

# Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report<sup>®</sup>

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AndrewHarper.com

2017 GRAND AWARDS EDITION



HIDEAWAY OF THE YEAR

Abadía Retuerta LeDomaine

VALLADOLID, SPAIN

The Ribera del Duero, one of Spain's great wine regions, lies around 120 miles northwest of Madrid. Just down the road from the famous Vega Sicilia vineyard, the magnificent 1,730-acre Abadía Retuerta LeDomaine estate has become the talk of Spain since it opened after a multimillion-dollar renovation in 2012. The 30-room hotel, created from a former 12th-century Cistercian monastery, is wholly exceptional.

The austerity of the original building was respected rather than overwhelmed during the renovation, and its style remains authentic and low key. The architects had the sense to embrace the essential rusticity of the property, with its beamed ceilings and limestone floors. The public spaces, including the renovated chapel, are spare, while the character of the rooms derives from the exquisitely simple teak furniture, the wide-planked oak floors and the beautifully made oak shutters in tall windows

that overlook the surrounding vineyards. Well-equipped baths come with oversized soaking tubs and separate showers.

The hotel features two excellent restaurants: the *Vinoteca*, a casual wine-oriented bistro, and the Michelin-starred *Refectorio*, where chef Marc Segarra, who trained at the renowned *Mugaritz* restaurant in San Sebastián, produces intriguing if sometimes over-elaborate tasting menus. Guided tours of the winery are offered. Amenities include an outdoor pool and a spectacular 10,000-square-foot spa

featuring vinotherapy (treatments using grape extracts). Horseback riding and golf are available.

The estate provides a perfect base from which to discover the Ribera del Duero, as well as the atmospheric old city of Valladolid, where the National Sculpture Museum is housed within the 15th-century Colegio de San Gregorio. Abadía Retuerta LeDomaine is a wonderful property, and it is ideal for either a timeout during a tour of northwest Spain or a weekend away from the Spanish capital.



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# 2017 GRAND AWARDS



Each year, we have the pleasure of recalling our travel experiences over the past 12 months and singling out a number of particularly memorable hotels and resorts. To be considered for our annual awards, properties must be relatively small in size, possess strong individual personalities, offer relaxing atmospheres and demonstrate a consistent devotion to personal service.

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To download our 2016 HOTEL & RESORT INDEX listing all the hotels we discovered last year, visit [andrewharper.com/go/hr-index](http://andrewharper.com/go/hr-index)

*Andrew Harper travels anonymously and pays full rate for all lodging, meals and related travel expenses. Since the inception of this newsletter in 1979, the featured hotels and restaurants have been selected on a completely independent basis.*

Faena Hotel Miami Beach / PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER



## UNITED STATES

### Faena Hotel Miami Beach

MIAMI, FL

In general, I prefer smaller hotels that are indifferent to the dictates of fashion. But every so often I find myself admiring a place that is the opposite of my customary template.

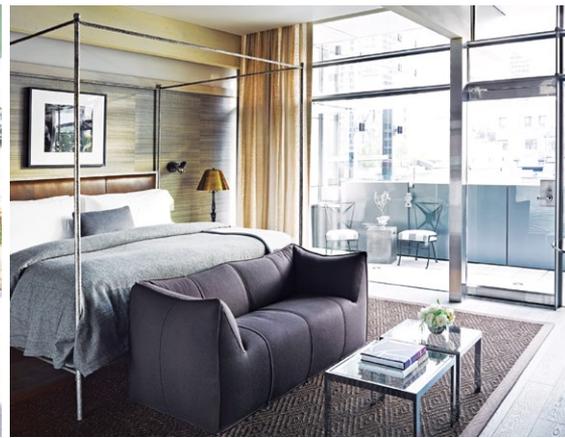
The new Faena Hotel Miami Beach is located in Mid-Beach, where the stretch between 32nd and 36th streets is now known as the Faena Art District in honor of Alan Faena, an Argentine real estate tycoon who has been the driving force behind a \$1 billion redevelopment. The Faena Hotel was originally the Saxony, a luxury resort constructed in 1947. The boldness of the new design is immediately evident in the lobby, now dubbed the “Cathedral,” which has been left as a vast theatrical space with massive gold columns and specially commissioned tropical murals.

We had opted for an Ocean View Junior Suite. The interior had a hardwood floor, handwoven rugs, art deco-inspired furniture and a vibrant color scheme of crimson and pale blue. The bath was exceptionally well-appointed.

Proud of his Argentine heritage, Faena employed the country’s most famous chef, Francis Mallmann, to oversee *Los Fuegos*, where the menu features gaucho-inspired meat dishes cooked on an open-wood grill. And at *Pao*, the young Austin-based chef Paul Qui serves creative modern Asian cuisine with Filipino and Japanese influences. Other amenities at the hotel include the lavish Tierra Santa spa, which offers treatments with a South American accent.

Along with being spectacularly imaginative, the Faena displays a human touch. During my stay, the staff were consistently friendly and unpretentious.

The Battery / © DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN



### The Battery

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

The Battery hotel, in the Financial District, is set in a private membership club where hotel guests are considered resident members during their stay and have complimentary access to all facilities. The 58,000-square-foot building was formerly a marble-cutting factory and now encompasses a bar-lounge, 14 guest accommodations, a fitness area and a spa with a steam room, a sauna and an oversized hot tub. A restaurant overseen by chef Nicolai Lipscomb offers a seasonal menu and has a rustic-chic décor with brick walls, tall wood columns, studded chairs, oval mirrors and grand framed portraits.

The interior design features baroque candelabras, contemporary art and a mix of antique and modern furnishings. A dimly lit library contains a seating area with a nautical theme and shelves stocked with books that are recommended by members.

To reach our stylish Deluxe Room on the third floor, we rode a dramatic glass elevator overlooking an enclosed garden lounge. The graciously appointed accommodations sported a handsome décor with hardwood floors, light gray walls, a soft leather chair and a comfortable bed backed by a tan headboard. A corner bar was well-stocked with high-end liquors and locally sourced snacks. The bath came with a frosted-glass walk-in shower and a separate freestanding eggshell soaking tub.

Overall the service was courteous, efficient and helpful. I highly recommend joining the daily tour, which provides an informative run-through of the history of the building. In many ways, this is the hideaway that San Francisco has lacked for so long.



## The Inn at Shelburne Farms SHELBURNE, VT

With the \$10 million that she inherited from her father in 1885, Lila Vanderbilt Webb and her husband, William Seward Webb, were able to fulfill their dream of creating an agricultural estate that employed only the most advanced techniques. Today, the farm is a nonprofit dedicated to the promotion of environmentally responsible farming.

The Inn at Shelburne Farms, a National Historic Landmark, was the couple's original home. A Shingle-style cottage — “cottage” being used in the Newport, RI, sense — it is an imposing red-brick structure, with shingled roofs and towering chimneys. Inside, the house is very much as it was when the Webbs lived there. Each of the 24 rooms (there are also four cottages on the grounds) features period décor and furniture.

The “Louis XVI Room” came with exquisite patterned wallpaper, a rich blue carpet, painted furniture and an ornate armoire. Electronic devices were conspicuous by their absence, and there was no air-conditioning (which was superfluous during our stay). The bath was on the small side, with a combined bath and shower. (Rooms vary greatly in size, so only the more expensive accommodations are recommended.)

Despite the elegance of the dining room, we opted to eat out on the terrace, with its unforgettable vistas of the lake. The menu changes daily, and many of the ingredients are sourced from the farm. Activities include hiking on the 10 miles of trails. In a world of look-alike hotels, The Inn at Shelburne Farms offers a distinctive experience.

## Hotel Wailea MAUI, HI

The 72-suite Hotel Wailea stands on a hillside above one of my longtime Maui recommendations, the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea. The Four Seasons has the advantage of being right on the beach, but those willing to forgo doorstep access to the sands will find a refreshing tranquility at the Hotel Wailea, which is set amid 15 acres of mature tropical gardens.

Accommodations occupy 18 four-suite villas; the key to happiness is reserving an Ocean View Suite. Ours was on the ground floor, but its views still proved to be sensational. Inside, our suite was equally appealing. The large living room had oak-plank floors, a kitchen wall with a refrigerator and a sink with granite countertop. Pocket doors opened to the bedroom. In the bath, a deep tub stood next to a shower space clad with fossilized coral. The wide single vanity, backed by a wall of travertine tile, had bright and well-placed lighting.

Service never failed to be warm from the moment we checked in at the impressive koa-wood front desk. At *The Restaurant at Hotel Wailea*, the waitstaff was also friendly and efficient, though the food was not as sophisticated as I had expected. Nevertheless, the view from the restaurant's lanai was inspiring, both at sunset and at breakfast.

Unfortunately, the swimming pool has no view and overlooks the (admittedly stylish) indoor/outdoor lobby-lounge. We enjoyed the pool nevertheless, because the cabanas lining it required no reservations.

## BEST CRUISE

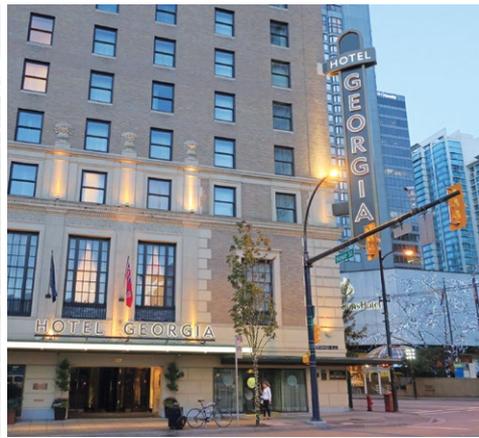
### **National Geographic Explorer**

Antarctica is the place of the moment. Its emptiness and purity are certainly part of the appeal, but for many, the teeming wildlife is probably the primary draw. Antarctica is the coldest, driest and windiest of the seven continents. While the interior may range from minus 40 to minus 94 degrees, the coastal areas, most notably the Antarctic Peninsula, see daytime summer temperatures usually in the high 20s. We journeyed this year to Antarctica with Lindblad Expeditions aboard the 148-passenger *National Geographic Explorer*. The expedition team included 14 naturalists and two photo instructors, who by my calculations had more than 250 years of combined experience in the field. They consistently went out of their way — whether on the bridge or on our Zodiac excursions — to guide us to sightings that made the trip unforgettable!





CANADA



CARIBBEAN

## Post Hotel & Spa LAKE LOUISE, ALBERTA

Lake Louise is undeniably lovely, but in July and August it is aswarm with sightseers. Most of them also wander through the only hotel on the lake, the vast 550-room Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise, which faces Victoria Glacier. If you can live without the Chateau's famous view, the Post Hotel & Spa, just three miles away, provides every comfort and is much less frenzied. The red-roofed timber-and-stone building and four log cabins lie along the boulder-strewn Pipestone River. The hotel's chalet style is true to its ski-lodge roots, with river-rock and fieldstone fireplaces, hewn timbers, peeled logs and rustic beams. Polished pine floors gleam with a warm patina.

The lobby leads to the hotel's white-linen dining room, presided over by Swiss chef Hans Sauter. Regarded as one of the finest restaurants in Canada, it certainly lived up to its reputation during our stay. Tucked one floor above the dining room is a delightful little library. A pine-paneled bar and a glass-fronted liquor cabinet fill one corner, and at either end of the room are cozy, windowed reading nooks. Elsewhere, the Temple Mountain Spa includes steam rooms, a Jacuzzi and a saltwater swimming pool.

Our suite made us feel welcome rather than wowed, with a beamed wood-paneled ceiling, sturdy unadorned furnishings and simple drapes on French doors that led to a generous semi-private deck. But we also got a woodburning fireplace, a wet bar, a roomy closet, a glass-and-tile shower and a jetted tub in a spacious bath, as well as a separate bedroom that can be closed off from the living room. We felt right at home.

## Rosewood Hotel Georgia VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

We received one of the warmest welcomes of our Vancouver trip at the historic 156-room Rosewood Hotel Georgia, where the urbane front desk clerk seemed genuinely pleased to meet us. Without our having to ask, he checked the room inventory and upgraded us to a Junior Suite. In fact, this proved to be a proper suite, with a bedroom fully separate from the living room. A white freestanding tub formed the centerpiece of the marble bath; it was flanked by nicely lit vanities and a large walk-in rainfall shower. I also appreciated touches such as the decanter of bath salts, the plush oversize robes and the well-marked light switches.

Although the property reopened as the Rosewood Hotel Georgia in 2011, the original Hotel Georgia first accepted guests in 1927, and the current incarnation shows off rich period details in its public spaces. Elaborate gilt molding accents the wood paneling of the double-height lobby. In the elegant *1927 Lobby Lounge*, we had eponymous "Hotel Georgia" cocktails, a drink which bore more than a passing resemblance to a Ramos Gin Fizz. Each evening, I had a nightcap in the intimate *Hawthorn Cocktail Bar*, choosing from its selection of Canadian whiskies (try the 12-year-old Pendleton 1910). The neighboring *Hawthorn Restaurant* routinely tops lists of Vancouver's best.

The spa is thoroughly contemporary, with a full range of treatments, a bright fitness center and a saltwater lap pool illuminated from below by color-shifting quadrilateral lights and surrounded by large porthole-like mirrors.

## Belle Mont Farm

BASSETERRE, ST. KITTS

The 400 acres of Kittitian Hill encompass the Belle Mont Farm resort, with 84 guest cottages and seven four-bedroom houses for families; residential units; a low-key village center; and the farm itself, which supplies the majority of the produce used in the various restaurants.

On arrival, we checked in at the resort's central public area, The Great House. One level below, we could see a spectacular infinity pool backdropped by the farm, the golf course and the sea. Heading uphill, we caught tantalizing glimpses of the cottages, all done with clapboard siding and shingle roofs. Inside, the room was not particularly large, but the high-peaked ceiling and the glass doors leading out to a deck and private pool made our accommodations seem simultaneously intimate and grand. The outdoor bath came with a shower, freestanding tub and separate vanities, all sheltered by a screen of vegetation.

*The Kitchen*, the main restaurant in The Great House, was designed by Bangkok-based Bill Bensley, one of the world's leading resort architects. I found the dishes to be imaginative, attractive and delicious. Activities at the resort include golf on the 18-hole, par-71 course designed by Ian Woosnam that weaves its way through the landscape. A spa, Mango Walk, is set on the highest point of the property and offers a full range of "indigenous" therapies using natural products from the farm.

This ambitious project is one-of-a-kind. If you feel like a change from the more conventional luxury Caribbean resorts, I cannot recommend it highly enough.



## RESTAURANTS OF THE YEAR

(U.S. FORMAL) **Menton** Barbara Lynch's culinary star has long illuminated the Boston dining scene. I have recommended her *No. 9 Park* for many years, and I now happily endorse this excellent restaurant. With a spare, sophisticated interior, Menton features big windows that overlook the bustling Fort Point neighborhood. The name comes from the French town of Menton, near the Italian border, and the menu draws on culinary traditions from both nations. We began our lunch with an exquisite presentation of heirloom tomatoes with crisped goat cheese, chili-inflected rhubarb and za'atar spice. A dish of striped bass with leeks, miso and mustard followed. Service was attentive, informative and friendly throughout. I look forward to returning, especially for dinner, at which there are four- and seven-course options.

(U.S. INFORMAL) **Leña Brava** I can't think of any American chefs who do upscale Mexican cuisine better than Rick Bayless. His newest Baja-inspired restaurant counts among Chicago's most coveted reservations, thanks to dishes that offer strikingly complex flavors. One memorable appetizer combined the sweet and charred flavor of roasted pineapple with pungent goat cheese, tangy orange-lime broth and hazelnut salsa macha. I also loved our main courses of black cod with spicy "pastor" marinade and sweet pineapple-shiso salsa, and short rib with smoky Oaxacan pasilla salsa and rich cauliflower purée. We spotted Bayless himself working in the kitchen, and his engaging daughter, Lanie, arranged for a selection of mezcals to pair with our courses.

(INT'L FORMAL) **El Portal de Echaurren** The modern dining room of this casually elegant Michelin two-star restaurant serves some of the best cooking in Spain right now. Young chef Francis Paniego is the fifth generation in his family to run a restaurant. At *El Portal*, Paniego is inspired by the traditional cooking of La Rioja and the seasonal produce of the surrounding farms. When the first hors d'oeuvres of the tasting menu come to the table, they are presented with a fanlike menu, where every dish is explained and detailed. These range from the wonderfully earthy — white asparagus with raw *perrechicos*, a type of local mushroom — to the intriguingly cerebral "Fresh herb, or how to eat a high mountain meadow," which is goat cheese cream topped with frozen foie gras powder and grass powder. This last dish may sound odd but it is stunningly light, bright and original, as is all of Paniego's cooking.

(INT'L INFORMAL) **Kissa Tanto** Tucked away in Vancouver's Chinatown, chef Joël Watanabe's acclaimed new restaurant serves Japanese-Italian fusion cuisine amid chic midcentury-modern décor. The food manages to be at once imaginative, attractive and comforting. I started with a gorgeously composed albacore tuna crudo garnished with olives, Tokyo leeks and capers served in olive oil and a shiso vinaigrette. A square of lasagna was layered with chanterelles, ground pork, radish greens and a miso béchamel, served in a pool of basil broth. And the tiramisu — an ethereally light version made with whipped soy, tofu mascarpone and plum wine, as well as espresso-soaked lady fingers — was as good as almost any I've had in Italy. .

Heirloom tomatoes at *Menton* in Boston; and quail's leg at *El Portal de Echaurren* in Ezcaray, Spain



## Amanera

CABRERA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

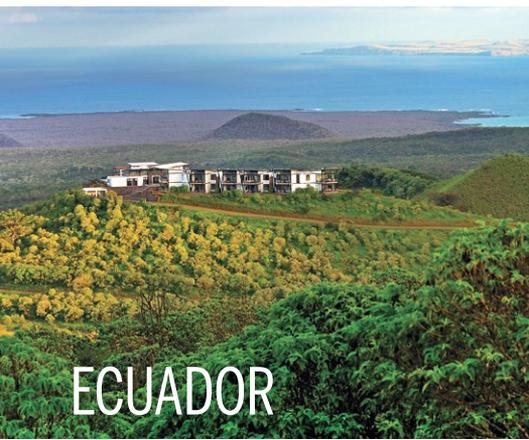
**A**manera, the 29th Aman resort, is set atop a cliff in a remote part of the Dominican Republic. The site encompasses 2,170 acres of untouched rain forest bordering Playa Grande, one of the most spectacular beaches in the Caribbean.

The resort's main building, the Casa Grande, is a two-story structure — much of it glass — with open walkways, atriums, terraces and cantilevered water features. Rising from the beach up the hill and into the rain forest, the 25 individual Casitas (13 with pools) form an array that resembles an amphitheater. From the outside, it is hard to appreciate just how large they are. On entering, we were taken aback by the exceptionally generous interior, augmented by a spacious terrace. Sliding wooden panels separated the living room from the equally large bedroom. The bath came with a glassed-off garden.

As evening approached, we strolled back to the Casa Grande, where the upper-level bar provided a perfect place for an end-of-the-day drink with a stunning view of the sea. Downstairs, the restaurant is a stylish place with soaring ceilings, subtle lighting and a delightful staff.

Aside from the beach and the infinity pool, the principal activity at Amanera is provided by the Playa Grande Golf Course. This was originally designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr., whose son, Rees Jones, has recently undertaken a complete renovation. The storied 7,085-yard, 18-hole course has no fewer than 10 holes beside the sea. Non-golfers can enjoy guided nature hikes through the rain forest, mountain biking and deep-sea fishing. There is also a lavish spa.

Pikaia Lodge



ECUADOR

Mashpi Lodge / PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER



Poronui



NEW ZEALAND

## Pikaia Lodge SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, ECUADOR

Staying at a lodge in the Galápagos may seem like an odd choice. However, a terrestrial base has significant advantages: The accommodations are likely to be more spacious; there is no risk of seasickness (unless you opt for a boat trip); and those traveling with children may find the experience a good deal more relaxing when staying on dry land. A lodge also better suits those with limited time, as cruise itineraries are generally of one- or two-weeks' duration.

The accommodations at the new 14-room Pikaia Lodge on Santa Cruz Island are surprisingly impressive. Perched on a hill amid 75 acres, the contemporary hotel has 12 suites with either patios or balconies, plus two larger suites, one of which has a private plunge pool. Our Balcony Room came with unobstructed views toward the distant coast through floor-to-ceiling windows. The travertine bath contained a lengthy counter with dual vanities, a spacious walk-in shower and a deep tub beneath a picture window.

In the airy lobby-lounge, a slab of black marble formed the front desk, and floor-to-ceiling windows faced an infinity pool that slowly changed color when illuminated at night. The *Evolution* restaurant served satisfying if not world-class cuisine; a dish of local cod, for example, came with a delicate lemon cream sauce but also ponderous rolls of yucca and plantain encased in fried egg-roll wrappers.

The Sumaq Spa has a couple's treatment room, a Jacuzzi with a view and a perfunctory fitness center. Throughout our stay, the staff were always cheerful and eager to please.

## Mashpi Lodge MASHPI PRIVATE RESERVE, ANDEAN RAINFOREST, ECUADOR

Mashpi Lodge is set in a pristine tract of cloud forest about 3½ hours northwest of Quito. Once you arrive, there is no need to leave the property, as the private 3,212-acre enclave is surrounded by a public reserve of 42,000 acres. This is part of the larger Chocó region, which ranks among the world's biodiversity hot spots.

After a hospitable check-in, we settled into our Wayra King Room. The uncluttered contemporary décor focused our attention on the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the lush forest. Along a white wall, a teak headboard accented the king-size bed, and a row of vertical teak fins partially shielded a side window, assuring privacy. The slate-tile floor continued into the bath, which contained a single vanity and a spacious walk-in shower. The room wasn't large at 366 square feet, but we didn't feel cramped.

In the spectacular restaurant and bar, dramatic two-story windows faced the jungle. A lunch buffet featured dishes such as ceviche, steak with chimichurri, and Peruvian golden berry Bavarian cream. Three-course dinners proved equally appetizing. Mashpi also has a full-service spa, as well as a large hot tub with jungle views. There is no swimming pool, but I didn't miss one, as we were too busy going on the well-run excursions. These included a hike to Mashpi's new aerial tram, an open-air cable car extending two kilometers through the jungle canopy and across deep, verdant gorges. Gliding in near silence above the forest, spotting birds and butterflies fluttering across the treetops, was an experience I won't soon forget.

## Poronui

TAUPO, NORTH ISLAND

About 30 miles from Taupo, Poronui is set on a 16,000-acre private estate, through which flow the Taharua and Mohaka rivers. Although it is considered one of New Zealand's premier fly-fishing lodges, Poronui is also a wilderness retreat that is suitable for non-anglers. Its stables, which are part of a complex that includes a gym and spa facilities, offer a range of equestrian activities. Guided hikes, mountain biking, sporting clays and archery provide alternative pursuits. Poronui is just 15 minutes by helicopter from the renowned Hawke's Bay wine region.

The property comprises a main lodge with seven lavish cabins; Blake House (for exclusive use), with two spacious bedrooms and two bunk rooms with four single bunks in each; and the Safari Camp (set beside the Mohaka River), with two tented suites, each containing two queen-size beds.

Our so-called cabin provided a large living room with floor-to-ceiling windows, a gas-log fire, leather armchairs, a writing desk and a wet bar. The bedroom contained a queen and a twin bed, while the bright adjoining bath came with twin sinks and an effective walk-in shower. Best of all was the wooden deck, which was supported on the steep hillside by long stilts. The view of the rushing Taharua River, emerging from a gorge between forested hillsides, was so aesthetically satisfying that it seemed more like landscape art than scenery.

After a day's fishing with a charming and knowledgeable guide, we enjoyed a dinner of scallop carpaccio, followed by chateaubriand, both of which were utterly delicious and graciously served.



## Edenhouse

NELSON, SOUTH ISLAND

**E**denhouse is a small, secluded hotel on the northern tip of New Zealand's South Island, close to both the Abel Tasman and Kahurangi national parks. Its owners are the delightful Peter and Bobbie Martin. A native Australian, Peter Martin spent many years in London's financial world before acceding to his wife's desire to return to her homeland.

Set amid 50 acres of grounds, Edenhouse looks like a country residence that has been standing for at least a couple of centuries. But in fact, the Martins designed it themselves, relying on skills that Bobbie Martin had acquired at London's Incbald School of Design and The English Gardening School. The property comprises just two spacious suites in the main house and a separate two-bedroom garden cottage, so you feel as though you have been the fortunate beneficiary of a private invitation. We had been allocated to the cottage; there we found a peaceful living room with a sofa, a writing desk and a fridge stocked with wine. The décor evoked that of an English country house, with mostly neutral colors, floral cushions and framed prints.

The interior of the main house is also decorated in a traditional and patrician style. As well as a large sitting room, it contains a formal dining room, a library, a den and an artist's studio. All of the staff at Edenhouse live in the local valley and are clearly considered by the Martins to be part of an extended family. As a result, the atmosphere is unusually relaxed and welcoming. The talented cook uses local ingredients whenever possible, and the food was memorably delicious throughout our stay.

## SPECIAL RECOGNITION

**Chef of the Year: Tanguy Laviale** Bordeaux has emerged as the most interesting up-and-coming restaurant town in France, and the table not to miss is the stylish bistrot à vins *Garopapilles*. Here, chef Tanguy Laviale dazzles with two short market-driven menus — three courses at lunch and five courses at dinner — that change according to the ingredients he sources each morning. His dishes astonish with their freshness, elegance and apparent simplicity. A perfect example of his work? Sea bass fillet with fresh goat cheese, passion-fruit grains in a mustard vinaigrette, roasted hazelnuts and pan-fried foie gras. Laviale trained at the prestigious Ferrandi cooking school in Paris and then worked with a variety of the best chefs in the French capital, including Christian Le Squer (Four Seasons Hotel George V), Jean-Louis Nomicos (*Les Tablettes*) and Alain Ducouturier (*Carré des Feuillants*), before moving to the Bordelais region and opening a “private table” at Château Haut-Bailly in 2007. The marriage of steely technique and unbridled gastronomic creativity, seen in dishes like seared scallops with smoked herring eggs and fresh herbs on a bed of Jerusalem artichoke purée, have made Laviale the most promising young chef we encountered in 2016.

**Sommelier of the Year: Estelle Touzet** After a brilliant career working at Le Bristol, the Hôtel de Crillon and, most recently, Le Meurice, Estelle Touzet became the head sommelier at the Ritz Paris when it reopened this past summer. As the hotel's first head sommelier, she directs a team of nine along with a cellar of some 40,000 bottles. Aside from her charming tableside manner, what most impresses is her spectacular ability to recommend an array of wines to match the tastes and budgets of diners in concert with what they've ordered. Touzet's presentation is simultaneously passionate, poetic and technical. Describing her work as “taking our clients through the vineyards by storytelling,” she clearly derives a deep pleasure from introducing wine lovers to lesser-known regions and producers.

**Hotel Manager of the Year: Eve Reilly** I arrived at Poronui to be greeted at the front door by a tall, quietly spoken, gently humorous woman whose Irish accent had survived her many years of residence in New Zealand. “Celtic charm” may be a cliché, but Eve Reilly is living proof that it really does exist. Having shown me around my suite in person, she led me to the dining room, introduced me to the chef and, even though it was long past lunchtime, arranged a board of meats and cheeses, plus a bottle of excellent Pinot Noir. Effortlessly, Reilly gave the impression that absolutely nothing would ever be too much trouble. At dinner, she sat at the head of a long communal table and presided over a diverse group of fishermen and hunters, ensuring that everyone was included in the conversation and that each guest, in turn, was the object of her particular attention. Poronui is a superbly run property, and everything functions without a hitch. But what particularly impressed me was that all the members of the staff are clearly happy in their work and proud to be part of such a distinguished operation. This esprit de corps can only be attributed to the lodge's wholly exceptional manager.

From left: Tanguy Laviale; Estelle Touzet; and Eve Reilly / LAVIALE: © C. GOUSSARD / TOUZET: © ALBAN COUTURIER





## La Borde LEUGNY, FRANCE

**L**a Borde is a rural estate of just five suites tucked deep in the pastoral heart of Burgundy. The 17 acres that surround the 16th-century buildings were just fields when owners Rik and Marieke Klomp arrived, but the couple quickly set about creating formal gardens, starting with an allée of lindens. A swimming pool was added, facing the former dovecote. This cylindrical building, capped by a conical tile roof, now contains showers and a hot tub and stands adjacent to the spa, which has a steam room, a sauna and a massage treatment room.

Escorted around a central courtyard, we arrived at the entrance to our Junior Suite. This came with vaulted ceilings of ancient wooden beams, a terra-cotta floor and a functioning fireplace. Worn wooden beams also supported the ceiling of the bath, which had a soaking tub, pedestal sinks and a walk-in shower.

Nearby, a former carriage house has been renovated into a stylish lounge center-pieced by a massive Renaissance-style hearth. Immense glass doors can transform the lounge into an indoor/outdoor space that opens onto the courtyard. A wood-beamed loggia covers a communal dining table; there, we dined on fine French cuisine prepared and served by Marieke herself. After a satisfying meal, a stroll in the garden seemed like just the thing. Rik refused to let me go, however, until I put on some rubber overshoes to protect my leather loafers from the wet grass. This thoughtful gesture exemplified the property's anticipatory service and warm hospitality.

## A Quinta da Auga SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, SPAIN

**T**he 51-room A Quinta da Auga is an intimate and refined hotel that has been created in an 18th-century former paper mill on the river Sar, three miles west of Santiago de Compostela. Surrounded by a two-and-a-half-acre estate, this family-owned property offers a welcoming atmosphere and attentive personal service. Framed family photographs add a distinctive touch to the stylish public areas, which are decorated with a fine collection of 19th-century oil paintings.

On arrival, we flung open our bedroom shutters to admit light and fresh air, as well as a chorus of birdsong and the soothing sound of rushing water. Our 1,075-square-foot suite was decorated with blue-and-ivory toile de Jouy wall coverings, crystal chandeliers and antique furniture. A polished mahogany table with two chairs facilitated room-service dining, and in the separate sitting area, we found oak floors, a leather-topped desk and a leather sofa. The marble bath came with a Jacuzzi tub and a separate shower.

The hotel's fine *Filigrana Restaurant* is under the supervision of chef Federico López Arcay, who serves a menu of traditional Galician dishes, with appetizers such as sea urchin stuffed with a velouté of sea urchin roe, or grilled octopus with San Simón cheese, followed by monkfish with king prawns and fried rice, or grilled loin of Galician beef with *tartiflette* (a dish of potatoes, cheese, onions and lardons). The hotel's other principal amenity is its spa, which offers a range of facilities for hydrotherapy treatments, including a Dead Sea "flotarium."

## Schlosshotel Chastè

TARASP, SWITZERLAND

**S**parsels is a pretty village in the Lower Engadine valley dominated by the dramatic 11th-century Tarasp Castle. At the foot of the fortress, the 18-room Schlosshotel Chastè occupies a 500-year-old farmhouse that has been owned by the Pazeller family for 21 generations. Converted into a hotel in 1912, it is a dignified stuccoed building, with stencilled decoration, a sloping wooden roof in the classic Alpine style and shuttered windows bedecked with boxes of pink and crimson geraniums.

My Junior Suite proved to be a wonderfully traditional room with pale paneled walls, a four-poster bed (with thick white duvets) and a sofa in an alcove. Although a little old-fashioned, the bath was well-lit, sufficiently spacious and contained two sinks and a combination shower-tub. Tall glass doors led out from the bedroom into a private garden, from which there was a view across the valley to the village of Ftan and the austere mountains above.

Dinner was served in a cozy paneled dining room, which was clearly patronized by local people as well as by visitors. The cuisine was well-prepared and delicious. We enjoyed grilled entrecôte of venison with gnocchi and pumpkin sauce; and an Engadine beef tenderloin served with duck liver, truffles and Parmentier beignets (potato fritters). The wine list is extensive and includes a large selection of Swiss bottlings, which are little known only because they are seldom exported.

The Schlosshotel Chastè is almost the definition of a hideaway. It is distinctive, atmospheric, comfortable and enchanting in every way.



## Villa Honegg

ENNETBURGEN, SWITZERLAND

The Villa Honegg is located high on a mountainside overlooking the southern shore of Lake Lucerne. Many guests opt to reach it by helicopter.

Built in 1905 in the art nouveau style, the 23-room hotel was entirely refurbished in 2011. My Junior Suite was decorated in a subdued palette of coffee, cinnamon and cream. Aside from the king-size bed, backed by a striking woven-leather headboard, the room contained a white sofa set on a wide-plank hardwood floor, plus a small desk. The white marble bath contained an extremely large walk-in shower as well as a tub. The view from a tall window was simply breathtaking: A steep, emerald-green hillside, dotted with traditional wooden barns and chalets, descended to the lake, while the mountains extended southward as far as the distant peaks of the Saint-Gotthard Massif.

Public areas at the hotel include interconnected lounges furnished with wingback leather armchairs, deep sofas, open log fires and book-lined shelves. Perhaps the most dramatic feature of the Villa Honegg is its magnificent scenic terrace. At dinner in the elegant dining room, I enjoyed delicious marinated char served with char caviar, barley salad and baked nasturtium, with a celery and elderflower dressing. The service was charm personified.

The Villa Honegg's other amenity of note is its spa. Facilities include an indoor pool, a Finnish sauna and a steam bath. Best of all, however, is the stunning outdoor horizon pool, heated to 95 degrees year-round, from which there are glorious panoramas of the lake and mountains.

## La Grande Maison de Bernard Magrez BORDEAUX, FRANCE

Bordeaux has long had a curiously undistinguished roster of hotels. Now, things are beginning to change. Winemaker Bernard Magrez, who owns four Grands Crus Classés châteaux, decided to open the six-room La Grande Maison de Bernard Magrez hotel in a residential neighborhood as a showcase for the distinctive Bordeaux lifestyle. To do so, he acquired a handsome but rundown 18th-century mansion across the street from his Institut Culturel Bernard Magrez. Interior designer Frédérique Fournier has given the hotel a Napoleon III-style décor, with a specific nod to the year 1855, when the Bordeaux grand cru wines were first classified.

On arrival, the property seemed more like a guesthouse than a hotel. Our room was immediately appealing, however, with its high ceiling, floral-pattern carpet and silk taffeta fabrics from the eminent French textile house Braquenié. The bath provided Hermès toiletries, a heated limestone floor, double vanities and a separate rainfall shower.

Perhaps the chief advantage of a stay at La Grande Maison is the opportunity to eat in Pierre Gagnaire's restaurant downstairs without being mindful of an after-dinner drive or fretting about a taxi. A predictably outstanding wine list features all the Grands Crus Classés. Service throughout our dinner was gracious, precise and noticeably formal.

Ultimately, this is a pleasant and sophisticated small hotel eminently suitable for a short visit to Bordeaux, so long as you don't mind the less-than-central location and don't require amenities such as a spa or a gym.

## Hôtel Brittany & Spa ROSCOFF, FRANCE

Roscoff is one of the busiest fishing ports in France, as well as a renowned center for thalassotherapy. The best hotel in town is 23-room Le Brittany, which occupies a solid granite mansion with a slate roof and is set in a park overlooking the sea at the edge of town.

Le Brittany offers a strong sense of place and a relaxed and intimate atmosphere. There is a terrace out front, where drinks are served in good weather, and a bar with a big stone fireplace, plus a small spa with a saltwater swimming pool. Hardier types may be tempted to cross the street to take a dip in the Atlantic.

The accommodations are all decorated with color schemes of sand and pale blue complemented by antique wooden furniture. Our suite was spacious and sunny and came with a snug crow's nest of a sitting room with three granite-lined windows that offered constantly changing views of the harbor. The bedroom also had a window overlooking the sea and a door that opened directly into the hotel's small, attractive garden. The large bath was equipped with an oversized soaking tub and separate jet shower, excellent lighting and Breton seaweed-based toiletries. The hotel's restaurant is superb.

Happily, we'd booked at Le Brittany for two nights. The following day, we took the 15-minute ferry ride from Roscoff to the Ile de Batz. This is a great place for an easy seaside hike, a highlight of which is the Jardin Georges Delaselle, a garden of tropical plants that was created by a Paris businessman between 1897 and 1918.



## Andaz Tokyo Toranomon Hills TOKYO, JAPAN

Even after visiting Tokyo many times, the immensity of the city always comes as a shock, which is why I appreciated the tranquility and thoughtful service at the 164-room Andaz Toranomon Hills hotel. The property occupies the top six floors of the 52-story Toranomon Hills tower, situated in a neighborhood between the Imperial Palace and the Tokyo Tower.

The reception is softly lit, and check-in takes place on tablet computers at walnut tables instead of at the usual counter. The décor, created by the New York-based designer Tony Chi and Tokyo interior architect Shinichiro Ogata, harmoniously mixes Western and traditional Japanese styles. Our Tower View King room came with *shoji* panels, plus a walnut desk and a picture window. Lamps made of *washi* paper created atmosphere, but there were also spotlights on dimmers for more illumination. A wood-paneled bath with quarry-tile floors came with both a tub and a shower, along with locally made toiletries. (Their perfume changes with the season; for example, cherry blossom for spring.)

The Andaz has a sushi bar on the 52nd floor and an excellent comfort-food restaurant, the *Andaz Tavern*, on the 51st. There we enjoyed a delicious dinner of duck consommé with foie gras-stuffed ravioli, and chicken roasted in an earthenware casserole with sherry and root vegetables.

The hotel's AO Spa & Club is located on the 37th floor and comes with a panoramic 65-foot indoor pool with a jet bath, plus five treatment rooms.

## Hakone-Ginyu HAKONE, JAPAN

Hakone is a popular resort for Tokyoites in need of fresh air and some greenery. On arrival at the train station, we found a smiling attendant from the Hakone-Ginyu *ryokan* waiting for us with a wheeled cart to transport our luggage.

A *ryokan* is a traditional Japanese inn, often one intended for rest, reinvigoration and contemplation. And a *ginyu*, it turned out, is a person seeking inspiration for a poem through travel. Though neither of us penned any verse during our two-night stay, the peaceful hillside setting of this intimate 20-room wooden lodge was deeply relaxing. To be happy here, however, it is important to decide in advance how local you want to go. For example, will you be more comfortable sleeping in a traditional Western bed than on a futon on the floor? And when making your reservation, you should also be specific about any dietary restrictions or aversions.

Hakone-Ginyu offers four room types. "Hoshi" rooms on the third floor are available with Western beds or futons and come with private *onsen*, or hot-spring water open-air baths. They're decorated with Japanese furnishings, and come with private dining rooms and separate bedrooms with *tatami* floors.

The *kaiseki* dinners — comprising around a dozen Japanese dishes that were as beautiful to look at as they were to taste — were exquisite on both evenings of our stay and were complemented by an unexpectedly excellent wine list. A spa offers a variety of treatments and massages.

## The Upper House

CENTRAL, HONG KONG

The Upper House comprises 117 rooms and suites located between floors 38 and 49 of a Pacific Place tower. The low-key style of the hotel manifests itself right away. No grand lobby, no imposing counter, just a coterie of young staff in dark suits who briskly check you in at a small podium while tracking your luggage on iPads. The exceptionally attractive interior is the work of André Fu, a New York- and Seattle-based designer, and it displays a spare, Zen-inspired aesthetic that manages to be neither cold nor intimidating. A skillful mix of stone, wood and muted fabrics is combined with abstract sculptures and sensitive lighting.

To call the regular rooms "Studios" is no affectation, as they start at 730 square feet. Our "Studio 70" came with light wood accents, blue-gray fabrics and floor-to-ceiling windows that afforded a mesmerizing panorama of Victoria Harbour. No detail had been overlooked, including a wine fridge, an espresso machine with a selection of teas and infusions, a 42-inch television with surround sound, a desk with multiple power outlets and unusually indulgent down bedding. We also appreciated the "spa-inspired" bath with its dual sinks, walk-in rainfall shower and limestone-clad tub.

The 49th floor provides a spectacular setting for the superb *Café Gray Deluxe*. Directing the kitchen is chef Gray Kunz, who made his mark at *Lespinasse* in New York. Although The Upper House lacks a pool and a spa, it does have a gym. And yoga classes are offered on Saturday and Sunday mornings in the delightful sixth-floor garden, The Lawn.



## BEST SPA

### **Villa Honegg, Ennetbürgen, Switzerland**

The spa at the Villa Honegg, overlooking Lake Lucerne, is a stylish but relatively small facility that offers a range of treatments and massages, plus a Finnish sauna, a steam room and a spectacular indoor pool with underwater music, a counter-current swimming system and panoramic windows. What makes the spa unique, however, is the outdoor horizon pool. Heated to 95 degrees year-round, it offers a staggering view of the lake 3,000 feet below, as well as ridge after ridge of jagged mountains that extend all the way to the high snow peaks of the Saint-Gotthard Massif. Basking in the warm water and gazing at the scene of astounding natural splendor was almost a transcendental experience. I can only imagine what it must be like in winter when the entire landscape is thickly covered with snow.

## Ngapali Bay Villas & Spa

THANDWE, MYANMAR

At present, the best place to relax on the beach in Myanmar is Ngapali, on the country's unspoiled west coast, where the hotels are mostly low-rise and hidden among the palms.

Ngapali Bay Villas & Spa was designed by British architect David Wordsworth and Burmese interior designer U Kyaw Sein. They did a remarkable job; our self-contained villa was exceptionally spacious and comfortable, with a 20-foot ceiling, magnificent wooden floors and stylish teak furniture. Contemporary Burmese paintings and traditional Buddhist sculptures helped to create a strong sense of place. One wall was almost entirely glass, and the huge windows afforded views of a long beach of pale golden sand. An enormous adjoining bath was appointed with twin copper sinks, a walk-in shower and a huge teak tub. Some villas have private pools; ours did not, but we scarcely felt deprived. To our amazement, even the Wi-Fi functioned without a hitch.

A short walk away, *Tamarind* restaurant has a glorious outdoor terrace where we would sit for hours, gazing at the glinting water or contemplating a stroll down the beach to a small market. As might be expected, the menu specializes in seafood. The other chief amenity at the resort is the Frangipani Spa. Throughout our stay, the staff were consistently friendly and helpful. Frankly, given the general quality of hotels in Myanmar, I was surprised by the general excellence of this property. It operates at an international standard, being comparable to leading beach resorts in Thailand and other more developed parts of Southeast Asia.

## BEST POOL

### **Amanera, Cabrera, Dominican Republic**

The main building at Amanera has an array of water features that includes striking reflecting pools cantilevered off the sides of the structure, seemingly in defiance of gravity. Most impressive is the large infinity pool at the edge of the lower level. From the water, you would be forgiven for thinking that the far end of the pool melts into space. But from the terrace, you see that it also overlooks the beautiful sweep of the Playa Grande below.

## BEST BEACH

### **Ngapali Bay, Thandwe District, Myanmar**

On the west coast of Myanmar, the Myeik (or Mergui) Archipelago consists of more than 800 islands, virtually all of which are currently undeveloped. For now, however, the best place for a spell on the beach is Ngapali, farther north. It is an hour's flight from Yangon to the airport at Thandwe, from where it is a 20-minute drive to my recommended Ngapali Bay Villas & Spa. The beach itself is a long, wide stretch of pale golden sand backed by palms, fronted by calm translucent sea and dotted with a fleet of small, wooden, brightly painted fishing boats. A forested offshore island lends a focal point to the view. Aside from being a blissful place to swim or to lounge beneath a parasol, Ngapali Beach serves as an informal thoroughfare, and at least once a day we would join a group of local people in a stroll along the sand to a small market. There, we would invariably find a table at a café, order a cold drink and contemplate returning to spend an entire winter in blissful tropical languor.

Spa pool at Villa Honegg, Switzerland; and Ngapali Beach, Myanmar / PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARPER





# INDELIBLE MEMORIES OF 2016

Lake Manapouri from the mouth of the Waiau River, Fiordland, South Island, New Zealand / PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER

## **Whale Watching off the Coast of Maui**

During our *Safari Explorer* cruise in Hawaii, I dutifully arose early one morning to join a sunrise whale-watching excursion. As I sipped my coffee in the twilight, longing to return to our cabin's comfortable bed, a crew member spotted a whale "logging," or resting on the surface. We approached and discovered a humpback nursing her newborn calf. The mother sometimes helped the calf onto her back, raising it above the waterline in order to catch an easy breath. We watched for an extraordinary 45 minutes. Throughout the cruise, we spotted whales spouting and breaching, often at close proximity. But when I think back, it is the memory of a humpback and her calf that I most treasure.

## **Yaxha at Sunset, Guatemala**

Spectacular ancient ruins are often crowded, but we had the Mayan Yaxha all to ourselves. This enigmatic complex of nine plazas and some 500 buildings — just across the Guatemalan border from Belize — proved to be sensationally atmospheric. Numerous pyramids, palaces, observatories and ball courts have been unearthed, but many more buildings remain covered in palms and strangler figs. We timed our visit so that we could watch the sunset from atop the tallest pyramid, which affords panoramic views as far as Lake Yaxha. We stood alone outside the entrance to

the temple, from where Yaxha's priests and rulers once surveyed their domain. As the sun disappeared, the hoots of howler monkeys echoed across the treetops, but the vast city below stood silent.

## **Walking on the Frozen Ocean, Antarctica**

Toward the end of our Antarctic cruise aboard the *National Geographic Explorer*, we entered a tranquil fjord flanked by impressive snowcapped hills that stood silently beneath gray skies. Ahead lay a vast sheet of ice. To our amazement, the ship plowed right into it. Through an entryway on the lower deck, we walked onto the frozen ocean. Some people wandered about in wonder; others fell to the ground to make snow angels. Out on the ice, I thought of the Apollo astronauts who ventured out onto the plains of the Moon and looked back at their lunar module. For a moment, I understood the feeling of being on another world.

## **Serene Lake Manapouri, New Zealand**

The Waiau River flows south out of Lake Te Anau at the southwestern tip of New Zealand. Clear, fast and powerful, it achieved fame as the River Anduin in the movie adaptations of "The Lord of the Rings." I had come to fish for trout from a jet boat, the advantage of which is that it enables you to remain stationary, even in the strongest current, and to fish the slack water at the edge of the flow. At the end of a

supremely successful day, Keith, my guide, suggested a six-mile trip downstream to where the river enters Lake Manapouri. The jet boat swerved and lurched and crashed through the rapids until we reached the lake. There, we killed the engine and, in the sudden silence, sat staring at the vast sheet of sky-blue water, untroubled by scarcely a ripple and backed by the jagged peaks of the Fiordland National Park. I felt profoundly at peace.

## **The North Face of the Eiger, Switzerland**

From the center of Wengen, it is a 10-minute ride on the Aerial Cableway to Männlichen. Emerging from the station, I was confronted by one of the world's great mountain panoramas. To my right were the Mönch and the Jungfrau, but directly in front was the immense north face of the Eiger: the Mordwand, or "murder wall," a mile-and-a-half of vertical rock and ice on which the sun never shines. Although it is relatively easy to reach the 13,025-foot summit of the Eiger along a ridge, the sinister north face was long considered to be unscalable. Since 1935, at least 64 people have died attempting to conquer it. It was first climbed by members of an Austrian-German team in 1938, who were then immediately summoned by Hitler to be extolled as exemplary specimens of Aryan manhood. Parts of the face are slightly concave and create their own weather systems. As I stood watching, buffeted by a chill wind, swirling vortices of cloud formed, dissipated and then regrouped. The whole scene had a Wagnerian quality, and it was impossible not to be overwhelmed by a feeling of menace.

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