the main hall; fresh seasonal produce and, of course, the château’s wine round out the menu. On the day I visited, we dined in the orangerie, a fire blazing in its grand fireplace, on foie gras, duck rillettes, olive tapenade, potato chips made by a neighbor, and fresh tomatoes. Eventually the Perromats hope to set up a proper restaurant with a professional chef.

“We’re on an adventure to open up Bordeaux to the world,” Caroline said. “We’re a small part of it. It’s a work in progress. We’re taking our time to do it right.” Yet the reality of their ambitious undertaking is not lost on them. “We’re not twenty years old anymore, so there’s no time to lose.” ■

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(Maldives, continued from page 105) is, Finolhu is in the Maldives; specifically, in the Baa Atoll, one of only three UNESCO-designated World Biosphere Reserves in the Indian Ocean—which made the zeal with which its creators proselytized about the high-flying hedonism of their vision, to the exclusion (at least on my visit) of any mention of the country’s environmental and wildlife issues, feel slightly tone-deaf.

That said, Finolhu has some notable things going for it—starting with its prices. With one-bedroom beach villas coming in at around \$850 in the low season, it offers better value by local five-star standards. The rooms themselves are sleekly designed, with wide private patios laid with Balinese tiles, enormous beds under pitched, pale-wood ceilings, and gorgeous outdoor bathrooms, those in the beach villas bowered in palms and bougainvillea. The food was creatively conceived and beautifully presented, from the crunchy soft-shell-crab tacos at the Fish & Crab Shack to the *poke* and heavenly spiced crispy eggplant, vivid with roasted chiles, at Kanusan, the Pan-Asian restaurant.

And there’s the island itself, whose windswept sandbar should, on an early-morning ramble, fulfill just about every permutation of castaway fantasy that’s out there.

For Americans, Finolhu’s fun but very site-unspecific offerings ultimately lead to one question: Why come all this way for something you can arguably get in Ibiza, or Turks and Caicos—or South Beach? On the other hand, what is working here works well indeed. Those in the market for a good old time—as opposed to an edifying local experience—now know where to book. finolhu.com; doubles from \$850.

THE BUCKET LISTER

Four Seasons Private Island at Voavah

Private islands are somewhat of a thing for 2017, and the Maldives is full of them. But this latest retreat in the northern Baa Atoll from Four Seasons—which already has two best-in-class Maldives resorts, Kudaa Huraa and Landaa Giraavaru (the latter located just two miles from Voavah)—is the real deal: an exclusive private island that sleeps anywhere from two to 22 people, has its own chefs, staff, spa with therapists, and 65-foot-long PADI-equipped motor yacht with a dedicated divemaster.

Voavah, which opened in December, offers once-in-a-lifetime luxury for people who are celebrating something big or a holiday redoubt for those wealthy enough to not even blink at the \$36,000-a-night rate. The rooms have been cleverly configured in three separate villas to accommodate friends, multigenerational families, or entourage-heavy celebrities/oligarchs/*tuhao* (Chinese nouveaux riches). The Beach House has the main living and dining areas spread across its wall-less ground floor and richly appointed mezzanine suites above. A three-bedroom villa at the island’s northern end has a master suite with a truly dreamy 200-degree sea-and-sand view; the two-bedroom overwater villa, at the island’s other end (Voavah measures only about 1,000 feet long by 350 feet wide) has one of the more spectacularly photogenic conflagrations of infinity pool and horizon I’ve ever seen.

But what Voavah is really about is total personalization. Pancakes at midnight? Of course. Impromptu cruise on the *Summer* to snorkel among manta rays—which, in late summer, convene in Hanifaru Bay by the hundreds—with one of the researchers from the Manta Trust, a charity based at the nearby Landaa Giraavaru? Ready when you are, ma’am. Pizza-making class for the kids, while the grown-ups enjoy sundowners on the sandbar across the channel—perhaps with a traditional dance performance? Done—just give them a day to organize it.

That guests can also partake of any of the top-notch restaurants or services offered at Landaa Giraavaru only expands the territory. But when you’re standing ankle-deep in opalescent wavelets in the morning, looking northward to a constellation of uninhabited islands, a soaring expanse of milky-blue sky, and, beyond, the ocean—luxury at its most elemental and rare—it’s hard to imagine needing anything else, ever again. fourseasons.com; from \$36,000 per night, all-inclusive. ■

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(Peru, continued from page 96) my breathing, my chest would tighten as if in panic. The second was that I was going to be the first up the mountain, even ahead of Bruno. Not because I'm proud, or particularly fit. I was just in a rhythm with my breath, my steps, my arms, the wind, and I wasn't going to break it until I hit the pass. I had achieved both the sickness I feared and the meditative state I desired. I should have known they would come together.

We could only celebrate at the top for a moment, toasting with *muña* tea in the fierce wind before heading into another valley and skirting turquoise glacial lakes, until we found a rocky outcropping large enough to shield us. Lunch—a velvety spinach soup, smoked trout, and quinoa salad—felt well-earned. We spent the rest of the day on the downhill, our knees aching. When we reached the hamlet of Cancha Cancha, we all splashed river water on our faces. Matt and the guides examined the onion-skin bark of the squat *queuña* trees. Only then did I see other hikers, walking past us in the opposite direction.

"They can't be starting now," I said to Bruno. The sun had already passed beyond a ridge.

"Oh no, they are camping," he said. Donkeys followed them, loaded with equipment. The guides, chewing coca leaves, called out to Bruno and Moises.

"They do it in three days," Bruno said, gesturing back at the pass we'd just conquered. "We do it in one. Because we're badass."

I laughed, but he wasn't joking. I looked back at the peak of Sawasiray, shrouded in a mist that moved like exhalations. I imagined what it must feel like to be as well-adapted as those highland children: the thin, pure air stabilizing me, walking these mountains being an act as natural as breathing.

Although the Incas never had a written language (which blew my mind when I found out), they are legendary for their myriad accomplishments prior to their culture's swift and bloody collapse at the hands of Spanish conquistadors. At their peak, the Incas controlled a region twice the size of the Holy Roman Empire. Their engineering feats were unmatched by peers of their era. Their religious practices involved complex mummification and burial processes. Their knowledge of astronomy and agriculture allowed them to become brilliant farmers.

It was this last skill we were headed to see evidence of. The van took us on narrow, rutted dirt roads to Moray, an Incan archaeological site above the town of Maras that consists of elaborate terraces in concentric circles. There is a more direct route in, but we entered above the ruins on a trail that started in a small village called Misminay, where

children walked alongside us and giggled shyly before running back to their games. At first, Moray reminded me of an amphitheater, making me think of the frequent comparisons between the Incas and the Romans. But Moray wasn't built for sport. It is believed that the Incas' goal was to create microclimates for growing crops, like coca leaves or tobacco, that weren't adapted to the harsh conditions of the highlands above the Sacred Valley.

As we began hiking out of the ruins, another spectacular twilight descended and the mountains' aura of mystery deepened. I was struck by how little we could know of a culture that didn't write its own stories. For generations, the Quechua theorized about how Moray got its craterlike shape—our guide told us it was the result of an asteroid strike—though scientists have determined that it was caused by erosion. We have extensive, well-preserved evidence of the Incas, but much of it is inconclusive. The guides are the storytellers, the ones who tell us what might have been. On the way out of Moray, ours collected *muña* and cleaned up trash that had been left behind by other visitors. It didn't feel showy or self-righteous. It felt more like the *challa* to Pachamama—an expression of deep gratitude for the earth.

Following three adventure-packed days at the Explora Valle Sagrado, Matt and I headed across the Urubamba River to unwind at the Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, a two-year-old property from a company that has been a mainstay in (Continued on page 122)

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(Peru, continued from page 121)

Peruvian luxury travel for more than 40 years. It is in a traditional hacienda-style farmhouse with dark wood beams, tiled floors, and lots of colonial grandeur, with jaw-dropping views of multiple mountain ranges. It is furnished in Incan artifacts, worn-in leather, and vibrant textiles. The atmosphere of the rooms, the lounge, and the restaurant was relentlessly romantic. After checking in, we wrapped ourselves in blankets near the fire, with obligatory pisco sours, watched the sun move, and, for the first time since we had arrived in the Sacred Valley, did nothing.

The hotel calls its dining concept “earth to table.” Most of the vegetables on your plate are grown on a 10-acre organic farm that runs across the bottom of the property. Matt and I toured it one evening, recognizing various herbs, walking fields of different potatoes, which the farmers identify by their flowers. The farm is a reminder of why the valley has been called sacred for so long. Our guide told us that the fertility of this land was considered Pachamama’s greatest gift. The beans, corn, potatoes, quinoa, and amaranth that grow so well are what enabled the Incas to build their empire. There are 50 kinds of corn and nearly 4,000 kinds of potatoes indigenous to Peru. The struggle today is to protect that natural biodiversity.

We feasted in a candlelit hall, the lights of the valley glowing through the floor-to-ceiling windows. The restaurant excelled at traditional dishes done expertly, like *lomo saltado* and *pastel de choclo*, a surprisingly light corn pie, layered with guinea-pig *ragù*. The *ají de gallina*, a creamy, spicy dish of rice, chicken, and cheese, was so satisfying I had it twice.

The next day, two genial guides took us to a Quechuan weaving cooperative in Chincero (elevation 12,375 feet), which is known as the Rainbow City because the Incas believed it to be the birthplace of the rainbow. The guides pointed out adobe houses topped with ceramic bulls that were supposed to protect the inhabitants. Red plastic flags hanging in doorways signaled that chicha—a fermented alcoholic beverage made from corn—was available that day. The women

of the collective showed us their natural ingredients, from soap made of grated yucca for washing alpaca wool to dyes made from herbs, berries, even bugs. A young weaver smashed a cochineal insect, a parasite that lives on cacti, into her palm to produce a bright red pigment, then spread it on her lips. “Inca lipstick,” she said, giggling.

We hiked down from Chincero on one of the original sections of the Inca Trail, built in the 15th century, following ravines and small streams that feed into the Urubamba. It was our same swath of the valley, but we were seeing it from a new angle—and at this point, it did feel like it belonged to us. We had been there less than a week, but I knew that glacier under Sawasiray from multiple vantage points, and I knew when we hit a dirt road that we were almost to Urquillos and the gigantic *pisonay* tree. The Incas called these violet and jade mountains mystical because the gods remain in the earth, and no matter how modern voices might intrude, theirs are the cadences the Quechua still listen to, the ones that call the rest of us to explore. ■

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THE WELL in KOLBOTN, NORWAY

Illustration by Elena Boils



Nestled in the woods just outside Oslo is one of the most opulent and eclectic bathhouses ever built. The Well, a year-old, 110,000-square-foot, clothing-optional facility, puts a dazzling array of global spa traditions under one roof, from a Turkish hammam to a Japanese *onsen*. The austere décor, however, with its black volcanic rock and Art Deco tiles, is all Norwegian. Built by Stein Erik Hagen, the country's fifth-richest person, the Well is the kind of place that could exist only in the Norway of today: it adheres to the Law of Jante, the Nordic concept that basically no one is special, which explains Norwegians' traditionally restrained approach to luxury. But it caters to an industrious populace, made wealthy by decades of surging oil revenues, that increasingly has the means to indulge in serenity.

During my visit, I lay in a Finnish-style sauna next to two Norwegian ladies and four other men—all of us imperfect strangers. A short-haired Polish woman named Olga used a large Japanese fan to waft hot eucalyptus-scented air over us, part of our *Aufguss* treatment. “Maybe cover your nipples,” she grunted, not wanting to scorch our delicate parts. Afterward, we ran to the terrace, where the temperature was 30 degrees and the winds gale-force, to cool off. Stripped as I was of my American Puritanism, I felt my blood pressure drop. I joined my wife in the *onsen*, where she was listening to a Norwegian man wax poetic about Bon Jovi. She left to get a Thai massage while I sat in the restaurant, nursing a bottle of dark beer by the fireplace. In that moment, I found I was able to breathe more deeply than I had in months. *thewell.no*. — ROSS URKEN

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