

# THE HOT LIST 2014

Every year, *Condé Nast Traveller* highlights the best among the crop of new hotels that have opened around the world in the past 12 months. These properties score high on various criteria – be it service, design, location, food, amenities or just that elusive It-factor. In addition to global hotspots, with the first Hot List out of the Middle East we've picked 12 regional hotels and resorts that have impressed us most in the short time they've been open. Read on and get ready to book your next vacation spot ▶

STYLING: SABINA PABKINSON; PHOTO: MAZUN ABUSOUJR; MODEL: OLGA KACZYNSKA  
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Most villas at Al Sahel Villa Resort have personal plunge pools on the back patio

## EUROPE

### FRANCE INTERCONTINENTAL MARSEILLE - HOTEL DIEU

Marseille's year as European Capital of Culture may be over but there's still plenty of celebrating going on at this sprawling, 194-room palace with vaulted ceilings, fantastic views and the buzziest terrace bar in town. Set back on a hill overlooking the Vieux Port – smack in the middle of a once cut-throat, now ultra-hip neighbourhood – this former hospital has been transformed by Jean-Philippe Nuel with clean lines in soft grey, taupe and white. The suites have glass-wall bathrooms and big, arched private terraces for an evening *pastis* while soaking up views of the port and hilltop Notre-Dame de la Garde Basilica in the distance. There's a vast Clarins spa and a heated indoor pool. The wildly creative chef Lionel Lévy heads up both restaurants: Les Fenêtres, a slick brasserie with floor-to-ceiling windows, and the more formal Alcyone, packed with smart locals who love the *bouillabaisse* milkshake, lobster with pistachio and guacamole, and mouth-watering Snickers-inspired pudding.

**FLASH POINT** The spa's signature Provence massage with lavender-infused oils is worth checking in for.

*Doubles from AED 1,040; 0033-4-1342 4242, [intercontinental.com/marseille](http://intercontinental.com/marseille)*



The Presidential Suite is a contemporary haven with artworks chosen by interior designer Jean-Philippe Nuel



Cosy interiors lie within this bright manor house

### DOMAINE DE LA BAUME, PROVENCE

Don't be put off by the steep, unpaved road leading down to this ochre 18th-century manor, once the home of artist Bernard Buffet. A deeply comfortable 15-room hideaway revamped by hotelier Jocelyne Sibuet, it is an eye-catching mix of rustic and Italian baroque, from the open-beam farmhouse dining room to cosy frescoed parlours with fireplaces for afternoon tea, should the Mistral kick up. Upstairs, each suite is decked out with hand-picked antiques, *toile de Jouy* and pastel fabrics, four-poster beds and pretty prints of butterflies and birds. For the best hillside views, ask for the spacious L'Abeille (Bee) suite, named after a Buffet painting; the estate has its own beehives. You'll want to explore the leafy 99-acre grounds on foot, mountain bike or horseback, then laze by the pool or have a massage in the mini-spa cabin in the woods near a whooshing waterfall. Chef François Martin cooks with ingredients plucked from the kitchen garden and drizzled with the house olive oil, whipping up dishes such as truffle risotto, lamb with purple-basil pesto and roast figs with rosemary ice cream.

**FLASH POINT** If you can tear yourself away from the terrace overlooking the valley, the medieval village of Tourtour is just a 10-minute drive away.

*Doubles from AED 1,560; 0033-4-5774 7474, [domaine-delabaume.com](http://domaine-delabaume.com)*



Stay warm in L'Apogée Courchevel's hot tub

### L'APOGÉE COURCHEVEL

This new ski lodge from the Oetker Collection (Le Bristol in Paris, Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes) serves as the antidote to bling in the oligarchs' favourite winter playground. Instead of convoluted cuisine (the village already has seven Michelin-starred restaurants), Le Comptoir restaurant serves hearty slow cooking, and even the Champagne Lounge feels relaxed. The interiors are warm and timbered, with log fires and an understated Sisley Paris spa. At a total cost of about AED 493 million, creating this sort of discreet luxury didn't come cheap, and the room rates are certainly punchy. But then there are 170 staff to serve just 53 guest rooms and suites and a private chalet next door. The ski-in ski-out location in Le Jardin Alpin is sublime, and the hotel pool is surely one of the loveliest in the Alps. The rooms, decorated in muted colours, are cocoons of comfort after the rigours of Courchevel's 150km of ski runs.

**FLASH POINT** Discreet and smooth as honey, L'Apogée has saved Courchevel from becoming a terrible show-off.

*Doubles from AED 4,565; 003-4-7904 0104, [lapogeecourchevel.com](http://lapogeecourchevel.com)*



Large guest rooms have a serene colour palette

### AMAN CANAL GRANDE VENICE

News that Amanresorts was taking over a historic *palazzo* on the Grand Canal had been bubbling under for years. When the 24-suite hotel finally opened last summer, it became clear what had taken so long. The late-Renaissance Palazzo Papadopoli is a Casanova fantasy of sweeping staircases, marble fireplaces and frescoed reception rooms. Restoring all this, while fashioning an Aman-style hotel out of the family home of Giberto and Bianca Arrivabene (who still live on the top floor) was a big challenge. It would have been easy to turn the ballroom or the library into bedrooms, especially with their Grand Canal views; instead they have been left intact, the first becoming the dining room of the hotel's Asian-Venetian restaurant, while the latter remains a quiet resting room. The sense of space (along with discreet service) makes guests feel they own the *palazzo*, if only for the duration of their stay. The bedrooms blend Venetian ornament with the sober tones of grey, cream and white; in the Alcove Tiepolo you can lie in bed contemplating an original ceiling fresco by the artist; the small spa and not one but two gardens are welcome havens.

**FLASH POINT** Amanresorts has got the balance just right at this deeply calming sanctuary.

*Doubles from AED 1,470; 0039-041-270 7333, [amanresorts.com](http://amanresorts.com)*



The dining room overlooks the Grand Canal

### ITALY JK PLACE ROMA

In Rome, the best hotels are in the wrong places, as Byron complained. That changed last autumn with the opening of JK Place Roma in a quiet street off the intersection of via Condotti and via del Corso. Not that you would take the 17th-century building for a hotel, more the townhouse of cool young aristocrats. The entrance courtyard has been glazed over to create a contemporary living room ablaze with light and overlooked by statuary. Art is everywhere, and the glamour quotient high without tipping into pretension. All of which seems appropriate in this radical conversion of what was formerly the Sapienza university's school of architecture. The bedrooms, big by Roman standards, are done out in serene colours, with well-lit bathrooms in matching marble. JK Café, with its menu of revitalised favourites (carbonara, salt cod, *puttanesca*), is open to non-residents, and the effect has been to unleash a buzz of local gossip and youthful laughter that provides a better connection to the real Rome than the self-conscious isolation of other recent boutique openings. Perhaps this vivacious approach derives directly from the owners' experience of mixing fun and fashion at JK Place Capri, which almost single-handedly lowered the holiday island's centre of gravity.

**FLASH POINT** Perfect for a paparazzi-proof stay, and equidistant from the Spanish Steps and the Pantheon.

*Doubles from AED 3,050; 0039-0698 2634, [jkroma.com](http://jkroma.com)*

## THE HOT LIST 2014

### DUBAI THE OBEROI

The Oberoi is slap-bang in the middle of the city, making it a handy base when you're exhausted from shopping and sunbathing. This 252-room glass juggernaut of a hotel has expansive rooms, floor-to-ceiling windows, baths you could do lengths in and beds so gigantic they could fit your whole family. Recover from a hectic week with a massage at the 24-hour Ayurvedic spa, take one of the daily 6pm yoga classes or lie by the infinity pool where you'll be presented with cubes of frozen watermelon and Evian face mist. There are Western, Indian and Arabic restaurants, but you can try all three at the hotel's Friday brunch, where there's a dedicated Mojito station and help-yourself tapas such as kingfish *ceviche*, wagyu short ribs and quail-egg bruschetta. It's all very grand, but manages to feel delightfully low-key, too.

**FLASH POINT** That famous Oberoi service, personal but professional, keeps everything ticking over expertly.

*Doubles from AED 700; 00971-4-444 1444, [oberoihotels.com](http://oberoihotels.com)*

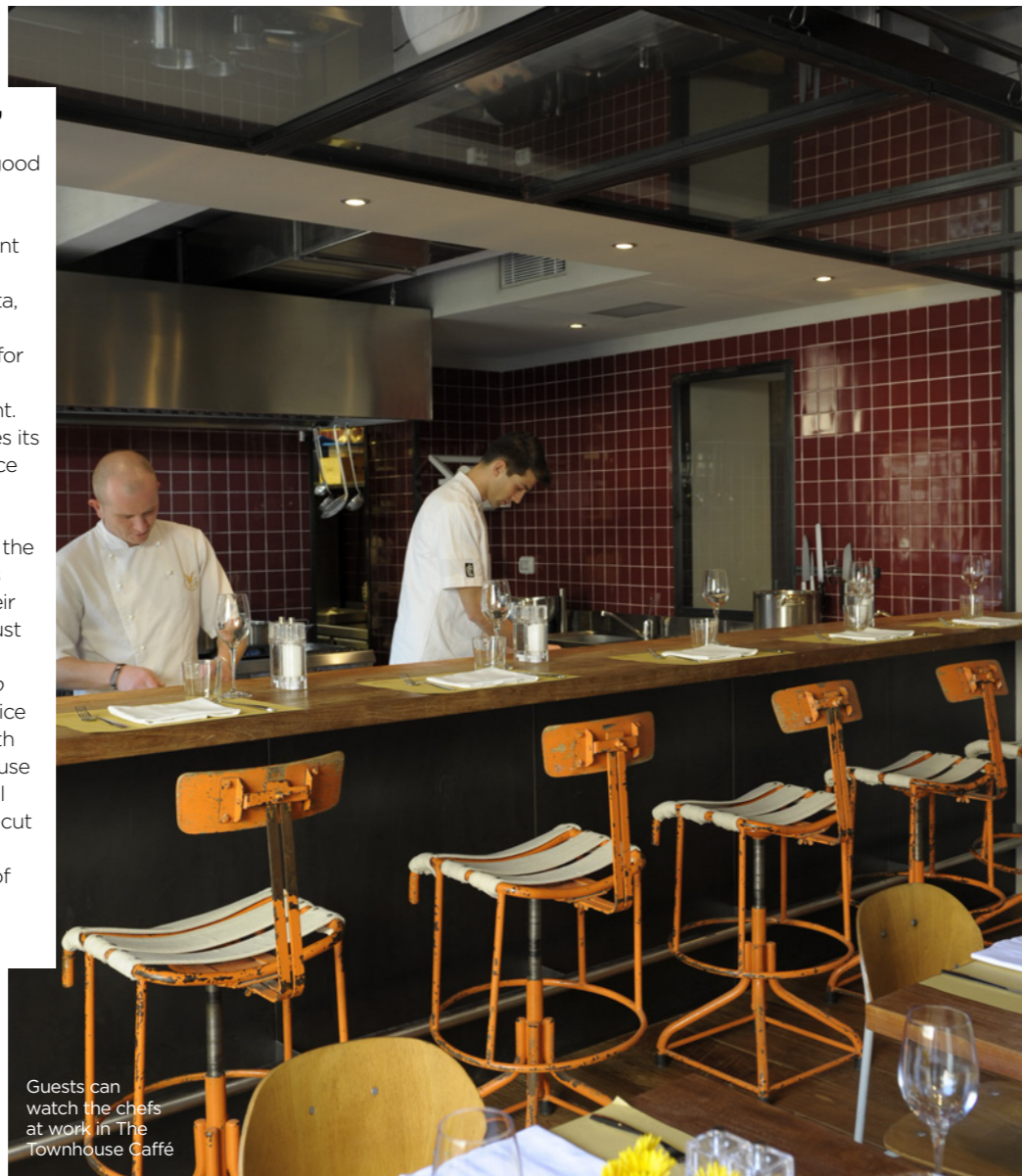
Guest bathrooms come with views over Business Bay's skyscrapers



## LA BANDITA TOWNHOUSE, TUSCANY

New York-raised hotelier John Voigtmann has good instincts. When he came across an abandoned farmhouse in Tuscany's Val d'Orcia in 2001, he realised it offered a far better chance of fulfilment than his job as a record-company executive. Six years later, that farmhouse opened as La Bandita, a stylish eight-bedroom retreat, and it proved hugely popular. Soon Voigtmann was scouting for another property and he found it in the nearby town of Pienza in the form of an ancient convent. Opened last spring, La Bandita Townhouse takes its cue from another bright idea: that the experience of waking up in a small Tuscan town and tuning into its laid-back rhythms is poorly catered for unless you rent an apartment. That's fixed here: the sounds of chatting neighbours and church bells filter gently into the 12 light-filled bedrooms, their contemporary furnishings contrasting with robust ceiling beams and exposed stone walls. Staying here is like joining a house party; come *aperitivo* time, you're likely to find yourself swapping advice about things to see, do and drink in the area with Voigtmann and his other guests. In the Townhouse Caffé, Glaswegian chef David Mangan puts local ingredients to good use in dishes such as hand-cut tagliatelle with lemon rocket pesto.

**FLASH POINT** You know those cool friends of yours? They just bought a house in Pienza. *Doubles from AED 1,270; 0039-05-7874 9005, la-bandita.com*



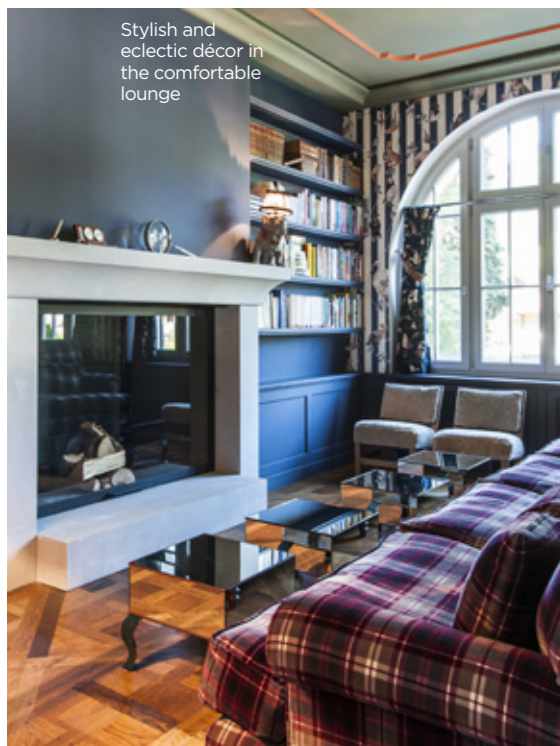
Guests can watch the chefs at work in the Townhouse Caffé

## SWITZERLAND LE GRAND BELLEVUE, GSTAAD

This used to be one of Gstaad's famously grand, formal hotels – and the best located, in its own park in the centre of town – until old Etonian Daniel Koetser and his interior-designer wife Davia bought and transformed it. Now it feels more like a luxury country-house hotel than a turreted, turn-of-the-century Swiss pile, with big reception rooms that manage to be both stylish, with bespoke furniture by George Smith and Soane, and eclectic – there's a life-size tweed camel in the lobby. And what's on offer is second to none: for families (kids' club, playroom, private cinema); for skiing (on-site ski hire, complimentary lift transfers, personal guides); and for wellbeing (an amazing subterranean spa with Bamford and Cellcosmet treatments, a huge pool, a gym and eight different steam rooms, from traditional hammam to Himalayan salt room). Even the hairdresser is a Swiss celebrity. Bedrooms are calmly decorated with the best beds, TV and audio gear and in-room iPads. As for food, choose from a sushi bar, a cosy chalet serving fondue and Leonard's, the Michelin-starred restaurant. With its zinc-topped circular bar and wonderfully comfortable, specially designed chairs and banquettes, the dining room is fashionably laid-back with food to match: pitch-perfect sharing plates, risotto, *Wiener schnitzel* and *bouillabaisse*.

**FLASH POINT** The exclusive Gstaad Yacht Club is here, too, so great people-watching is guaranteed.

*Doubles from AED 1,210; 0041-33-748 0000, bellevue-gstaad.ch*



Stylish and eclectic décor in the comfortable lounge

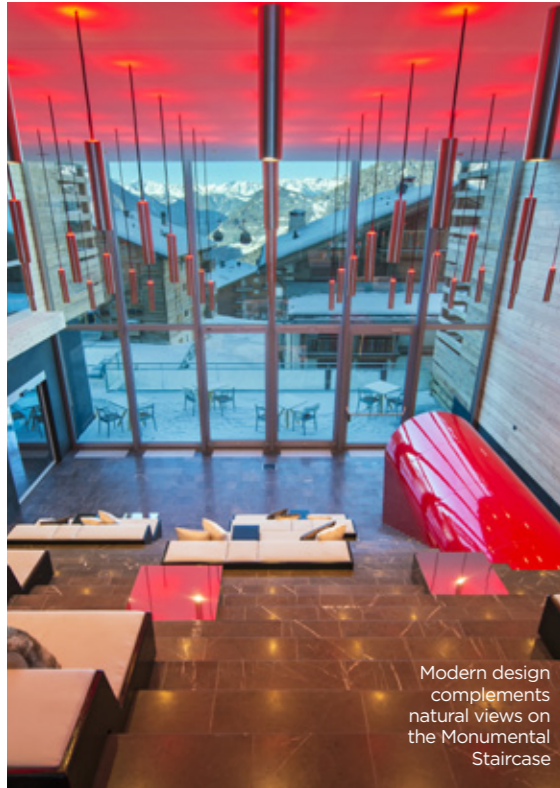
## THE CHEDI ANDERMATT

Nothing seemed to have changed in Andermatt since the Fifties until this bold European debut from the Singapore-based hotel group GHM. The spa, on three levels and with a 35-metre pool and fabulous hydrotherapy zone, is indicative of the sheer extravagance of space here, including the bedrooms, each of which has its own fireplace. Architect Jean-Michel Gathy has introduced Asian elements: screens, subtle lighting, symmetry and pools (some destined to become ice-rinks next winter). He has worked a similar riff at Aman Sveti Stefan in Montenegro and the Aman Canal Grande Venice, both great successes. The main restaurant here is divided into sociable areas beneath a coffered wood ceiling, and the menu highlights Western (smoked-salmon cannelloni) and Eastern (chilli tiger prawns) dishes; the little Japanese restaurant has a sushi and sashimi bar. There aren't that many ski runs here yet, but the hotel is open all year. Egyptian owner Samih Sawiris is pumping AED 7.4 billion into the redevelopment of Andermatt, with plans for another five hotels, apartments and villas. The new golf course was already playable last summer.

**FLASH POINT** The year-round destination hotel Switzerland has always needed. *Doubles from AED 2,710; 0041-41-888 7488, ghmhotels.com*



Relax in the pool lounge after completing laps in the 35-metre pool



Modern design complements natural views on the Monumental Staircase

## W VERBIER ↑

Verbier has always attracted a crowd of adrenalin-driven, hardcore skiers who like to party. The playful, urban edge of the new W slots into this scene perfectly, from the see-and-be-seen Living Room lounge, with its valley views and slick murals, to the leather-and-mirror Carve bar, a modern alternative to Verbier's famous but ageing Farm Club. And since it is right beside the resort's main Medran lift, guests can also practically ski into the hotel. The Amsterdam-based firm Architects Concrete (also responsible for the W London Leicester Square) has created a Manhattan vibe within a rustic, Alpine envelope by combining synthetic materials with wood, leather and stone finishes and lots of red. All 123 bedrooms, furnished with Eames classics, are big and have double-sided fireplaces separating bedrooms from bathrooms. Catalan chef Sergi Arola, whose Madrid restaurant has two Michelin stars, brings his *pica pica* style of dining to the Arola restaurant: sharing plates of *pork Iberique presa* with local ewe's cheese are served alongside the chef's signature dishes such as the cylindrical, deep-fried *patatas bravas*. There are ski-focused massage treatments at the AWAY Spa and a spectacular indoor-outdoor swimming pool.

**FLASH POINT** The W Verbier has taken branded hospitality on the slopes to an altogether funkier level.

*Doubles from AED 1,250; 0041-27-472 8888, wverbier.com*

## UNITED KINGDOM THE LONDON EDITION ↓

It might be unfair to call the Edition a restaurant with rooms, but you can't get away from the fact that the Berners Tavern – chef Jason Atherton's latest opening – is the beating heart of the hotel. Along with the lobby cocktail bar, oak-panelled, reservation-only Punch Room and nightclub Basement, it has become London's buzziest new gathering place. Ian Schrager's considered, gimmick-free design has given the original stucco ceilings, marble columns and stained-glass windows of the old Berners Hotel lobby a funky edge, with emerald-green velvet sofas, antique billiard table (with queues to play), MacBooks lined up on a vast leather-topped desk and a blackened steel bar serving teeth-whistlingly good Elderflower Power Sours late into the night. Up the marble stairs, away from the thrum, bedrooms are Bond-slick, a Sixties reimagining of pale oak floorboards, walnut panelling and Schrager's signature floor-to-ceiling white muslin drapes. They are also spectacularly quiet. Buttoned-linen George Smith Sofas sit alongside Scandinavian wishbone chairs, the minibar is stuffed with Amelia Rope chocolate, and there's a single hydrangea stem in a jar on the bedside table. In other words, a perfect foil to the hubbub below.

**FLASH POINT** Design-wise, the Edition steals it: grown-up, deeply comfortable and curiously cool.

*Doubles from AED 2,070; 0044-20-7781 0000, edition-hotels.marriott.com/london*



The Penthouse comes with a walk-in wardrobe, built-in sound system and a terrace from which to enjoy city views

PHOTOS: YVES GARNEAU, NIKOLAS KOENIG, ANDREW MEREDITH, DURSTON SAYLOR



Hip rooms feature quirky design elements like denim bedspreads

## ACE HOTEL LONDON SHOREDITCH ↑

Walk into the lobby of the Ace and you'll instantly feel the energy. A reception, coffee shop, bar and lounge rolled into one, it reverberates with the chatter of creatives – from students to CEOs – using it as a work space and meeting place. In the evenings, up-and-coming DJs play to a crowd drinking Sipsmith and tonic and chomping on brioche-bun burgers like they're at a private party. Unique artworks – sheet-music collages, photographic wallpaper and typographic prints – are everywhere, and the low-lit bedrooms have unusual touches such as denim bedspreads, hoodie dressing gowns and plastic crates instead of drawers. The fun is infectious. Brasserie Hoi Polloi – by the Bistrottheque guys – has a good-time atmosphere, too; tracks from Hot Chip, Tom Vek and Pet Shop Boys get toes tapping. Quite some effort has gone into making it effortlessly cool: waiters wear all-grey Nike Air Max and mint Sibling jumpers; when you've chosen what to eat (the crab salad is full of zing), read about milliner Stephen Jones on the back page of the menu. After midnight, when things properly get going, seek out the hard-to-spot basement bar (entry is from the street). It's a dark, stripped-back warehouse-style space with barmen in bobble hats and bobos dancing to disco, golden age hip-hop and electro. The rooftop bar is bound to be this summer's hottest hangout.

**FLASH POINT** It's great for East London, with its galleries, boutiques and bars, that such a big, punchy hotel has taken root here. *Doubles from AED 1,000; 0044-20-7613 9800, acehotel.com/london*

## ROSEWOOD LONDON ↓

How to stand out among all the snazzy new hotels in London? First, find a place to call your own. For its UK debut, the Rosewood group has created not just a new hotel but a new area: "Midtown". Whether you buy into the rebranding of Holborn or not, its location is actually quite handy, being a short stroll from Covent Garden, the British Museum and Oxford Street. This *belle époque* building was originally the home of Pearl Assurance (the company installed the seven-storey marble staircase) and more recently the Renaissance Chancery Court Hotel. After an AED 525 million refit, the vibe is distinctly English-manor-house, with flat-capped doormen and jars of sweets in the lobby. The grey, taupe and cream scheme is jazzed up with Asian accents (lacquered furniture, Chinese porcelain cups in the bathrooms), and there's homemade refreshments in the bedrooms. The library-like Scarfes Bar (lobster curries by day, killer cocktails by night) and the glittering Mirror Room (squishy chesterfields and a menu including rose veal tartare and seared *foie gras*) lie at either end of the bronze corridor separating the lobby from the outside world. The new Holborn Dining Room by ex-Ivy head chef Des McDonald adds a brasserie buzz, whether you're after a fish-finger sandwich or a slap-up steak.

**FLASH POINT** Holborn just got sexy.

*Doubles from AED 2,130; 0044-20-7781 8888, rosewoodhotels.com/london*



Nibble on *foie gras* in the glamorous Mirror Room

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## DUBAI ANANTARA DUBAI THE PALM RESORT & SPA

There are 293 rooms at this resort from the elegant Anantara portfolio of hotels, but you'd never guess it. Located on a serene stretch of beach and seafront on the eastern crescent of the Palm Jumeirah, this Thai-style property feels private and secluded, with low buildings and an air of gentleness that is unusual to find around these parts. The overwater villas – the first of their kind in the region – have glass panels in the floor to observe marine life; the lagoon access rooms have a swim in, swim out capability that can be quite fun (parents need not worry, there are lifeguards patrolling at all times). A kids' club and teens' club add to the family-friendly vibe. *Som tam* and Asian spiced lamb are on the menu at Mekong, and The Beach House, with its floor-to-ceiling windows, is a relaxed option with Mediterranean fare.

**FLASH POINT** Brings understated Thai elegance to a spot where ostentation is the norm.

Rooms from AED 900; 00971-4-567 8888, [dubai-palm.anantara.com](http://dubai-palm.anantara.com)

Pool access is at your back door in one of the Lagoon Villas



The Lobanov Presidential Suite features a full marble bathroom with a stand-alone tub, rain shower and separate powder room

## RUSSIA FOUR SEASONS HOTEL LION PALACE ST PETERSBURG

Until Four Seasons moved in, the Lion Palace Hotel was known more modestly as the "house with lions". Not that it is modest at all. A huge triangular mansion with yellow façades and gleaming white columns, it looks like an enormous slice of neoclassical lemon meringue pie. The lions are two statues that have stood at the grand entrance since the house was built in 1820; they are known to all Russians because they figure in Pushkin's great poem "The Bronze Horseman". Four Seasons has done everything possible to showcase this piece of literary and architectural history with an utterly sumptuous reinvention of 19th-century opulence. The Lobanov Presidential Suite even has a heated balcony so you can go out in your slippers in winter and admire the golden dome of St Isaac's Cathedral and the aquamarine frontage of the Winter Palace. But you could just as happily stay indoors and enjoy the foodie comforts: the Tea Lounge with its glass roof; the Xander Bar where you can sip a cocktail and sample a few *zakuski* (the nibbles with which Russians like to take their drink); the pan-Asian Sintoho restaurant; or the Percorso, where chef Andrea Accordi (whose Prague restaurant won Eastern Europe's first Michelin star) serves spit-roasted duck with cherry and pink-pepper compote.

**FLASH POINT** The Palace harks back to a kind of tsarist splendour that's as unreal and seductive as St Petersburg itself.

Doubles from AED 2,700; 007-812-339 8000, [fourseasons.com/stpetersburg](http://fourseasons.com/stpetersburg)

PHOTO: PAUL THUYNSBAERT



The Turquoise Loft is located within Alavya's oldest building

## TURKEY ALAVYA, ALACATI

Discovering a little hotel that's at once cool, stylish and impeccably curated usually comes with a flipside: you have to dress up to fit in. Not so at Alavya, in chi-chi Alacati on the Izmir peninsula. Yes, it's the new go-to hidey-hole for the great and good of Istanbul, but the money is muted, the fashion (though high) is discreet, and egos are parked at the door, albeit next to a string of Bentleys and Mercs. From the décor (blonde wood, heavy linens and monochrome sketches with an occasional bark of humour) to the intimate little spa and the smart but relaxed restaurant Mitu, the entire place is a meditation on chic. Stitched together out of six old village houses, it feels more like a hamlet than a hotel. In one room there are lofty vaulted ceilings, in another a four-poster, there are sun-blushed balconies, an enormous hot tub. Get out and wander the café-clustered streets of Alacati. Lose a morning in the antique shops on Haci Memis street. Head up to Urla vineyard to taste grapes winning Decanter awards by the case. Just make sure you're back by dusk for a poolside chat before everyone slips away for supper, while glowing lanterns swing silently in the breeze.

**FLASH POINT** It's not the first boutique hotel in Alacati, but it's the most heavenly.

Doubles from AED 1,220; 0090-232-716 6632, [alavya.com.tr](http://alavya.com.tr)

## ASIA

### CHINA HOTEL ÉCLAT BEIJING

Expectations are raised when you're presented on arrival with a neon-lit Chinese moon gate, a Dalí bronze sculpture and two iron doors from London's Battersea Power Station. And Hotel Eclat doesn't disappoint. Art collections are a Beijing hotel trend but this place wins for sheer diversity: a Warhol here, a hanging shark installation by Chen Wenling there and commissioned Timothy Oulton travel chests beside the beds. There are Fendi and Hermès bespoke bicycles, and giant photos of Beijing landmarks by Wang Guofeng along the corridors. But it's not all about art. The central location near Ritan Park makes it a brilliant base from which to access all areas of the sprawling capital. Book one of the pool suites for a typically non-conformist combination of cream-coloured Korean marble, dark-leather walls and geeky gadgetry such as 3D TVs and automatic back-massaging chairs. Out on the terrace, you'll find white sofas and a five-metre heated pool for a late-night dip. This is rock-star chic, Chinese-style. The downside is there's no restaurant, but the very good Opera Bombana is in the adjacent Parkview Green complex, serving tagliatelle with sea urchin, courgettes and Sardinian *bottarga* by chef Umberto Bombana.

**FLASH POINT** No other downtown Beijing hotel offers such a blend of stylish bravura and personalised comfort.

Doubles from AED 1,150; 0086-10-8561 2888, [eclathotels.com/beijing](http://eclathotels.com/beijing)



The Lobby Lounge showcases artwork by Andy Warhol



The open-air terrace of the Super Giant tapas and cocktail bar

### ◀ MIRA MOON, HONG KONG

Never mind the jade rabbits and deities that populate the folk legend woven around the Mira Moon: what you've actually got here is a swish, modish, Chinese-accented 91-room hotel in one of Hong Kong's edgiest districts. Sister property to The Mira on the other side of Victoria Harbour, Mira Moon occupies a former office block, with just four guest rooms per floor. Hi-tech is not so much embraced as given a bear hug: room service and much else is writ large on the bedside iPad. Bluetooth allows you to play your own music and Wi-Fi pops on the moment you open your laptop. The gizmos segue neatly with the bold interiors, which include tulip-shaped chairs and lanterns emblazoned with characters from Chinese mythology; service is efficient, and even the room attendants carry a business card. A Spanish and a Chinese chef vie with each other in the restaurant, while coffee and Chinese tea are served in the lobby (more of a salon, really). Mira Moon's location in Wanchai grants harbour views to the north, and raw urban vistas at other points of the compass.

**FLASH POINT** This is a 21st-century Chinese hangout with super-assured hospitality and a fun-filled vibe.

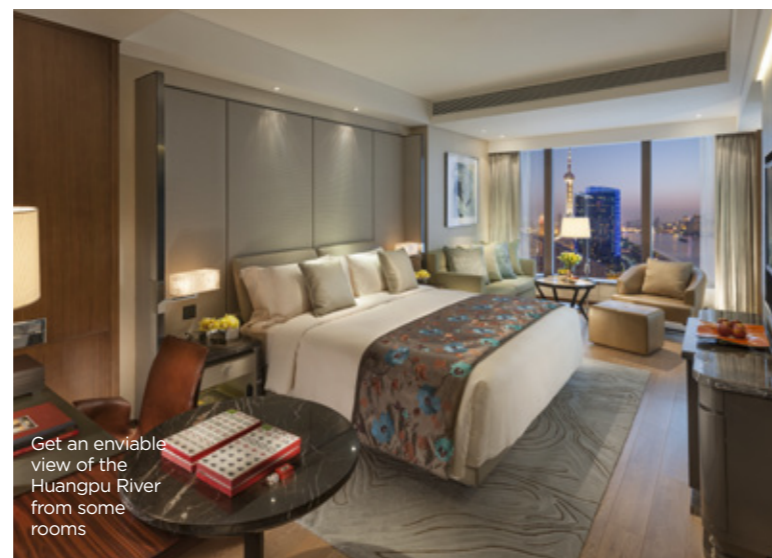
*Doubles from AED 680; 00852-2643 8888, miramoonhotel.com*

### MANDARIN ORIENTAL PUDONG, SHANGHAI ▶

If you want to hang out in the latest hotspot for Shanghai's smart set, then the gold-trimmed Riviera Lounge at the new Mandarin Oriental hotel is a good place to start. At the weekend afternoon tea, fashionable young things sip Longjing with delicate pastries. Joining them for dessert is a good way to experience New China chic in motion. Also causing a real buzz around town is the hotel's Yong Yi Ting restaurant, where emerging star Tony Lu is busy reworking regional cuisine with dishes such as shredded Shanghaiese salted chicken with jellyfish, and chilled drunken fresh abalone with fox nut. The Mandarin Oriental group is famous for its spas and here there are 13 private spa suites for Shanghai's elite. Overlooking the Huangpu River, the hotel is close to plenty of glitzy malls and the Shanghai Tower, the world's second-tallest building.

**FLASH POINT** A front-row view of non-stop Shanghai.

*Doubles from AED 1,410; 0086-21-2082 9888, mandarinoriental.com/shanghai*



Get an enviable view of the Huangpu River from some rooms

### THAILAND ▶ POINT YAMU BY COMO, PHUKET

Christina Ong, the Singaporean hotelier behind the COMO group, must have hugged herself when she came across the empty shell of Point Yamu. Its developers had gone bust, so the place was up for grabs, fully built but undecorated, on the crest of a little headland jutting into Phang Nga Bay. She hired the Italian designer Paola Navone – a lover of uncluttered white spaces and artisanship – to do the interiors, and persuaded James Low, the general manager of her Metropolitan hotel in Bangkok, to come down and run things. The result is one of those places where guests arrive with all sorts of expeditions planned then fail to move. Because of its elevation, a constant breeze ripples across the big pool terrace, the perfect place to settle with a book after a celestial breakfast. The monochrome scheme, punctuated with blue and flashes of turquoise, lends the lofty spaces an infectious insouciance. The only downside is the lack of a beach. Still, it's fun to chug off on a longtail boat to the beach club on a nearby island, so problem solved.

**FLASH POINT** Point Yamu feels wonderfully secluded, but Phuket Town is only a 20-minute taxi ride away.

*Doubles from AED 1,300; 0066-7636 0100, comohotels.com/pointyamu*

PHOTOS: FREDERIC LAGRANGE, KURT ALAN HECK



The property's centrepiece is the beachfront Collector's Villa

### INIALA BEACH HOUSE, PHUKET

Eleven brilliant designers worked on the three villas and penthouse at Iniala and the results are eye-popping, mostly in a good way. Each room is different: a hanging bed, undulating wicker ceiling and gold-domed private spa here; a floor that moves like sand, china-studded wall or dazzling white marble bathroom there. Add a restaurant overseen by Spanish maestro Eneko Axta, a sensational pastry chef and a cool sommelier, and you won't want to share Iniala with anyone else. Each three-bedroom villa has a private spa, and at the end of the day – once you have finally rolled off the massage bed – it's rather delectable to wander over to the 22-seat private cinema (all shag-pile and air-con) or the games room with its Thai-boxing ring (plus instructor) and Swarovski-studded pool table, after depositing the children in their own quarters with fort and tree-house. With Phuket airport 20 minutes away, and a hotel next door for guest overspill, Iniala is perfectly pitched for a wedding or multi-generational family get-together – albeit on an oligarch's budget.

**FLASH POINT** Owner Mark Weingard donates 10 per cent of profits to his charity, the Inspirasia Foundation, which can only add to the feel-good factor.

*One-bedroom suite from AED 10,100; 0066-7645 1456, iniala.com*



The Premier Suites overlook lush gardens and water features

### INDONESIA REGENT BALI

This swanky new Regent has given the Sanur region some much-needed va-va-voom. Charlie Chaplin, Noël Coward, and Elizabeth Taylor used to hang out here, but it had got stuck in a time warp, with nowhere really decent to stay – until now. The Regent is immediately impressive, with skyscraper-high ceilings in the lobby and an enormous courtyard dominated by a water feature with a temple on top. The spa is as peaceful as a starry night and the treatments are delivered with the kind of tenderness and charm only found on Bali. Interiors are uncluttered and serene, mixing batiks, rattan and marble with a contemporary eye, and the bedrooms are huge, with lattice-screened balconies the same size. In the morning, the sound of traditional Balinese music calls you to breakfast at Layang Layang restaurant, serving terrific smoothies, fresh pastries and feather-light omelettes.

**FLASH POINT** The super-stylish Regent has upped the stakes in Sanur. *Doubles from AED 1,100; 0062-361-301 1888, regenthotels.com ▶*



A taste of Italy at poolside La Sirena restaurant

# THE HOT LIST 2014

## DUBAI SOFITEL DUBAI THE PALM RESORT & SPA

Polynesia is the theme of the Sofitel's Palm Jumeirah outpost. This translates to décor in the public areas – the gardens, fresh flowers, bright artworks throughout the property – as well as in the 361 rooms, suites and villas where lively turquoise, blue and green splashes bring in a tropical island vibe. Check into one of the suites, or the beach villa, and you'll find Hermès amenities in the well-appointed bathrooms. There's not much reason to leave the property with eight restaurants, seven bars and lounges (including a nightclub), pools, a beach and the blissful So Spa right on the grounds – and given that getting off the Palm and into the city is a 20-30 minute affair, perhaps staying put is the best option. If you must wander, a complimentary bus service takes guests to the nearby Atlantis water park.

**FLASH POINT** The solicitous service is world-class, with friendly, helpful staff always standing by. *Rooms from AED 900; 00971-4-455 6677, sofitel.com*



Enjoy the mainland from afar as you lounge poolside

**VIETNAM**  
**AMANO'I, VINH HY BAY** ➔

Amanresorts' first hotel in Vietnam is totally off-grid, a two-hour drive south of Nha Trang. The winding coastal road to get here is beautiful and deserted except for the odd cow, or a bride posing for pictures in a canary-yellow dress. Forested mountains are barely interrupted by the smattering of villas designed by Jean-Michel Gathy, with low oak beds and vast bathrooms, private infinity pools and red paper lanterns hanging outside sliding doors. Take a buggy down to the beach club and breakfast at smart tables covered in putty-coloured cloths. The view is a sweep of sand and sea; the food is fresh fruit, homemade mango jam and a bakery basket of goodies still warm from the oven (pastry chef Arnaud previously worked at the two-Michelin-starred restaurant Taillevent in Paris). Play tennis, sail a Hobie Cat or spend time at the spa: it's a revelation. The yoga pavilion sits on a lotus-flower-filled lake and there are daybeds on wooden platforms where you can sip post-treatment ginger-and-lemongrass tea. At night, tuck into seafood rice pancakes in the Central Pavilion as lights from the squid-fishing boat out at sea pierce the ink-black sky.

**FLASH POINT** Miles from the east coast's other hotel heavyweights, this is uncharted territory where you can zone out in style. *Pavilions from AED 3,300; 0084-68-377 0777, amanresorts.com*



Choose to lounge, dine or swim from the expansive Beach Club



Rain showers in the guest bathrooms are just one of the luxe details

**CAMBODIA**  
**SALA LODGES, SIEM REAP**

It took more than two years to find 11 disused and authentic Khmer houses in local villages before transporting each one back to this unblemished plot on the edge of Siem Reap and refurbishing them. The results are spectacular: the weathered, stilted villas (dating from 1956 to the Eighties) look like they have always been here, surrounded by orchids and shady trees, a green sanctuary in a town that can feel maddeningly busy and dusty. The French and Swiss owners clearly have an eye for hospitality that goes beyond the architectural: all the staff, from the general manager to the cleaners, are impossibly kind and helpful; the food, a mix of Khmer classics including fish *amok* and hotel staples such as a club sandwich, is served in a sleek space with blackboard menus and polished-concrete floors. Outings and day trips highlight local culture as much as the temples of Angkor Wat, with bikes to explore the fluorescent-green paddy-fields and nearby villages, and tuk-tuk rides through town. If there's one quibble, it's with the mosquitoes attracted by the canals in the grounds, and some light sleepers might consider the barking dogs and crowing cockerels a nuisance. But most will find it all charmingly authentic, especially considering the price.

**FLASH POINT** The villas have just the right amount of added luxury, with big rain showers and king-size beds. *Doubles from AED 590; 0085-56-376 6699, salalodges.com*

PHOTO: PICASA

**BHUTAN**  
**GANGTEY GOENPA LODGE, PHOBIKHA VALLEY**

It may be a long journey to this remote new hotel in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, but you know you've made the right decision from the second you arrive. The vast, double-height lobby-lounge has an entire wall of glass with gripping views of the 17th-century Gangtey monastery, which appears to float above a wide, misty valley speckled with grazing yaks and ponies. Staff greet new guests with a song, a hot drink and a shoulder massage, which is a great start in anyone's book. The bedrooms are big, with wood-burning stoves, underfloor heating and a free-standing bathtub in a bay window for views of the monastery. Australian architect Mary Lou Thomson has created a seriously smart take on the rustic vernacular, with plenty of exposed stone, polished wood and local woven fabrics. Innovative touches such as inside/outside log fires make the private terraces usable year-round, and the kitchen uses organic ingredients to make slow-roast pork belly or exotic Bhutanese dishes such as *ema datshi*, a chilli-and-yak-cheese stew with wild mushrooms. The lodge makes a stellar addition to Bhutan's burgeoning hotel scene, established with such sensitivity and style by Taj, Aman and COMO.

**FLASH POINT** The light, the staff, the celestial views: this is how it feels to be on top of the world. *Doubles from AED 2,390; 00975-0234 0943, easternsafaris.com* ▶



Enjoy picturesque countryside vistas with your morning cuppa



Sip South Indian coffee in the hotel's chilled-out café

**INDIA**  
**➔ ABODE, MUMBAI**

"If you can keep your wits about you while others are losing theirs, the world is yours." This loose paraphrase of "If" by Bombay-born Rudyard Kipling is emblazoned in neon script at the otherwise discreet entrance to Abode. It's the city's first really smart boutique hotel, tucked behind the Gateway of India in the historic Colaba district. The sign might just as easily read: "Stay here and Mumbai will be yours." Hotel options in India's financial capital have until now been fairly unvaried, and all at sky-high prices. Abode is the antidote. With just 20 rooms and set in historic Lansdowne House, it combines personal service, low-key luxury and the intimacy of a guesthouse. The loft-style café is a haven from the cacophony of the streets, but there's a sense of place everywhere: the floor tiles are Parsi, a nod to the importance of that community in Mumbai; the raffia blinds recall coconut groves and fishing villages. British co-founder Lizzie Chapman is an exponent of ethical tourism, so there are Parle G biscuits to hand out to street children, the shawls on sale are from a women's collective and Abode only uses female taxi drivers, many of them single mothers.

**FLASH POINT** Check in and tune in: Abode is next to Mumbai's hottest galleries and restaurants.  
*Doubles from AED 250; 0091-80-8023 4066; abodeboutiquehotels.com*

**VANA, MALSI ESTATE, UTTARAKHAND** ➔

India's newest and biggest wellness retreat takes its name from the Sanskrit term *van*, meaning forest, as it's hidden in ancient Himalayan woodlands surrounding the city of Dehradun, 240km north of Delhi. The modern 90-room property, designed by Spanish architectural firm Esteva i Esteva, is on a 21-acre estate of mango and lychee orchards, and many rooms have uninterrupted views of the forest. Vana has 55 treatment suites, a great many pools, yoga studios and pavilions, a gym and tennis courts. There are more than 150 therapies to choose from, all drawn from traditional Indian, Tibetan and Chinese medicine. Delicious specialist menus are created from fresh organic produce, much of it grown in the kitchen gardens. The bedrooms are simple, with works by in-house artist Siraj Saxena; suites have private meditation rooms with paintings by Tibetan monks. The hushed soundscape is enhanced by the haunting music of Bhatti, the hotel's flautist, who also offers sound-vibration healing sessions.

**FLASH POINT** This is one of the most talked-about spa openings of the year and it is exceeding expectations.

*Doubles from AED 2,800 per night, including transfers, all meals, group wellness activities and a 75-minute individual treatment per day; 0091-135-391 1114, vanaretreats.com.*

*Minimum stay three nights ▶*



Just one of the wellness retreat's many pools



**THE HOT LIST 2014**

Al Sahel's villas and main resort building feature traditional thatch roofs that harmoniously blend with the natural surroundings

**ABU DHABI**  
**ANANTARA SIR BANI YAS ISLAND AL SAHEL VILLA RESORT**

Once a private royal retreat, Sir Bani Yas Island opened as a wildlife reserve and resort destination a few years ago. Fast forward to today and this corner of Abu Dhabi - that could easily be mistaken for an African savannah - plays host to three Anantara-run properties. Al Sahel Villa is the newest, though the villas channel rustic-chic with canopied terraces from where you can keep an eye out for wildlife - friendly gazelles often emerge out of the long grass. The sustainable design doesn't preclude luxury: Plush beds are hard to get out of and the stand-alone tubs are enormous; come dusk the private plunge pools are lit up invitingly. The concierge at the resort can - and happily does - arrange a range of activities, including coastal kayaking, mountain biking, wildlife drives, snorkelling and horseback riding. The African mirage is completed at lodge-inspired Savannah Grill & Lounge, which dishes up some of the finest steak in the region, best enjoyed as the sun descends to a soundtrack of cicadas.

**FLASH POINT** Skip the road trip and arrive via a scenic plane ride from Dubai or Abu Dhabi.  
*Doubles from AED 895; 00971-2-801 4300, al-sahel.anantara.com*

STYLE: SABINA PARKINSON; PHOTO: MAZUN ABUSOUR; MODEL: OLGA KACZYNSKA; HAIR: KIRSTEN KLONTZ; MAKE-UP: NICKOL WALKEMEYER; PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT: MUHAMMED ASHEEM; TOP, TROUSERS, SHOES: ALL BY GUCCI



## JAWAI LEOPARD CAMP, RAJASTHAN

This sophisticated, eight-tent camp is set in the Aravalli Hills, a comfortable three-hour drive from either Udaipur or Jodhpur. A stay here means avoiding both the crowds and the cumbersome regulations of India's wildlife reserves, while also getting a front-row seat on a fast disappearing way of life. In Jawai, white-bearded temple priests and red-turbaned Rabari herdsman live as their ancestors did for centuries, sharing their rocky surroundings with the wildlife. Leopards are regarded as sacred guardians of the ancient temples that dot the landscape; it is estimated that 30-50 live in the Jawai area. There are also Nilgai antelopes, crocodiles, Langur monkeys, wild boar and more than 100 bird species (including flamingos at the Jawai Dam), and the guides are knowledgeable and passionate. In the tented suites, local stone has been combined with smart stainless steel, leather and dramatic black-and-white wildlife photographs, and there are proper bathrooms with powerful hot showers. The camp's garden supplies fresh organic produce for robust Indian feasts served after cocktails in the evening.

**FLASH POINT** There are now quite a few sophisticated safari lodges and camps in India, but none comes close to Jawai for extraordinary wildlife encounters.

*Doubles from AED 2,440 including all meals and twice-daily game drives; 0091-11-4617 2700, [sujanluxury.com/jawai-leopard-camp](http://sujanluxury.com/jawai-leopard-camp). Open September to June*



Monochromatic artwork is indicative of the extraordinary wildlife encounters you can expect on the drives

PHOTOS: JAISAL SINGH, STEFANO CANDITO, DOUG FOGELSON



Stilted Garden Villas are perched over a lagoon

## MALDIVES CHEVAL BLANC RANDHELI

Eight years on from the Maison Cheval Blanc in Courchevel, the second property from the LVMH group opened late last year. It was five years in the making, and it shows. The resort is entrancing, the finish impeccable. Its key colours of taupe and white blend beautifully with the natural tones of granite, stone and wood, cheered by sudden pops of lemon yellow. Look up in your immense villa (designed by Jean-Michel Gathy, who is having a massive year) and you'll notice that the rattan roof is exquisitely woven. In the bathroom, the magnifying mirror by Aliseo is the most powerful on the market. But it's the service as much as the design that will make you smile, from breakfast (a perfect buffet of delights) to dinner at Le 1947 (a sumptuous tasting menu) and treatments in the Guerlain spa (Indian head massages, facials, *shiatsu*). There's no more romantic way to travel than by seaplane, and the hotel has its own, bobbing at the quayside.

**FLASH POINT** Cheval Blanc has set a new global standard; Aman's crown is no longer secure.

*Doubles from AED 5,680; 00960-656 1515, [chevalblanc.com](http://chevalblanc.com)*

## NORTH AMERICA

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA THOMPSON CHICAGO

Thompson Chicago is all about kicking back and feeling right at home. The hotel, which opened last October in a smart residential area, manages to combine striking architecture (exposed-brick walls, wooden beams and a contemporary central staircase) with the slightly edgy style of British designer Tara Bernerd. As with her work at London Belgraves hotel, Bernerd's use of plush fabrics and textiles (velvet, cowhide, flannel, tweed) creates an understated, elegant style that's both cosy and handsome. She has paid homage to one of the city's most beloved architects, Frank Lloyd Wright, using examples of his geometric tiles in the lobby. Bernerd has created a relaxed, informal style in the bedrooms with bespoke furniture and carefully chosen art, such as *Flying Death* by Wes Lang, inspired by rock'n'roll bike culture; and there are amazing views of Lake Michigan or the Chicago skyline through floor-to-ceiling windows. The Italian restaurant, Nico Osteria, serving rustic rigatoni and big-eye tuna, has been booked solid with excited foodies since opening day.

**FLASH POINT** Ask for one of the Lakeview rooms, where you can take in the vista from your bathtub.

*Doubles from AED 920; 001-312-266 2100, [thompsonchicago.com](http://thompsonchicago.com)*



Shack up in a bi-level loft-style penthouse

## LOEWS REGENCY HOTEL, NEW YORK

Park Avenue has never been over-endowed with great places to stay. The Loews Regency is one of the few, and it has great pedigree: its owners, the Tisch family, are one of the city's wealthiest clans, and the restaurant is renowned for its power breakfasts. But in recent years the clubby interior had grown dated and dowdy and the place was dead in the evenings. Then came a year-long, AED 367 million renovation and the hotel reopened its doors in January. The new look is bright and gleaming, with a strong Art Deco flavour: lots of mirror and chrome, a palette of black, white and grey and masses of marble. The 379 rooms are very comfortable and continue the Art Deco theme, but what sets them apart is their generous size and huge marble baths. The Regency Bar & Grill is buzzing again thanks to chef Dan Silverman, formerly of The Standard Grill, whose no-frills approach to quality meats and fish shines in dishes such as seared duck breast with dried cherries and pistachios. (There are also some knockout desserts, including a popcorn *pot de crème*). Throw in an adorable tiled coffee bar from local favourite Sant Ambroeus and you've got a property aiming to be part of the city's lifeblood once more.

**FLASH POINT** There are cooler hotels in town, but for a grown-up, uptown experience, the Loews is your new best bet.

*Doubles from AED 1,580; 001-212-759 4100, loewshotels.com*



The Lobby Lounge was designed by Rottet Studio and includes an art installation by Nina Helms



The hotel's two Penthouse Suites come with terraces

## THE MARLTON HOTEL, NEW YORK

West 8th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues still shows signs of the gritty insolence that's been knocked out of the rest of Manhattan. Which is something that evidently appealed to the groove-cutting hotelier and restaurateur Sean MacPherson, who's converted an old students' dorm into this Twitter-trending place to stay. There are 107 bedrooms in the narrow seven-storey building, all tiny (save the two penthouse suites) and gizmo-free, other than a basic phone and bog-standard TV. But my, they are pretty. MacPherson was inspired by traditional Parisian guesthouses, and he clearly has an eye for cake-icing mouldings, gold sconces and bevelled mirrors; the bathrooms are black-and-white-tiled studies in vintage glamour. The ground-floor lobby is low-lit, wood-paneled, warmed by an enormous fire in winter and well-padded with sofas and leather chairs; there's a retro espresso bar and plenty of art books on the shelves. At night the cocktail bar, around the corner from the main entrance, is busy with neighbourhood hipsters and out-of-towners ordering Double Rye Manhattans and Bohemian Sidecars at double-figure prices while waiting to slide into a booth at Margaux, the bistro, and order grilled lamb chops or buckwheat rigatoni.

**FLASH POINT** If you're after pint-sized style on a budget, this is the place.

*Doubles from AED 920; 001-212-321 0100, marltonhotel.com*

PHOTOS: ANNIE SCHLECHTER, ADRIAN GAUT, SKOTT SNIDER



Nostalgic furnishings combine with modern comforts in this Revival building

## THE REDBURY SOUTH BEACH, MIAMI

After a total refurbishment, the former Fairfax hotel reopened last November as a fresh-faced, 69-room property. It may look like a bit of a runt in the shadow of Collins Avenue neighbours such as the 13-storey Delano, but as the smallest member of the SBE hotel group, it proves that bigger is not necessarily better. The edgy, playful design by Ashley Manhan includes black-and-white floor tiles and red Adirondack chairs in the central courtyard. Upstairs, corridors lined with grey-and-white wallpaper are punctuated with red, lemon-yellow and flamingo-pink doors. The bedrooms are big, with mirrored wardrobes, boxy Geneva alarm clocks and faux-vintage turntables with a stack of 78s. There are great views from the rooftop pool terrace, and a herb garden and bar are to be added this summer. Chef Tony Mantuano's restaurant, Lorenzo, produces sharing plates of *pizzette*, Nonna's meatballs and gnocchi with boar *ragù*.

**FLASH POINT** With access to The Raleigh and SLS South Beach, this is a buy-one-get-two-free combo that's hard to beat.

*Doubles from AED 730; 001-305-604 1776, theredbury.com/southbeach*



Sunbathe in style at the rooftop pool

## PALIHOUSE SANTA MONICA

Those looking for old-school California glamour should check in to this romantic new place from hotelier Avi Brosh. Opened last summer a few streets away from the Pacific, the gorgeous 37-room beach lodge is in a landmark Mediterranean Revival building that dates back to 1927 when Santa Monica was the last stop on the railway line. The sun-filled guest rooms, designed for families on a long stay at the beach, are all different but each is wonderfully spacious with lovely exposed beams, whimsical animal-print wallpaper, walk-in wardrobes and huge windows that open to let in the ocean breeze; some have kitchens. Striking design touches include work-bench desks, bell jars and mirrored dressing rooms. Although it's steps from the busy Third Street Promenade, various shopping arcades and the Santa Monica Pier, the location feels quiet and hidden away. The lobby - with its original mosaic floor and tasteful taxidermy - has nooks and banquettes for breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea from the terrific in-house café (the chef shops twice a week at the famous Santa Monica farmers' market; dinner and bar service will be offered later this year). Visitors can also check out the hotel's Palifornia app, an insider guide to Los Angeles with curated recommendations on favourite beaches, bars, hikes and other fun.

**FLASH POINT** Sophisticated SoCal nostalgia lives on.

*Doubles from AED 1,320; 001-310-394 1279, palihouse.com*



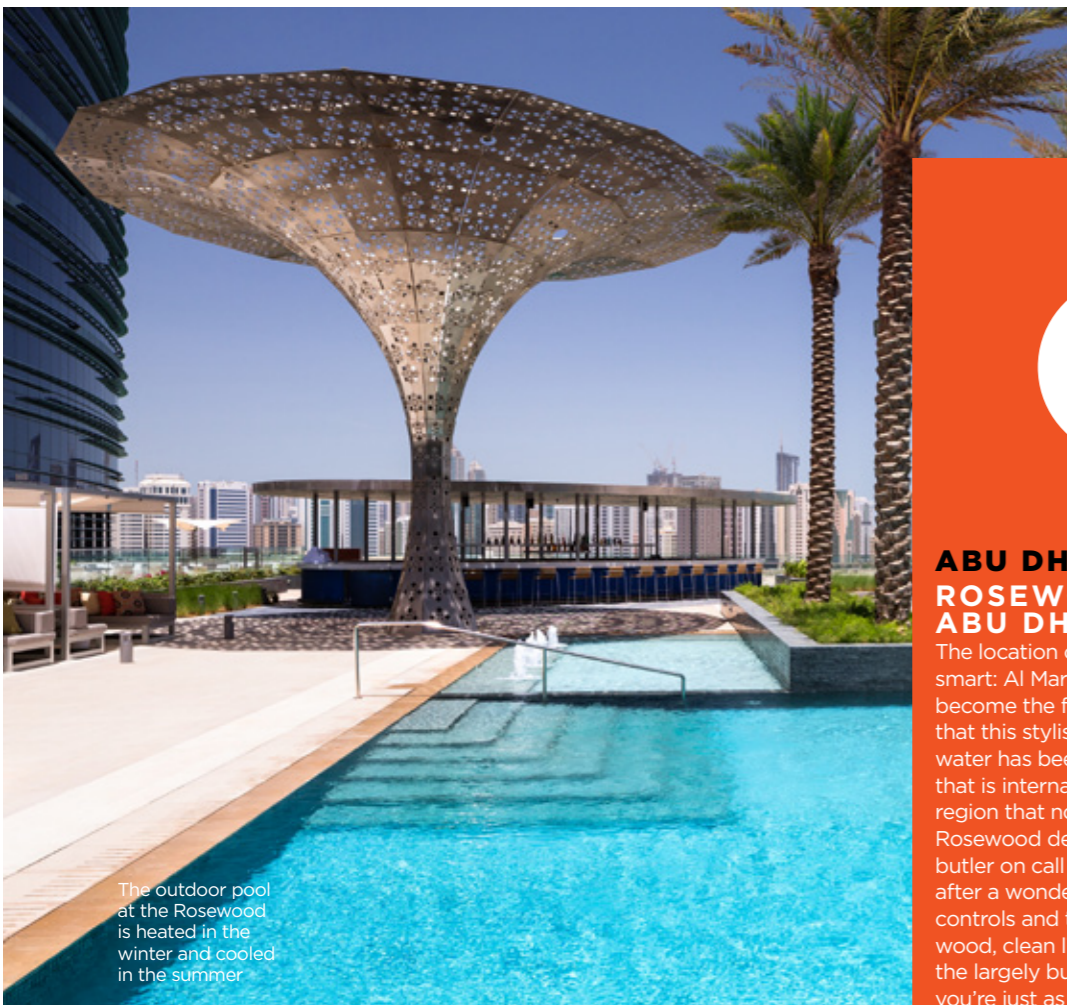
Objets d'art and original artworks fill the Apartment Suite

## THE LINE HOTEL, LOS ANGELES

You've probably never thought about staying in LA's Koreatown, but the Sydell Group - the team behind the Ace Hotels in New York and Palm Springs and the Freehand in Miami - have given you a shiny new reason to do so. A homage to the vibrant, resilient neighbourhood that re-emerged from the gang-wars of the Nineties, this 388-room hotel is a restoration of a 12-storey, mid-century modernist tower designed by Daniel Mann Johnson & Mendenhall. Working with street-food king Roy Choi, who recently opened two restaurants on the premises, the hotel sets out to celebrate the 24-hour energy of the area, home to LA's densest concentration of late-night hangouts. A buzzing lobby bar is overseen by the Houston Brothers, and a boutique, Poketo, is curated by designers Angie Myung and Ted Vadan. The rooms above are a soothing antithesis, with cushy platform beds, views of the Hollywood Hills and bathrooms reminiscent of the best Korean spas.

**FLASH POINT** The ultimate perch for night owls.

*Doubles from AED 670; 001-213-381 7411, thelinehotel.com*



The outdoor pool at the Rosewood is heated in the winter and cooled in the summer

# THE HOT LIST 2014

## ABU DHABI ROSEWOOD ABU DHABI

The location of the UAE's first Rosewood is strategically smart: Al Maryah Island in Abu Dhabi is poised to become the financial core of the emirate, meaning that this stylish hotel with its prime position by the water has been attracting a growing client base that is international, well-heeled and discerning. In a region that not just expects but demands service, the Rosewood delivers with guests hosted by a personal butler on call 24 hours a day, who takes you in hand after a wonderfully seamless check-in process. iPad controls and the modern, minimalist décor – dark wood, clean lines, Arabic details – are suggestive of the largely business clientele that was planned for, but you're just as likely to find the weekend leisure crowd enjoying a hammam at the serene Sense spa. *Paella* and Iberian *jamón* are on the menu at Catalan, with its retro vibe and floor-to-ceiling windows; La Cava recreates the feel of a genuine grape cellar, with over 1,000 labels, and a walk-in cigar room.

**FLASH POINT** The Rosewood has set the standard for luxury developments in Abu Dhabi's new business district.  
*Doubles from AED 600; 00971-2-813 5550, rosewoodhotels.com*

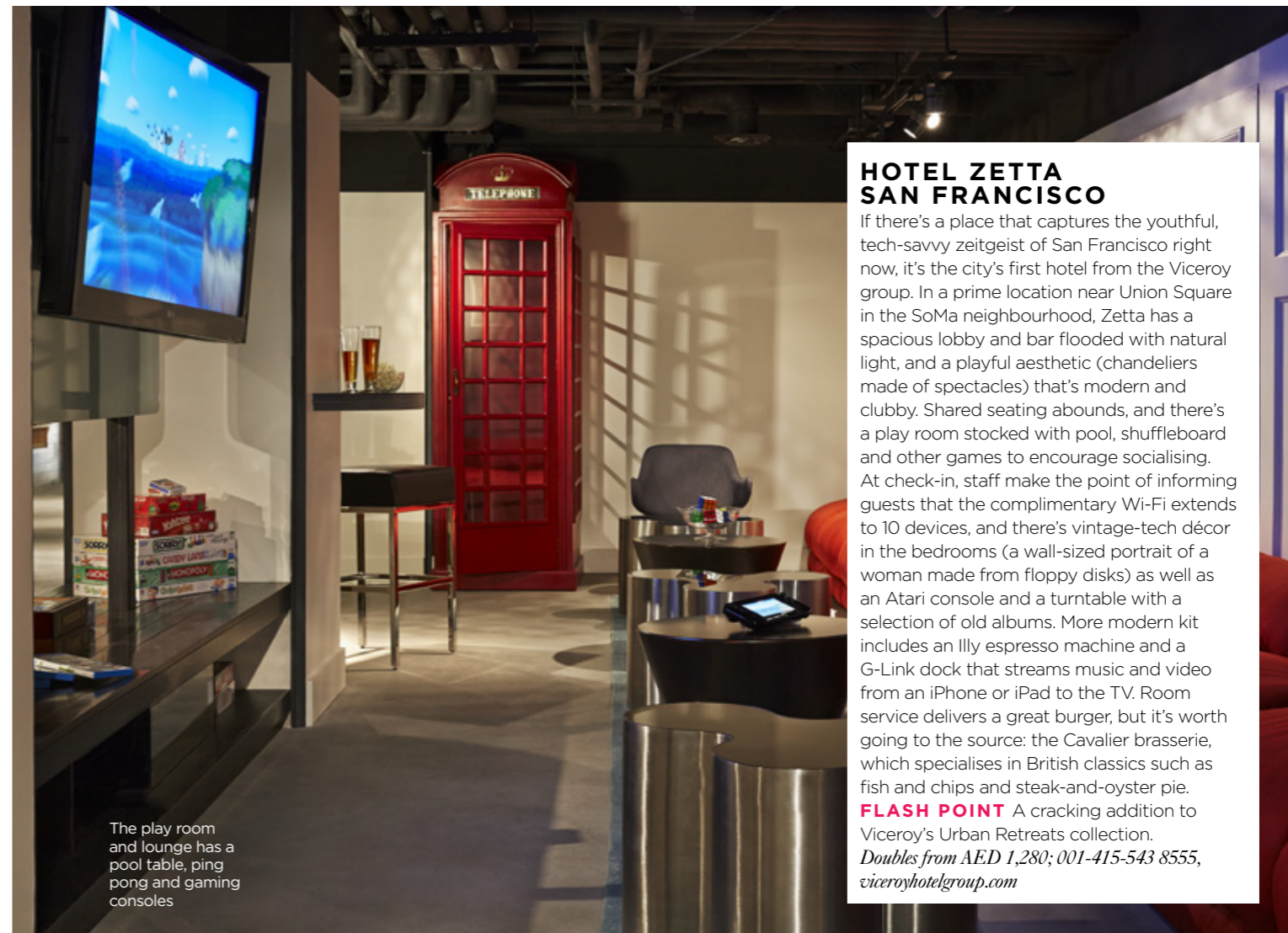
## ST REGIS ABU DHABI

There's an air of lifestyles of the rich and famous at Abu Dhabi's second St Regis, located on the cornice, a stone's throw from embassies, corporate offices and Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. Nowhere is this more evident than in the much-buzzed-about two-storey Abu Dhabi Suite, perched between the 48th and 49th floors, with the ornate *majlis* spread across the suspended bridge connecting the two halves of the suite. The three-bedroom suite comes with staff quarters, a 14-seat dining room and a spa that includes a steam room, sauna and Jacuzzi. The sense of privacy is further emphasised with helicopter transfer straight to the helipad atop the Nation Towers, from where a private elevator deposits guests straight into their palatial quarters – nothing so mundane as a check-in desk here. All guests have access to Rhodes 44, serving Michelin-starred chef Gary Rhodes' signature British cuisine. He has a hand in the St Regis afternoon tea, too, which is worth sampling.

**FLASH POINT** The unapologetic opulence is just the ticket for a little indulgent me-time.  
*Doubles from AED 750, Abu Dhabi Suite from AED 100,000; 00971-2-694 4444, stregisabudhabi.com*

Check out the cornice from the St Regis Grand Deluxe Suite

PHOTOS: DON RIDDLE, ALEX FRADKIN



The play room and lounge has a pool table, ping pong and gaming consoles

## HOTEL ZETTA SAN FRANCISCO

If there's a place that captures the youthful, tech-savvy zeitgeist of San Francisco right now, it's the city's first hotel from the Viceroy group. In a prime location near Union Square in the SoMa neighbourhood, Zetta has a spacious lobby and bar flooded with natural light, and a playful aesthetic (chandeliers made of spectacles) that's modern and clubby. Shared seating abounds, and there's a play room stocked with pool, shuffleboard and other games to encourage socialising. At check-in, staff make the point of informing guests that the complimentary Wi-Fi extends to 10 devices, and there's vintage-tech décor in the bedrooms (a wall-sized portrait of a woman made from floppy disks) as well as an Atari console and a turntable with a selection of old albums. More modern kit includes an Illy espresso machine and a G-Link dock that streams music and video from an iPhone or iPad to the TV. Room service delivers a great burger, but it's worth going to the source: the Cavalier brasserie, which specialises in British classics such as fish and chips and steak-and-oyster pie.

**FLASH POINT** A cracking addition to Viceroy's Urban Retreats collection.  
*Doubles from AED 1,280; 001-415-543 8555, viceroyhotelgroup.com*



The dining room's menu focuses on seasonal produce

## CANADA FOGO ISLAND INN, NEWFOUNDLAND

This place redefines getting away from it all. On an island off the coast of Newfoundland, at the furthest eastern reach of Canada, accessible only by ferry or tiny prop plane, the inn stands – on stilts – at the very edge of the roiling Atlantic. It makes no attempt to blend in: this is bold, modern architecture, a long, cross-shaped building four stories tall. And yet, with its driftwood-white walls, minimalist interiors and furniture and textiles made by local craftspeople, it also seems perfectly in keeping. It can go toe-to-toe with any world-class, five-star hotel: big rooms, dreamy beds, hot tubs on the roof, superb food made using seasonal ingredients. But the island and the restless ocean are the real stars, showcased through floor-to-ceiling windows, particularly stunning in the dining room with its double-height ceiling. Founded by Zita Cobb, an islander who made millions in fibre-optics, the inn is run by a charitable foundation that feeds profits back into the community. You are encouraged to join a guide and explore the island: pick berries in autumn, discover herds of caribou or the packs of icebergs that drift past in spring, go fishing or visit the artist-in-residence programmes in similarly striking architect-designed buildings. This is a place to reconnect with the world; a stay here is transformative.

**FLASH POINT** This has to be the most audacious hotel opening Canada has ever seen.  
*Doubles from AED 2,920 full-board; 001-855-268 9277, fogoislandinn.ca* ▶



Funky rooms come with "chill out zones"

## CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

### MEXICO HOTEL ESCONDIDO, PUERTO ESCONDIDO

Laid-back Puerto Escondido on Mexico's southern Pacific coast has long been a draw for surfers. With legendary breaks like the Mexican Pipeline as the main attraction, hotels were an afterthought. The arrival of Hotel Escondido on an untamed stretch of beach has changed that. Grupo Habita, known for its hotels in Mexico City, has created a surfer-inspired retreat that merges beachy freedom with comforts such as private plunge pools and in-room spa treatments. The 16 palapa-thatched bungalows are connected by pathways snaking through rock gardens, the unexpected shapes of organ-pipe cactus, spiky agave and velvety petals serving as sculpture. Each bungalow is positioned to catch evening breezes from the Sierra Madre del Sur mountains. The seclusion attracts a mix of TV stars, models and artists such as painter Bosco Sodi, whose nearby studio was designed by Tadao Ando. You can go horse-riding, help release baby sea turtles into the ocean or swim in a phosphorescent lagoon. The ever-evolving menu includes quesadillas fragrant with wild epazote, and yoghurt topped with Hotel Escondido's own honey. At the bar, the drink of choice is mezcal: try a smoky Alacrán.

**FLASH POINT** Your immersion into local culture begins at check-in with a shot. *Doubles from AED 990; 0052-954-582 2224, hotelescondido.com*

### BRAZIL BUTTERFLY HOUSE, BAHIA

A jungle retreat tucked between coconut palms and freshwater lagoons on Brazil's Marau peninsula, this deliciously laid-back hotel may be an effort to get to, but boy, is it worth it. There are five bamboo bungalows on stilts, with private porches and grass roofs, and a further three sea-view suites in the main house. Owner Chloe Gibbs raided a Casablanca riad for beautiful tiles, and silk throws are sourced from the Atlas Mountains. Service is reassuringly slick. Tired of snoozing by the pool, strolling the beach or swinging in hammocks? The staff will organise yoga sessions, jungle quad-biking, surf lessons and boat cruises to waterfalls. The abundance of fresh lobster means you may eat nothing else, and so complete is the solitude, it's easy to forget that down the coast lies the hip hotspot of Barra Grande, a hangout for beautiful Brazilians and chic Notting Hill-billies tired of the show-and-tell of Trancoso and on the hunt for pure, unadulterated fun. Add live music in sandy squares and daytime discos that spring out of virgin rainforest and you may just be in nirvana.

**FLASH POINT** Marau is still under the radar, so you have a good few more years before everyone else catches on. *Doubles from AED 820; 0055-73-3258 4113, butterflyhousebahia.com*



While away the day in bamboo loungers at the pool

## THE HOT LIST 2014

### RAS AL KHAIMAH MARJAN ISLAND RESORT & SPA

Getting an authentic taste of the region without it being OTT is a tough balancing act – but this elegant, sea-facing resort that draws inspiration from local culture manages it exceptionally well. Airy rooms with water views are adorned with calligraphic paintings, and Islamic design accents are carved into wooden features. Rooms on the Spa Retreat Floor are packed with wellness extras, like holistic music choices, an extensive pillow menu, aromatic scents and a private check-in lounge for La'Mar Spa. You can't mistake where you are with the dining and leisure offerings: A shisha lounge, an Arabic tea lounge, live oud music and restaurants dishing up Moroccan and Lebanese fare complete the picture. As the sun sets, you might take a leisurely stroll down the resort's one-kilometre-long seafront boardwalk framed by café terraces and shop fronts.

**FLASH POINT** A ladies-only pool and dry policy suggest it knows its audience well.

*Doubles from AED 550; 00971-7-203 6666, marjanislandresort.com*

### WALDORF ASTORIA RAS AL KHAIMAH

A 50-minute drive from Dubai International Airport through the rugged peaks of the Hajar Mountains suddenly opens out to the mammoth Waldorf Astoria on a private 350m stretch of beach. Inspired by opulent palaces, show-stopping chandeliers, a turquoise colour palette mimicking the hue of the Arabian Sea and plenty of marble combine to create a regal atmosphere. Continue your reign at the Waldorf Astoria Spa where indulgent treatments include Hot Hydration (a full body brush and cleanse) and the aptly named Royal Massage, a four-hand massage aimed at relaxation – and relax you will. With no less than 10 restaurants and lounges to choose from, Marjan is a nod to the region while Peacock Alley offers the brand's signature dish, the Waldorf salad, on a menu of light bites and refreshments. In close proximity to the emirate's top attractions, the concierge can arrange visits to heritage sites and museums, and organise a desert safari or dolphin spotting expedition on a traditional dhow.

**FLASH POINT** A personal concierge can pack your bags and arrange home delivery if required.

*Doubles from AED 900; 00971-7 203 5555, waldorfastoria3.hilton.com*



The private island property's grand entrance alludes to what you'll find inside



The Waldorf's Imperial Suite is two floors of indulgence, with a balcony, grand piano and private internal staircase



Live bands and tasting menus are on order at Chao Pescao

**COSTA RICA**  
**ANDAZ PENINSULA PAPANAYO RESORT**

For the past 10 years, the Four Seasons has been the Papagayo Peninsula's only place worth staying at, but now Andaz – Hyatt's younger-sister brand – has totally upped the ante. Both hotels were designed by the Costa Rican architect Ronald Zurcher, but the Andaz feels fresher and funkier. Staff in turquoise chinos look like they've stepped out of a Gap campaign. There's a purple Volkswagen van to take you to the marina or golf course. The hotel is a mix of wheel-shaped public spaces and seven low blocks camouflaged into the hillside and prettied up with bamboo-covered walkways. Bedrooms feature lots of natural materials: laurel desks and wardrobes; driftwood panels above the bed; and a pebble-floored shower opening straight on to the balcony. Spend days paddle-boarding, kayaking, lazing by the pool and having spa treatments. At night, head to Chao Pescao, the hippest of the three restaurants, for tuna ceviche, yucca chips and expert bartender Clark's Cocomacaco cocktail with pineapple and coconut milk.

**FLASH POINT** Classy and cool, this is a real game-changer for the Guanacaste coast. *Doubles from AED 940; 00506-2690 1234, papagayo.andaz.hyatt.com*

PHOTOS: ANDRES GARCIA LACHNER, JUAN PABLO MURRUGARRA



This unique stay comes complete with an imaginary owner

**PERU**  
**HOTEL B, LIMA**

It's very odd that such a creative, cosmopolitan city as Lima has lacked a smart boutique hotel for so long. And there was trepidation among discerning *limeños* as to what this new venue might be like. As it happens, Hotel B is as refined yet artistically left-field as the bohemian neighbourhood of Barranco it inhabits. The imaginary owner – dreamt up by interior designer Jordi Puig – is Florita Trista, a Peruvian aristo art dealer with a passion for travel and a habit of breaking the rules. Hotel B was conceived as Trista's private home, thrown open to display a dazzling collection of contemporary Peruvian art and highlight her exceptional talent as a hostess. There are sweeping marble staircases, fragrant bowls of fresh-cut roses and significant artworks (by the likes of Victor Rodriguez and José Tola) on loan from the de la Puente sisters, Hotel B's investors and founders of the ground-breaking Lucia de la Puente gallery which is connected to the hotel. Dramatic canvases dominate the white walls of the 17 high-ceilinged bedrooms. At breakfast in the library, waiters in crisp white jackets serve coffee from silver pots and *tamales* à la carte, but it is the restaurant that's the real draw: a hit with chic locals for its yellowfin-tuna *tataki* and sultry candlelight, it's also perfect for people-watching over Pisco Sours.

**FLASH POINT** Lima is red-hot: the food is worth the plane ticket alone, and now there's a place to stay with a direct connection to the city's vibrant art scene. *Doubles from AED 1,160; 0051-1-206 0800, hotelb.pe*

**CHILE**  
**AWASI, PATAGONIA**

In the adventurer's playground of Chilean Patagonia, intimate, eco-conscious newcomer Awasi shines brighter than the gleaming Lago Sarmiento it overlooks. Rather than being confined within the Torres del Paine National Park, Awasi stands on a ridge above 6,000 hectares of private reserve, giving a sense of space and solitude usually only afforded to the local gauchos. And make like a gaucho you will: the 12 secluded villas by architect Felipe Assadi are modelled on the cattle-herders' cabins, beer-blonde log houses with corrugated roofs that gleam like silver fish in the forest. Inside, it's all grandpa armchairs and log fires, with king-sized beds centred so you can view the dramatic landscape. Awasi assigns each villa a private guide and four-wheel-drive on call 24/7. Gallop across the steppes, stargaze in secluded canyons, track the puma, then cosy up for cocktails in the main lodge, where you can feast on king crab and Austral hake.

**FLASH POINT** For the chance to explore Patagonia on your own terms, Awasi is priceless. *Villas from AED 7,770 per person for a three-night stay, including all meals, excursions and transfers; 0056-22-233 9641, awasi.com*



The Awasi buildings are made from locally sourced wood, melding seamlessly with the environment

**URUGUAY**  
**SOFITEL MONTEVIDEO CASINO CARRASCO & SPA**

This smart reopening on the Río de la Plata has given Uruguay's hotel scene a major boost. The hotel originally opened in 1921 to entice moneyed holidaymakers to Carrasco, outside Montevideo, where wealthy Uruguayans were building grand holiday homes. But when the money moved to Punta del Este, the old Hotel Carrasco suddenly looked dated, and was finally shuttered for 10 years. Sofitel is only the second global five-star brand to move into Uruguay (there's a Four Seasons in Carmelo), and it's a clever idea. Close to Montevideo's free-trade zone and only 10 minutes' drive from the new international airport, this is by far the best hotel in town. The restoration of the building cost AED 278 million and involved master plasterers from Havana and architects from Argentina. With layers of paint removed, stained glass revived and 22-carat gold applied, the vast, marble-floored ground floor is their greatest achievement. Upstairs, there are 93 quietly glamorous bedrooms, and 23 suites where guests are assigned top-dollar butlers. The food is very good, making the most of local ingredients such as famously tender, grass-fed beef.

**FLASH POINT** There's a new-found confidence in Uruguay, and this superb hotel is its finest ambassador. *Doubles from AED 840; 00800-035-702 749, sofitel.com*



Careful restoration brought this heritage building back to its former glory

# THE HOT LIST 2014

## AJMAN

### AJMAN SARAY, A LUXURY COLLECTION RESORT

One of the UAE's most historically rich emirates hasn't been flush with luxe retreats thus far – but this Luxury Collection property has changed the game. Featuring refined Arabian architecture with Mashrabiya motifs, hanging lamps, lush courtyards and tranquil oases, the hotel's *pièce de résistance* is the 193sqm Royal Suite. The expansive terrace overlooks the Arabian Gulf; in addition to living and dining rooms, a bedroom with a pillow-top bed and a private study, the suite comes with a spa treatment room so guests can escape to their own private sanctuary. The country's first GOCO Spa individualises treatments while including classics on the menu like hot stone massages and some more unique experiences such as the black diamond exfoliation. The way to spend the evening is at Bab Al Bahr beach bar and grill, where a DJ plays into the night.

**FLASH POINT** This spot just made visiting the heritage city more enticing.

*Doubles from AED 600; 00971-6-714 2222, ajmansaray.com*

## BAHRAIN

### THE DOMAIN, BAHRAIN

A slick, high-tech property that embraces the idea that social interaction is an important part of the travel experience, The Domain is Manama's most interesting new boutique address. The hotel's Social Director makes introductions between Domain club members and guests – ideal for building business relationships, or stumbling across a local with great insider tour suggestions – and The Conversation is the property's social media network, accessible via an app that also allows you to make reservations and customise your stay with the swipe of a finger. Sixty-three suites and 68 rooms overlook the Bahrain Bay and city skyline and are attended by personal butlers. The two-floor Vie Lifestyle Lab spa and wellness centre serves as a counter to the social experience, where guests can switch off with a soothing body wrap or muscle-melting massage – before rejoining the populace at the rooftop sky lounge, Txoko, for Basque tapas and molecular cocktails with ocean views.

**FLASH POINT** The unique butler service includes a style butler, on hand to provide hair straighteners or curlers, and a technology butler with a briefcase full of the latest connectivity solutions.

*Doubles from AED 1,070; 00973-1-600 0000, thedomainhotels.com*



The beachfront bar and grill turns into a DJ lounge after dinner hours

PHOTOS: NEIL SCOTT CORDER; TURAN, DAVID CROOKES



Head up to Le Domain for cuisine from the south of France



Unwind in the wellness centre with holistic treatments

## AFRICA

## KENYA

### SEGERA RETREAT, LAIKIPIA

There is no shortage of beautiful safari lodges on the Laikipia plateau, including the rhino sanctuary of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and art-filled Ol Jogi. But there is nothing like Segera Retreat, a contemporary collection of thatched wooden villas at the heart of a 50,000-acre property, with Mount Kenya rising in the distance. The retreat, as its name implies, isn't a camp but a wilderness escape, with inspired gardens – a jigsaw of weird cacti, waterfalls of bougainvillea, sinuous salt pools and beds of exotic flowers – surrounding six two-storey villas, plus the larger Villa Segera and stone-clad Segera House. Each is different: one has a big outdoor bath carved from a single rock; another features photographs by Michael Poliza. Segera's owner, Jochen Zeitz, is also crazy about African art and it's everywhere: contemporary sculptures standing beside pools, installations in the converted stable block, paintings hanging in the grape tower. Like the art, the food is sensational and African-grown, and every meal is served in a different spot: by a pool, at a riverside picnic table, in the candle-lit stables. You can do what you like, when you like. One day, explore the solar-power and rainwater-harvesting plants (more fascinating than they sound) or learn about wildlife conservation in the little museum; another day, hike with a guide to spot elephants or lie by the pool after a massage, watching luminous sunbirds.

**FLASH POINT** Segera is proof that it's possible to build something eco-friendly and luxurious that also supports the local community.

*Doubles from AED 7,120 full-board, including game drives, guided walks and other activities; segera.com*



The spacious tented suites are in the heart of the park, ideal for wildlife spotting

## ZAMBIA

### CHINZOMBO LODGE, SOUTH LUANGWA

Zambia's South Luangwa National Park is famous for running the continent's finest guided walking safaris, the first of which were set up by Norman Carr in the Fifties. The safari company he started is still known for its circuit of simple bush camps, from which guests set off to track game on foot. So the opening of this exceptionally smart lodge late last year signalled the start of a new era. Designed by the brilliant South African architects Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens (who created North Island in the Seychelles), it sits on the banks of the Luangwa River beneath a canopy of ancient trees. The lodge was made in South Africa and assembled flat-pack-style in Zambia. The whole lot can be taken down and recycled without leaving a trace. The six tented suites are raised on platforms made from reconstituted timber, the beds cooled by an eco-friendly air-conditioning system. In the central mess tent there are carefully chosen books, cutlery and glasses, and big sofas covered in loose, natural fabrics. The dining area and bar is hung with framed photos of Carr and smiling staff members. Banded mongooses scurry around, raiding red-ant mounds; in the evenings, elephants and giraffes come down to drink at the water's edge, and hippos lumber on to the river bank to feed on the sweet grass.

**FLASH POINT** Two of the best guides in Zambia, Abraham Banda and Shadreck Nkhoma, work at Chinzombo.

*Doubles from AED 2,740 per person sharing, including all meals, drinks and activities; 00260-216 246025, normancarrsafaris.com*



The hotel has been carefully restored, with features like high ceilings, exposed brick walls, bespoke furniture and Australian artwork.



Film-maker Don Cameron worked on the hotel's unique design, which includes individually styled rooms.

### HOTEL HOTEL, CANBERRA

In a city that thrives on order, this 68-room hotel has a lot of swagger. Occupying three floors of the Japanese-inspired Nishi Building in the cultural zone of NewActon, it is laser-focused on Canberra's young-gun political advisers, minders and persuaders. The bedrooms are similarly configured but individually styled: there's a huge multicoloured wool tapestry in one; some have wallpapered ceilings and clay walls. Dozens of dusty suitcases (found by the owners in Mumbai) are stacked up against one wall in the bar, lit by a vintage chandelier from a Thirties Italian railway station. You'll find those hipsters with their briefing notes sitting at angular tables arranged like a jigsaw puzzle in the restaurant, where superstar chef Sean McConnell has been signed up to produce his signature shared plates. Or try A Baker for smoked duck breast, artichoke, maple, carrot and orange purée with summer beans and a local Nick O'Leary red grape (the emphasis is very much on regional produce). There are racks of design books, timber and concrete space dividers, and a multitude of surfaces on which to prop a nectarine Bellini and a plate of *culatello*. If you ask the concierge, he'll send you out on a specially commissioned Goodspeed bike with an excellent map of local hotspots.

**FLASH POINT** Who would have thought strait-laced Canberra would ever get this hip? *Doubles from AED 1,000; 0061-2-6287 6287, hotel-hotel.com.au*

## AUSTRALASIA

### AUSTRALIA 1888 HOTEL, SYDNEY

It's rare to find somewhere that combines good value with really smart touches, a sense of place and a distinctive soul. But that's exactly what this 90-bedroom Sydney hotel delivers. An AED 19 million makeover has breathed new life into the place, a 19th-century former wool factory and store in Pyrmont, while keeping its period windows and exposed, wonky brickwork, now a backdrop to Minotti chairs, vintage furniture and recycled pieces (the desks are made of wood salvaged from the original building). When it opened last summer, it instantly seemed to have been there forever, with a warmly lit bar and retro design straight out of an Edward Hopper canvas. Rooms vary in size from tiny to generous, and some only have internal views (overlooking the atrium); but all have iPads, well-stocked fridges and MicroCloud bed-toppers. The atrium, complete with fig tree, is the hub of the hotel, whether for a long, lazy breakfast (the soy-linseed sourdough bread is sensational) or a sociable evening accompanied by regional beverages and small plates of tasty organic dishes, from beef sliders to sharing plates of slow-roasted salt-bush lamb shoulder.

**FLASH POINT** Home-grown and proud of it, 1888 is a defiant statement amid the city's increasing globalisation. *Doubles from AED 600; 0061-2-8586 1888, 1888hotel.com.au*



The spacious four-bedroom cottage is fit for a family getaway.

### NEW ZEALAND MATAKAURI OWNER'S COTTAGE

This must be the ultimate New Zealand escape, in a spectacular location overlooking Lake Wakatipu, just minutes from South Island's adventure capital, Queenstown. Built in the elevated grounds of Matakauri Lodge – the third in Julian Robertson's portfolio, which also includes The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs and The Farm at Cape Kidnappers – this cottage is ideal for families or groups of friends. Acclaimed Auckland interior designer Virginia Fisher has lavished her unique style throughout with silver rabbit rugs, reindeer skins and blankets made by the artisans who created costumes for *The Lord Of The Rings*. You can absorb the cinematic views from the hot tub on the front balcony, while the adjacent lakeside terrace is the spot for sundowners; help yourself from the bar or cellar.

**FLASH POINT** When the global financial crisis hit the rest of the world, New Zealand must have been far enough away not to feel it. *Doubles from AED 2,280, half-board; 0064-3-441 1008, matakaurilodge.com*

PHOTOS: MIZ WATANABE, GERRY O'LEARY

## THE HOT LIST 2014

### OMAN SALALAH ROTANA RESORT

While most visitors head straight for Muscat, Oman's lush southern city Salalah is a world away, surrounded by mountains, waterfalls and tropical forests. Carved from desert rock using traditional techniques, this authentic Omani resort is perched on the golden sands of Salalah beach, with Arabesque villas surrounded by lagoons and Venetian-style canals like a serene desert oasis. Silk Road serves top-notch cuisine from the Far East, India, the Middle East and Western Europe, while the Beach Bar & Restaurant offers a more relaxed setting. But the real draw is the bespoke Destination Dining, which offers a fully customised meal, meaning you choose the location – from a mountain picnic to a private island lunch – and everything else is provided, including a butler at your beck and call.

**FLASH POINT** Salalah is Arabia's perfume capital, and guests are well-positioned for a trip to nearby Al-Husn Souq to pick up frankincense and perfume to take home.

*Doubles from AED 670; 00968-2-327 5700, rotana.com/salalahrotanaresort*

### KUWAIT JUMEIRAH MESSILAH BEACH HOTEL & SPA, KUWAIT CITY

Positioned comfortably outside the city centre on a tranquil beachfront, this hotel is tailor-made for relaxation and wellness. With 328 guest rooms and villas, you'd think the property would be overrun with activity but a calm atmosphere prevails, aided in part by the resort's accommodating staff. Spacious rooms with natural design touches overlook gardens and pools that are nestled within the horseshoe-shaped property, shielding sun-lounging guests from the action of the outside world. Avoid the midday heat in subterranean Talise Spa, a veritable wellness playground with an extensive menu of treatments – including one utilising diamond dust, for a touch of Arabian Gulf glamour – and facilities like a phosphorescent Himalayan salt room that professes to alleviate respiratory ailments. Your sense of wellness is reinforced through supper, where Salt's menu is sophisticated but not overwrought. Fresh seasonal fish like hammour is served before a healthy quinoa-based dessert. There's a kids' club and activities designed to keep teens busy, meaning you can book a getaway for the whole family.

**FLASH POINT** The relaxed pace makes it ideal for a weekend detox and rejuvenation getaway. *Doubles from AED 1,255; 00965-2226 9600, jumeirah.com*

WORDS: JULIAN ALLASON, JONATHAN BASTABLE, RALPH BESTIC, GARY BOWERMAN, PETER BROWNE, CHRIS CALDICOTT, FIONA CAULFIELD, ONDINE COHANE, GUY DITTRICH, FIONA DUNCAN, MARION FOX, LYDIA GARD, LANIE GOODMAN, LISA GRAINGER, LAUREN HOLMES, FIONA KERR, JENNY KING, EMMA LOVE, HAZEL LUBBOCK, NATHAN LUMP, MARY LUSSANA, LEE MARSHALL, JESSICA MOZAMBI, SOPHIA MONEY-COULTS, LAUREL MUNSHOWER, LULU ORCHARD, ED PETERS, MICHELE PETERSON, ADRIANIE PIELOU, STEPHANIE RAFANELLI, RHEA SARAN, BONNIE TSUI, ISSY VON SIMSON, DOMINIC WELLS, TRICIA WELSH, PHOTO: GERRIT MEIER



The Omani resort includes two atmospheric swimming pools.

Sumptuous villas overlook the pool, tennis courts and Arabian Gulf at Jumeirah Messilah.

