

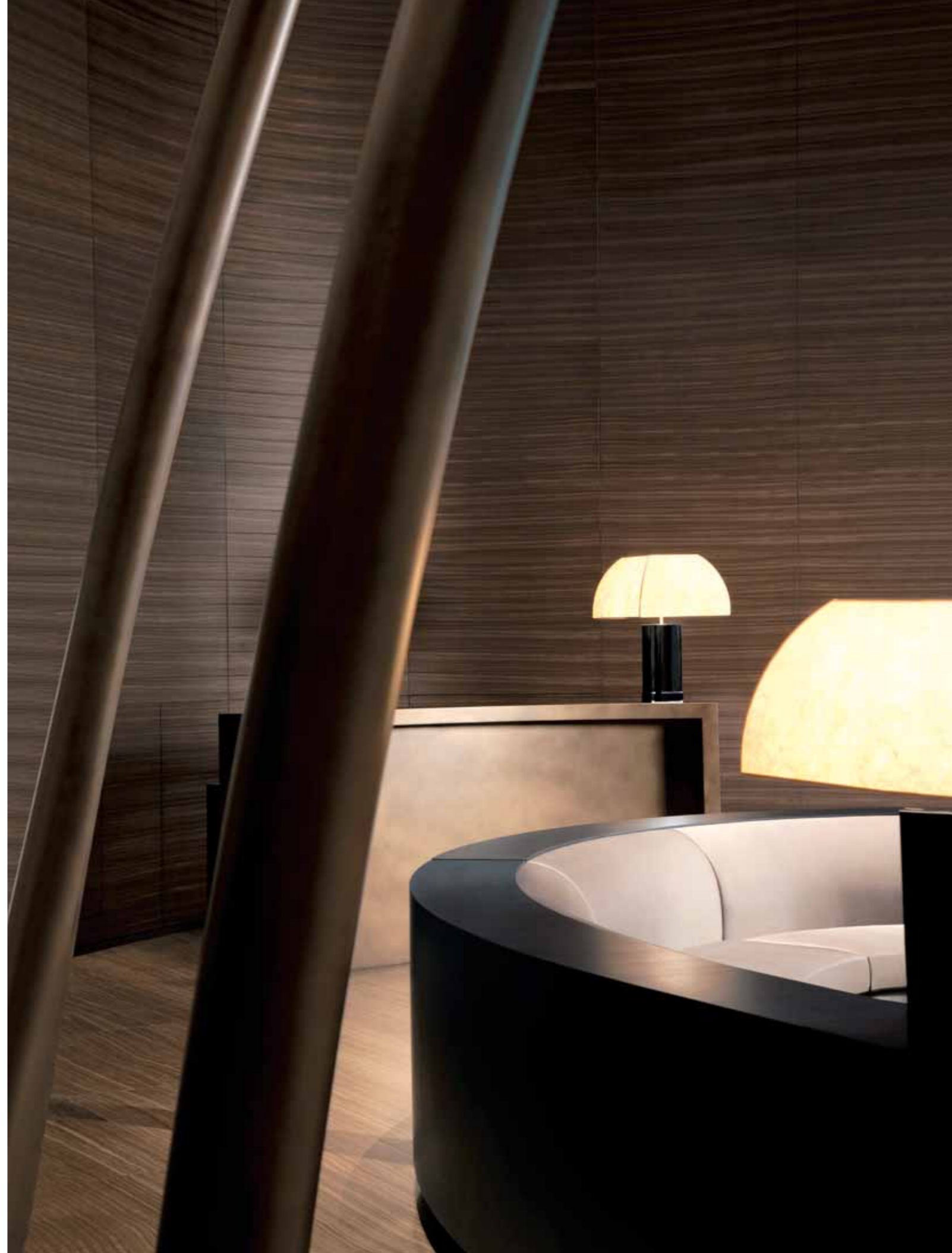
LUXE

LIST

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2010

THIS YEAR, OUR ANNUAL SHOWCASE OF THE REGION'S BEST NEW HOTELS AND RESORTS IS LARGER THAN EVER, FEATURING 41 PROPERTIES IN MORE THAN A DOZEN COUNTRIES, ALL VETTED BY OUR ROVING BAND OF DISCERNING CONTRIBUTORS. FROM A WALLED DESERT RETREAT IN ABU DHABI TO A RIVERFRONT *RYOKAN* IN KYOTO, READ ON TO DISCOVER A REMARKABLE RANGE OF PLACES THAT TRULY RISE ABOVE THE REST IN TERMS OF LOOK, LOCATIONS, SERVICE, AND VALUE

DESIGNER DIGS **Opposite:** Understated elegance in the lobby of the Armani Hotel Dubai.





AUSTRALIA
Saffire Freycinet, Tasmania
The Blackman, Melbourne
Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa, Lithgow

CHINA
Amanfayun, Hangzhou
Fairmont Beijing, Beijing
Fairmont Peace Hotel, Shanghai
Hullett House, Hong Kong
Peninsula Shanghai, Shanghai
Ritz-Carlton Shanghai, Pudong
The Upper House, Hong Kong
Yi House Art Hotel 798, Beijing

FIJI
InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa, Viti Levu

INDIA
Alila Diwa Goa, Majorda Beach
Leela Palace Kempinski, Udaipur
Park Hyderabad, Hyderabad
Raas, Jodhpur

INDONESIA
Alila Villas Soori, Bali
The Amala, Bali

JAPAN
Hoshinoya Kyoto, Kyoto
Sankara Hotel & Spa, Yakushima

LAOS
Amantaka, Luang Prabang

LEBANON
Le Gray, Beirut

MALAYSIA
Banjaran Hot Springs Retreat, Ipoh
Clove Hall, Penang
Straits Collection, Penang

MALDIVES
Alila Villas Hadahaa, North Huvadho Atoll

NEW ZEALAND
Matakauri Lodge, Queenstown

SINGAPORE
Fullerton Bay Hotel, Marina Bay
Wanderlust, Little India

SOUTH KOREA
Banyan Tree Club & Spa, Seoul

SRI LANKA
Villa Bentota, Bentota

THAILAND
Banyan Tree Samui, Koh Samui
Langham Place Samui at Lamai Beach, Koh Samui
Paresa, Phuket
Phulay Bay, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Krabi
Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok, Bangkok
Soneva Kiri, Koh Kood

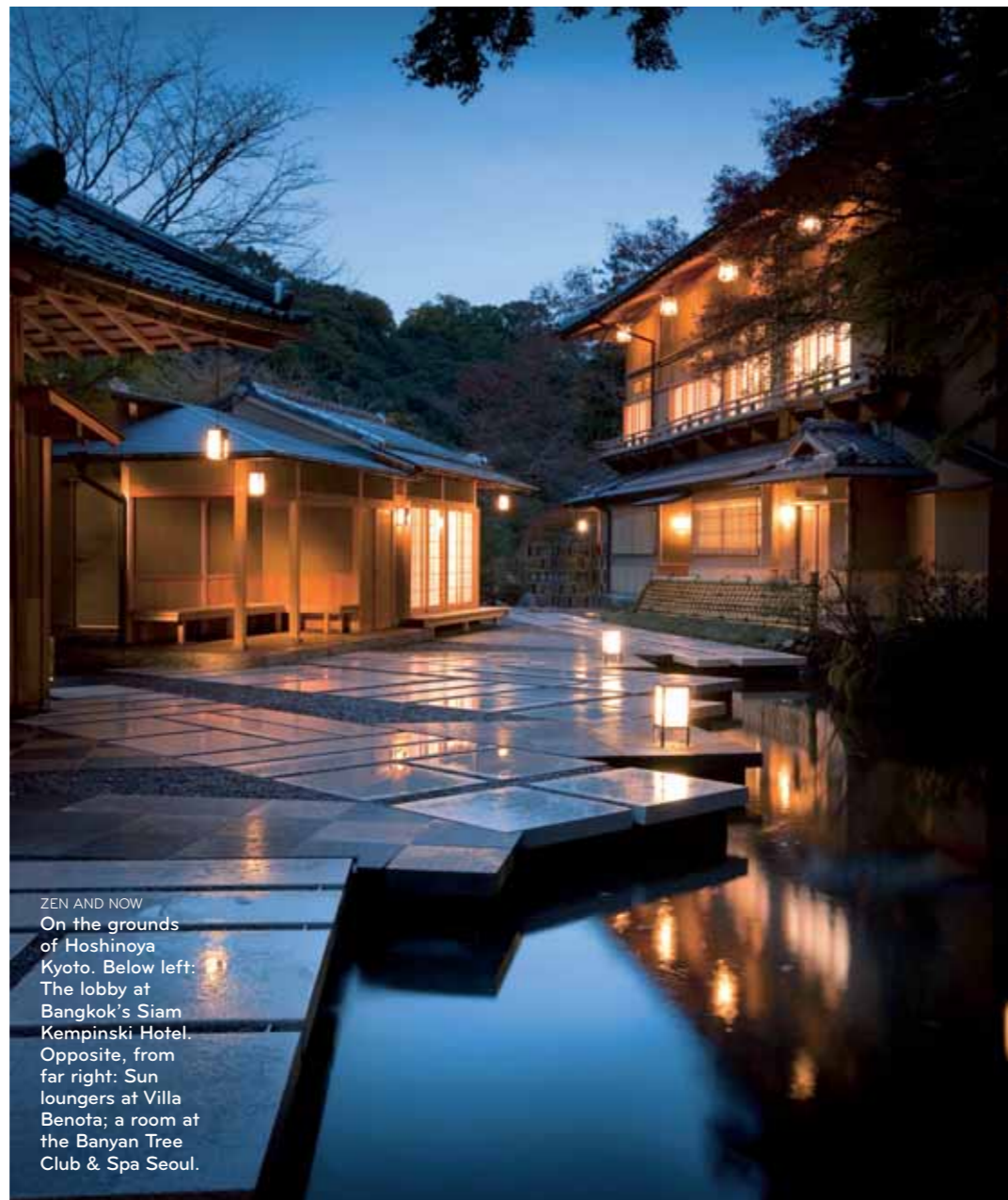
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Armani Hotel Dubai, Dubai
Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara, Abu Dhabi
Yas Hotel, Abu Dhabi

JAPAN

Hoshinoya Kyoto, Kyoto

Nestled deep in the Arashiyama Gorge and accessed via a 10-minute boat ride up a maple-fringed river, the Hoshinoya is Kyoto's most avant-garde *ryokan*. Occupying a series of century-old buildings, the inn's 25 minimalist guest rooms are outfitted for maximum comfort, with heated chestnut-wood floors, soaking tubs, and duvet-enveloped futons. TVs are absent, but there are plenty of other diversions, such as spending time in the hotel's library, where complimentary *hoji-cha* (roasted green tea) and snacks are available throughout the day. Service is seamless, and the poised, smartly clad staff speak excellent English. Meals here are also a delight, particularly the seasonally driven Japanese cuisine—think grilled sweet fish with lashings of rock salt—at the Dining Room.

11-2 Genrokuzancho; 81-75/871-0001; kyoto.hoshinoya.com; doubles from US\$617



ZEN AND NOW
On the grounds of Hoshinoya Kyoto. Below left: The lobby at Bangkok's Siam Kempinski Hotel. Opposite, from far right: Sun loungers at Villa Bentota; a room at the Banyan Tree Club & Spa Seoul.



COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE SEOUL; COURTESY OF VILLA BENTOTA



SRI LANKA

Villa Bentota, Bentota

Located off the coastal road between Colombo and Galle, this 1880s colonial villa was first revamped in the early 1970s by the founder of tropical modernism, Geoffrey Bawa. Now, thanks to local design maestro Shanth Fernando, the place revels in a chic, 21st-century style that incorporates antique Dutch chandeliers, Jaffna folk art, and Chinese ceramics. None of the 15 guest rooms are identical; one suite boasts a private plunge pool, while another (No. 4) has a sprawling sea-facing balcony. Unwinding comes easy here, but for those in need of extra relaxation there's a bijou Ayurvedic spa, where the herb-infused hot-sand massage is a standout. Meals (wood-oven pizza, tandoori chicken with avocado salsa, wasabi-crusting salmon) can be taken poolside, on the sprawling lawn, or in the minimalist open-air dining pavilion. Don't let the occasional sound of a passing train put you off; just across those tracks is Bentota Beach, a beckoning stretch of soft sand and cerulean water.

138/18-138/22 Galle Rd.; 94-34/227-5311; villabentota.com; doubles from US\$249



THAILAND

Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok, Bangkok

Smack in the middle of Siam Square and connected to the behemoth Siam Paragon shopping complex, this dramatic property greets guests with a grand, 15-meter-high lobby featuring swaths of Italian marble, alabaster feature walls, and a gallery's-worth of sculptures and paintings by local artists like Watcharaporn Yoodee and Pichet Piaklin. The 303 rooms and suites offer a subtler palette of gray and beige, with silk walls and lotus photographs that nod to both Thailand's Buddhist heritage and the hotel's location on a former estate of the Thai royal family (one of the princesses lives next door). All nine room categories have balconies overlooking an oasis of greenery; book a duplex suite for more space and direct access to one of the hotel's three saltwater swimming pools. Complimentary Internet access, mini-bar, and recent-release movies are welcome bonuses. While in residence, don't miss dinner at Sra Bua, a fine dining Thai restaurant by the owners of Michelin-starred Kiin Kiin in Copenhagen.

991/9 Rama 1 Rd.; 66-2162-9000; kempinski.com; doubles from US\$257

THIS PAGE: COURTESY OF HOSHINOYA KYOTO; LEISA TYLER; PREVIOUS SPREAD: JASON LANGRISH/CHRISTOPHER WISE ROADSHOW IMAGES

SOUTH KOREA

Banyan Tree Club & Spa Seoul, Seoul

It's challenging enough to build something from scratch, but it can be even tougher to fit a brand-new resort into an existing framework—which is exactly what the Banyan Tree did with its flagship urban resort in the South Korean capital. In and around the shell of the former Tower Hotel, a decidedly average establishment that just happened to occupy a stunning perch on the slopes of city-center Namsan, the group has created what has quickly become Seoul's top refuge for urbanites looking to unwind. The property has just 32 rooms, each with its own plunge pool. Stylish but understated decor with wood accents and local artworks creates an atmosphere of quiet exclusivity that never crosses over into decadence. Apart from some very good restaurants, the Banyan Tree's amenities include a golf driving range, private pool cabanas, and (of course) a spa, where treatments employ local products like ginseng and green tea.

San 5-5, Jang Chung-dong 2-Ga, Jung-gu; 82-2/2250-8000; banyantree.com; doubles from US\$418

MALDIVES

Alila Villas Hadahaa,
Gaafu Alifu Atoll

There is no denying this island resort's eco-credentials: the angled timber roofs of the 50 villas—some set over the water, others on the beach—are designed to keep rooms naturally cool, while recycled glass bottles are filled with water purified on site. Indeed, all construction here followed strict environmental guidelines, the payoff for which can be appreciated while snorkeling the near-pristine lagoon, where thriving corals attract parrotfish, harlequins, and the occasional turtle. Bespoke itineraries called Journeys by Alila take guests to meet artisans who weave smoked grass into covetable homewares, or to a submerged island to learn about the atoll's formation. Back at the resort, sand-floored Battuta's serves local curries and Moroccan dishes, while Relish focuses on Western fare. Just be prepared for the minimum two-hour layover between international arrivals on Male and the 55-minute domestic hop to Gaafu Alifu Atoll, followed by another hour's transfer by private yacht.

960/682-8888; alilahotels.com;
doubles from US\$1,145



AUSTRALIA

The Blackman, Melbourne

The luminous colors and sense of wonder that infuse Australian painter Charles Blackman's *Schoolgirl* and *Alice in Wonderland* series have been translated into spatial form at this namesake lodgings. The third Art Series Hotel to open in Melbourne this past year—the other two are named for and feature art by Adam Cullen and John Olsen, respectively—is located just outside the city center, making it well placed for both business or leisure travelers. Like its sibling hotels, The Blackman offers a quirky blend of culture and comfort; each of its 209 rooms features archival Blackman prints, an in-house art channel, a library of art tomes, and splashes of gemstone-bright color, as well as a kitchenette and a balcony overlooking either the city or one of Melbourne's expansive parks. Guests wanting to know more about Blackman's oeuvre can book a tour with Jane O'Neill, the resident curator, and then stroll up the road to the National Gallery of Victoria.

452 St. Kilda Rd.; 61-3/9039-1444; artserieshotels.com.au;
doubles from US\$188



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INDONESIA

Alila Villas Soori, Bali

A sister property to Alila Villas Uluwatu, which occupies a stunning cliff-side perch on Bali's southern peninsula, the Soori makes the most of an even more removed location. True seclusion-seekers won't balk at the 90-minute drive from the airport, which winds through the villages and rice paddies northwest of Tanah Lot temple before depositing guests at this photogenic enclave. Flanking a black-sand beach and designed with modernist flair by Singaporean architect Chan Soo Kian, the Soori comprises 48 chic, pale-stone villas equipped with Apple TVs, deep soaking tubs, private pools, and shaded decks. The breakfast menu at Cotta changes daily, but always includes homemade jams and addictive, gluten-free banana bread; by night, this romantic seaside restaurant turns out delicacies such as pink-peppercorn seared foie gras. Guests looking to explore beyond the property can choose from any number of well-crafted excursions, including eco-friendly outings on two-wheeled Segways. Top-notch butlers and a fine spa round out the picture.

Desa Kelating, Tabanan; 62-361/894-6388; alilahotels.com;
doubles from US\$860



PAGE BREAK

Relaxing at Bali's Alila Villas Soori. Opposite, from top: In a nod to the Maldives' seafaring heritage, the lobby at Alila Villas Hadahaa is shaped like an overturned boat; a room at The Blackman in Melbourne.

COURTESY OF ALILA VILLAS HADAHAA; COURTESY OF THE BLACKMAN; COURTESY OF ALILA VILLAS SOORI



LAOS
Amantaka,
Luang Prabang

Merit-making is one of the many cultural immersion programs on offer at Luang Prabang's top billet, where you can earn good karma by delivering steamed Mekong fish and braised vegetables to Buddhist monks. A well-executed conversion of the town's onetime colonial hospital, Amantaka has just 24 neutral-hued suites, none smaller than 65 square meters, and all furnished with restraint under soaring ceilings. When you're done exploring the manicured grounds, tour any number of surrounding temples with Amantaka's knowledgeable guides. Alternatively, climb aboard the hotel's custom-built boat for a cruise along the Mekong, or strike out on unguided explorations of neighboring sights like the night market. The attentive restaurant staff greet all guests by name; rely on them to point out the best local dishes on the menu, but save room for the sublime sticky rice pudding with wild mango.

55/53 Kingkitsarath Rd., Ban Thongchaleun; 856-71/860-333; doubles from US\$600

THAILAND
Banyan Tree Samui, Koh Samui

Samui's accommodation scene has gone from scruffy to stylish in the last few years, and perhaps no property better exemplifies the trend than the Banyan Tree. Set on a series of terraces that cascade down a lush hillside to a horseshoe-shaped bay, the resort features 78 pitched-roof villas bedecked in sumptuous Thai silks and coconut-wood accents. Check-in at the ridge-top reception area is accompanied by sweeping views of the Gulf of Thailand, and while it's physically all down hill from there, the experience is anything but. Given that all the villas come with plunge pools and a full range of mod cons, you'd be excused for never venturing beyond your front door. Yet you should, because the extensive facilities here include three excellent restaurants, two bars, a small but private beach, and (of course) an expansive spa, which just happens to be home to the island's first hydrotherapy circuit. This tropical getaway's hallmark, however, is even simpler to describe: serenity.

99/9 Moo 4, Maret; 66-77/915-333; banyantree.com; doubles from US\$790



COURTESY OF BANYAN TREE KOH SAMUI; COURTESY OF AMANTAKA, OPPOSITE; COURTESY OF ARMANI DUBAI; COURTESY OF INTERCONTINENTAL FIJI



FASHION STATEMENT
Ristorante, the Italian dining room at Dubai's Armani Hotel. Below right: Views of Natadola Bay from the InterContinental Fiji. Opposite, from far left: A corridor at Amantaka; one of Banyan Tree Samui's 78 pool villas.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Armani Hotel Dubai, Dubai

Joining the glittering ranks of Dubai's ultra-luxury offerings is fashion designer Giorgio Armani's first hotel. Tucked inside the lower floors of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, the Armani Hotel may miss out on the dazzling views afforded to visitors from the building's 124th-floor observation deck, but it makes up for that with style to spare. Clad in subdued earth tones, the hotel is a study in elegance, with almost everything—from furniture and slippers to silky, tigereye bars of soap inspired by a pebble found on a Sicilian beach—painstakingly crafted by Mr. Armani himself. The 160 guest rooms are spacious and tech-savvy, with appliances operated through a remote-control system that even connects to a camera outside your door, so you can see who is knocking. The lobby is deliberately understated, paving the way for dining options like Ristorante, which serves classic Italian fare, and Amal, where Dubai's current ruler, Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, is regularly spotted with his entourage tucking into innovative Indian cuisine.

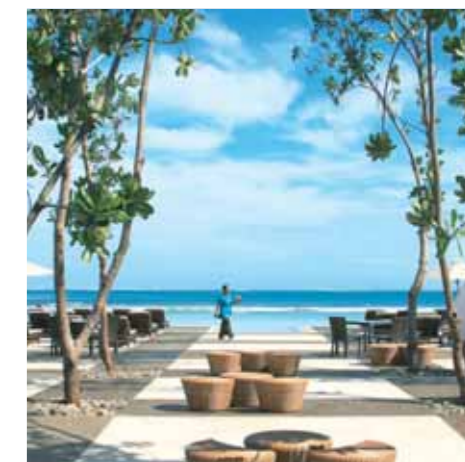
Burj Khalifa; 971-4/888-3999; armanihotels.com; doubles from US\$653

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FIJI
InterContinental Fiji Golf Resort & Spa,
Viti Levu

The days float by all too quickly at Natadola Bay's newest playground, where most guests seem to content to loll around the pool, sipping chilled Vonu lagers and gazing out at the blue expanse of the South Pacific. Fanning out from the beach, a series of low-rise buildings house 271 spacious rooms, all with outdoor living areas. Ground-floor beachfront suites come with enormous bathtubs, patio daybeds, and direct access to Natadola's powdery sand, while butler-serviced club suites are worth the splurge for their private plunge pools. If you can drag yourself away from your sun-lounger, there is an 18-hole championship golf course to hone your swing at, or vibrant offshore reefs to explore. The spa is excellent, and there's a choice of restaurants; the grilled lobster at Navo is not to be missed. Be sure to keep an eye out for the sugar-cane train that occasionally rolls through the property.

Natadola; 679-673-3300; ichotelsgroup.com; doubles from US\$210



CITY SLICKER
The rooftop pool at Singapore's Fullerton Bay Hotel. Opposite, from top: A villa bedroom at The Banjaran; poolside in the courtyard of Raas, Jodhpur.



SINGAPORE

Fullerton Bay Hotel,
Marina Bay

Built on pilings above the water, this glass-wrapped gem looks across the harbor to the triplet towers of Marina Bay Sands—as arresting a vision as any in Singapore these days. But while *that* hotel is all pomp and glam, Fullerton Bay is a finely crafted jewel box that makes clever use of its historic location. A striking crystal chandelier greets guests in a wide, curve-ceilinged entrance area, which occupies the refurbished Clifford Pier—a 1933 Art Deco structure that once welcomed immigrants to the former British colony. Beyond the concierge desk is the Landing Point, a glittering mosaic-paved lounge by Hong Kong designer Andre Fu, which leads in turn to Clifford, also by Fu, where views of the bay through soaring picture windows provide the backdrop to fine French dining. Making the most of their waterfront perch, the 106 elegant rooms and suites (each with goose-down bedding, Nespresso coffee machines, and bespoke toiletries) feature floor-to-ceiling windows too, as well as balconies. But the vistas are perhaps better appreciated from the panoramic rooftop Lantern bar, where evening crowds gather around a 25-meter pool to sip mojitos and nibble from the tapas menu.

80 Collyer Quay; 65/6333-8388;
fullertonbayhotel.com; doubles
from US\$377

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MALAYSIA

**Banjaran Hotspings
Retreat,** Ipoh

In a country known for its beach resorts, The Banjaran marks a bold—and very welcome—departure. Located outside Ipoh on an estate framed by towering limestone karsts, the retreat is a good 80 kilometers from the sea. But only the most inveterate beachgoer wouldn't swoon at the sight of its lush, Edenic surrounds. As the name suggests, there are hot springs here; the main pool has been fitted with “dipping pots” where guests can steep in 36°C water. Given that wellness is high on the Banjaran's agenda, there is also a full-service spa (offering everything from crystal therapy to colonics) and an alcohol-free restaurant that has struck the right balance between healthy and delicious. But this is no fat farm: the 25 thatched-roof villas are downright lavish, each with a plunge pool, open-air living area, and big, Jacuzzi-equipped bathroom. The New Agey soundtrack piped across the property is a gaffe, though it's easy enough to escape, particularly inside the vast natural cave that now serves as a meditation space.

1 Persiaran Lagun Sunway 3;
60-5/210-7777; thebanjaran.com; doubles from US\$564

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INDIA

Raas, Jodhpur

Located in the frenzied heart of Jodhpur's ancient walled city, Raas strikes a fine balance between old and new, seclusion and immersion. While part of the property occupies the pavilions of a restored haveli, most of the rooms are newly built, though the overall effect is one of harmonious integration thanks to the lavish use of pink sandstone. Guest quarters are sleek and minimalist, with black terrazzo floors and creamy stone bathrooms. In the central courtyard, there's a dining terrace and an inviting swimming pool flanked by curtain-draped cabanas, and several cushioned nooks in which to snooze or read a book. And above all looms the 15th-century majesty of Mehrangarh Fort, former home to the maharajas of Jaipur and among India's best-preserved citadels. When it comes time to tour that, hop in one of the hotel's blue *tuk-tuks*—the ideal conveyance for negotiating old Jodhpur's maze of narrow, crowded streets.

Tunvarji ka Jhalra, Makrana Mohalla; 91- 291/263-6455;
raasjodhpur.com; doubles from US\$328





(Continued from page 113)

AUSTRALIA

Saffire, Tasmania

Joining the ranks of Australia's top wilderness lodges, Saffire spreads across national parkland on eastern Tasmania's rugged Freycinet Peninsula. While the undulating roof of the main lodge looks like a manta ray cast in metal, the 20 suites are much more down-to-earth, featuring native timber, stone, leather, and epic views of the cobalt waters of Great Oyster Bay and the pink-granite Hazard Mountains beyond. Food is an asset here: at the degustation-focused *Palate*, chef Hugh Whitehouse turns out complex dishes that make the most of Tasmania's paddocks and produce. Guests can also sign up for guided excursions to the peninsula's celebrated Wineglass Bay, from which a parade of seafood—crayfish, scallops, plump oysters—is plucked daily, destined for Whitehouse's kitchen (61-3/6221-1856; saffire-freycinet.com.au; doubles from US\$1,195).

Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa, Lithgow
Emirates Hotels & Resorts' first property outside the U.A.E. brings a slice of Dubai-style extravagance to the Australian backcountry. Surrounded by craggy escarpments and rolling bushland, the resort crouches amid a private nature reserve near the Greater Blue Mountains of New South Wales, three hours' drive from Sydney. Most of the 40 suites occupy timber-and-stone guest cottages inspired by early Australian homesteads, and come with handcrafted furniture, plunge pools, fireplaces, and verandas. Activities range from wildlife safaris to horseback riding, after which you can refuel on sophisticated fare prepared with fresh organic produce

from local farms (61-2/6350-1800; emirateshotelsresorts.com; doubles from US\$1,860).

CHINA

Amanfayun, Hangzhou

Bamboo groves and Longjing green tea plantations surround this deceptively humble collection of courtyard dwellings. Indonesian interiors visionary Jaya Ibrahim transformed these historic structures into 42 pared-down suites boasting pillow-top beds, under-floor heating and invigorating rain showers. The most indulgent add a double massage room. In a departure from Aman's usual brand of seclusion, guests share the well-worn cobblestone path that cuts through this rustic retreat with farmers heading to their fields and monks on pilgrimage to nearby Buddhist temples. Also open to the public are three of the resort's eateries: the authentic Tea House, humble but tasty Steam House, and Hangzhou House for local flavors like West Lake snow shrimp cooked with tea leaves. Other forms of satisfaction include the spa's warm oil and bamboo massage, and a well-edited boutique stocked with empress-worthy bling (22 Fayun Nong, Xihujiedao; 86-571/8732-9999; amanfayun.com; doubles from US\$580).

Fairmont Beijing, Beijing

Architect Paul Tange, son of the renowned Kenzo Tange, lives up to the family name with this modernist take on traditional Chinese gates, 25 stories tall and clad in rose-gold glass. Inside, 222 generous guest rooms—all at least 40 square meters, and with panoramic urban vistas—rich embellishments like Chinese silks, original brushstroke paintings, and hand-carved lacquerware create a plush imperial ambience, balanced by mod cons like a Bose Wave sound system. Winter visitors will surely appreciate the bathroom's heated marble floors and toilet seat. The crispy Peking duck cooked at Lunar 8 rightly draws raves, and homesick travelers flock to The Cut for succulent steaks; equally authentic are the addictive rolls and fresh sashimi at the sleek Sushi Bar (8 Yong An Dong Li, Jianguomenwai Ave., Chaoyang District; 86-10/8511-7777; fairmont.com; doubles from US\$397).

Fairmont Peace Hotel, Shanghai

Once the epitome of the decadence and

glamour of Shanghai's 1930s heyday, this 12-story Art Deco landmark has reopened after a three-year makeover. Originally known as the Cathay, it attracted Shanghai high society and global luminaries like Noël Coward and Charlie Chaplin. Glammed up for a new generation of gilded travelers, the copper-capped architectural icon features retouched (and rebuilt) Art Deco interiors, updated in-room technology, and revamped dining venues. Whimsical Chinese restaurant Dragon Phoenix, European dining at the Cathay Room & Terrace, and the famous Jazz Bar with its octogenarian musicians all make a welcome return. Additional facilities opening later this year include a Willow Stream Spa, and a museum recounting the hotel's fascinating history (20 Nanjing Dong Lu; 86-21/6321-6888; fairmont.com; doubles from US\$382).

Hullett House, Hong Kong

Crowning a 126-year-old building that was once the city's Marine Police Headquarters, this heritage property features just 10 unique suites, each designed to reflect a distinct era of local history. Check in to the Tsing Lung room for hand-drawn, red-lacquer murals and a four-poster pagoda bed, or book the D'Aguiar suite to experience furnishings that would not be out of place in the English countryside. Lower floors feature five restaurants including Mariner's Rest, where guests can dine on British pub fare in an original 1881 holding cell, and Loong Toh Yuen, where fine tea and Cantonese cuisine are served in a dining room done up with Art Deco mirrors and an antique fireplace (2A Canton Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon; 852/3988-0000; doubles from US\$564).

The Peninsula Shanghai, Shanghai

In the early 1900s, the Peninsula's founding Kadoorie family owned four celebrated Shanghai hotels. Almost a century later, they've made a triumphant return with The Peninsula Shanghai on the Bund waterfront. This 14-story mansion is the first new building on The Bund for 63 years. Nevertheless, the landmark property, already feels like a grande dame. All 235 guest rooms are wired with China's smartest in-room technology, including humidity controls and nifty nail dryers. Be sure to try an herbal massage at the ESPA, a cocktail on the rooftop terrace, or a

unique cultural tour offered through the just-launched Peninsula Academy (32 Zhongshan, Dong Yilu; 86-21/2327-2888; peninsula.com; doubles from US\$520).

Ritz-Carlton Shanghai, Pudong,
Shanghai

Shanghai's second Ritz-Carlton crowns the top 18 floors of the 58-story Shanghai IFC tower in Pudong. The 285-room hotel dazzles with an updated Deco design and stunning views of the Bund. High-tech rooms present a modern take on classic Shanghai glamour, with claw-footed copper bathtubs alongside 42-inch TVs. The jewel-like ESPA offers locally inspired treatments, like the Jade Qi Yun facial. For a taste of the Shanghai high life, join the local glitterati at rooftop eatery Flair, where stylish cocktails and Asian tapas are served up with breathtaking views of the glowing Oriental Pearl Tower and the city below. Back on ground level, the IFC shopping mall contains luxury-brand flagships, trendy restaurants, and direct access to the Metro (*Shanghai IFC, 8 Century Ave., Lujiazui*; 86-21/2020-1888; ritzcarlton.com; doubles from US\$490).

The Upper House, Hong Kong
Sister to Beijing's Opposite House, the Upper House occupies a lofty perch in one of the Pacific Place towers on Hong Kong Island. The 117 rooms, crafted by local designer Andre Fu, all feature large rain showers, soaking tubs, jaw-dropping views of the harbor and island, and niceties like a complimentary minibar and silk pouches stocked with Ren amenities. The hotel's sole restaurant, Café Gray Deluxe, is helmed by Michelin-starred chef Gray Kunz, who oversees a menu of impeccable European and Asian-accented dishes (*Pacific Place, 88 Queensway, Admiralty*; 852/396-8111; doubles from US\$385).

Yi House Art Hotel 798, Beijing
In the heart of Beijing's boho 798 Art District, these boutique digs—set in a former Bauhaus crystal factory—are styled as a home for art lovers. Graffiti murals splashed across the entrance courtyard

lead to a chic, monochrome lobby where regular exhibitions are held. Ming dynasty meets modern design in the 30 high-ceilinged guest rooms, furnished with custom pieces in charcoal and lime. Downstairs, the excellent Mediterranean grill restaurant Fennel is helmed by former Raffles Beijing chef Christian Hoffman. Although removed from the sights of Beijing's historic center, guests are well placed to explore the many galleries, studios, bookshops, and boutiques in this industrial complex turned creative hub. Strike out on your own, or have the staff arrange a customized art tour (*Jiuxianqiao Lu, 2 Hao Yuan, 798 Yishu Qu, Chaoyang*; 86-10/6436-1818; yi-house.com; doubles from US\$145).

INDIA

Alila Diwa Goa, Majorda Beach
With its exposed laterite columns, sloping red-tiled roofs, rattan furniture and beaten-metal accessories, the Alila Diwa Goa gives a nod to local architecture while remaining resolutely modern in its sleek fittings and minimalist look. Rooms overlook paddy fields with grazing cows, and feature Balinese toiletries, ikat-covered cushions, and walk-in closets. The staff is laid-back and friendly, making families with children feel especially welcome. The resort stands out for its custom-tailored activity menu; a leisure concierge can facilitate anything from bicycle tours to cooking lessons. Fine-dining restaurant Spice Studio has an open kitchen allowing diners to interact with the chef, while all-day Vivo has five live counters serving international and Indian fare. A Spa Alila will open soon, but for now, Bali-trained masseuses are available for in-room treatments. The kid's club keeps younger guests engaged while grownups drink single malts, wine, or the local palm *feni* at the Edge bar adjoining the infinity pool (*48/10 Majorda, Adao Waddo, Salcette*; 91-832-2746800; alilahotels.com; doubles from US\$205).

Leela Palace Kempinski Udaipur,
Udaipur

The canopied launches that convey guests to this regal retreat offer but a taste of the opulence to come. Arrivals are greeted by lively Rajasthani folk musicians and a shower of rose petals before being ushered into Rajput- and Mughal-style gold-domed

buildings, ornate courtyards, manicured gardens, and a heritage orchard. All 80 spacious rooms and suites (some with their own plunge pools) look directly onto Lake Pichola, with views across to the city or the Aravalli Hills; sumptuous embroidered brocades and hand-carved marble lotuses showcase the talents of India's finest artisans. The spa, set within gardens on the lake bank, is centered on an ancient Shiva temple where a *puja* takes places each morning. The large outdoor pool is the best in Udaipur. The Dining Room, helmed by French chef Karim Hassene, offers Indian-accented Gallic fare and spectacular degustation menus, while the lakeside Sheesh Mahal is a romantic choice for dining under the stars (*Lake Pichola*; 91-294/670-1234; theleela.com; doubles from US\$525).

Park Hyderabad, Hyderabad

One of India's major IT hubs, Hyderabad makes an appropriate address for the country's most cutting-edge hotel. From its angular, computer-modeled facade—said to emulate the metalwork found in the jewelry collection of the erstwhile Nizams of Hyderabad—to its 270 sleekly outfitted rooms, the latest venture by the Park Hotel Group is as forward thinking as can be, with eco-credentials that include LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certification. Service standards are a work in progress, but there's nothing to detract from the quality of the cooking at the Verandah, which serves updated local fare like Hyderabad biryani and *aloo vepudu* curry with crostini. The restaurant is connected to the nightclub below via a translucent "stair tube" that passes through the swimming pool, a novelty that seems right at home at this highly original property (*22 Raj Bhavan Rd., Somajiguda*; 91-40/2345-6789; theparkhotels.com; doubles from US\$329).

INDONESIA

The Amala, Bali

Tucked off Seminyak's main drag, these 12 thatched-roof villas deliver the sybaritic pleasures of much grander Bali properties on an intimate scale. Follow a bamboo-clad path to the resort's two-story Wellness Studio, which draws the island's top yogis, tai chi masters, and martial artists. Deeper into the lush property, a six-room spa offers standout treatments including paraffin

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manicures and pedicures, and Ayurvedic *abhyanga* oil massages, all accompanied by glasses of freshly squeezed cucumber juice and soothing tunes from preloaded iPods. Minimalist and Japanese-inspired, the villas, which come in two categories, feature plush canopied beds and flat-screen TVs. Spa Villas offer three-meter plunge pools with therapeutic jets, palm-fringed sundecks, a dining area, a sunken outdoor bath, and a roomy steam shower, best enjoyed with the resort's bespoke herbal concoctions. Pool villas take it up a notch with bigger pools and a cozy kitchen, while the grand Amala Residence boasts three bedrooms and a nine-meter pool. Children under 12 are not admitted, and silence reigns throughout the resort (108 Jl. Kunti, Seminyak; 62-361/738-866; theamala.com; doubles from US\$325).

JAPAN

Sankara Hotel & Spa, Yakushima
Embraced by the subtropical rain forests of Yakushima Island, off the southernmost corner of Kyushu, this auberge-style retreat is designed to harmonize with the green mountains and centuries-old cedar forests that have earned the island a spot on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Newly placed on the roster of the Ryokan Collection's Small Luxury Japanese Hotels, the Sankara is a fine, upstanding addition to the family. Twenty-four villas and five cottage-style suites sit on elevated ground overlooking the sea, with interiors clad in wood tones that complement the leafy surrounds. The resort makes a point of coexisting with the island's community; French-trained chef Chiharu Takei sources all his produce locally, making for guilt-free satisfaction at the hotel's two restaurants (553 Haginoue; 81/997-47-3488; sankara-hotel-spa.com; doubles from US\$815).

LEBANON

Le Gray, Beirut
Eagerly awaited, this sassy property by British hotelier Gordon Campbell Gray symbolizes a new era for Beirut. Adjacent to the Green Line that divided the once conflict-ridden city, the 87-room hotel overlooks the newly rebuilt downtown,

where fashionistas sip café au lait among sleek boutiques. Set in a dusky yellow tower rising around a soaring glass-domed atrium, each spacious guest room has dining tables, couches, walk-in dressers, and a host of gadgets. Despite airport-style security, the small lobby is just as striking, featuring a backlit white metal wall punched with the shapes of flowers and dragonflies. Head to the rooftop for a dip in the purple-glass infinity pool, or relax at one of five bars and restaurants, including the alfresco Indigo on the Roof, where you can get a taste of Beirut's budding organic movement while watching the city being rebuilt below (Martyrs' Square, Solidere; 961-1/962-828; legray.com; doubles from US\$495).

MALAYSIA

Clove Hall, Penang
Native son Christopher Ong brings his talents home, upgrading this 1910 colonial bungalow-turned-gentleman's club into six unique suites on lovingly landscaped grounds shaded by clove and coconut trees. Generous rooms, none smaller than 45 square meters, come with four-poster beds, loungers, and Ong's museum-quality Asian antiques. The Ginger and Clove suites each boast a colossal stone bath, while the two upstairs quarters have bijou balconies. Take breakfast outdoors by the sea-foam-green tiled swimming pool or in a photogenic dining room filled with Peranakan furniture on original black-and-white tiles. Butterflies flutter among the palm fronds during quiet days, and at night the staff light the ground with lanterns. Explore the waterfront and the Technicolor shop fronts of George Town on the hotel's vintage bicycles or by complimentary chauffeured SUV (11 Clove Hall Rd., George Town; 60-4/229-0818; clovehall.com; doubles from US\$175).

Straits Collection, Penang
Spread between separate rows of restored George Town shophouses, the Straits Collection offers a tantalizing choice between two addresses—one behind the Goddess of Mercy Temple on Stewart Lane, and the other on Armenian Street, at the start of the old quarter's Heritage Trail. Spruced up by Narelle McMurttrie of Langkawi's Bon Ton Resort, the accommodations leave you feeling like you're living in this colorful city, not

removed from it. None of this means sacrificing style for authenticity—expect Chinese antiques in eye-popping hues, flat-screen TVs, skylights, and sexy open-air rain showers. Friendly staff can guide you to the best spots for sightseeing and shopping—like the state-owned toddy shop or the incense maker around the corner—while Kopi Cine, the cozy corner bistro, offers fresh salads, tasty local desserts, and nightly screenings of classic films (47–55 Stewart Ln. and 89–95 Armenian St., George Town; 60-4/263-7299; straitscollection.com.my; doubles from US\$129).

NEW ZEALAND

Matakauri Lodge, Queenstown
The southern sister of New Zealand's acclaimed Farm at Cape Kidnappers and Kauri Cliffs, Matakauri Lodge overlooks the shimmering water of Lake Wakapitu on the South Island. Set just outside Queenstown, the recently refurbished property—it was originally built as a spa retreat—is both close to the action of New Zealand's adventure capital, and yet far enough removed to feel like a backwoods estate. Dressed in an earthy but contemporary Kiwi flavor, each of the 10 suites is equipped with a fireplace and a private porch overlooking the lake and the aptly named Remarkables range. British-born chef Dale Gartland has been brought down from the Farm to oversee the restaurant in the cedar-sided main lodge, while a spa rounds out the offerings with alpine-inspired treatments (569 Glenorchy Rd.; 64-3/441-1008; matakaurilodge.co.nz; doubles from US\$835).

SINGAPORE

Wanderlust, Little India
Thanks to the efforts of four separate creative teams commissioned by lawyer-turned-hotelier Loh Lik Peng, this former Little India schoolhouse has been whimsically restored to showcase a madcap, endearing mishmash of provocative and quirky designs. The lobby level offers a dash of postmodern glamour—think a handsome Frank Gehry sofa—juxtaposed against a gray-toned industrial space. Twenty-nine guest rooms are available in three themes: the petite “Pantone” rooms on level two, each done up in a different hue; level three's paper-inspired “Mono” rooms, featuring either chirpy Pop Art installations or origami-like ceilings; and, best of all, the “Whimsical” rooms

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perched on level four, with towering loft beds and flourishes like a floor-to-ceiling rocket. When you are done marveling at the interiors, check out Cocotte, where the comparatively subdued rustic decor takes a backseat to Chef Anthony Yeoh's hearty French fare (2 Dickson Rd.; 65/6396-3322; wanderlusthotel.com; doubles from US\$286).

THAILAND

Langham Place Samui at Lamai Beach, Koh Samui

Laid out in the manner of a local village, these 77 Lanna- and Chinese-styled villas and suites occupy a compact nook at the north end of Lamai Beach. Interconnected by landscaped paths and separated by swaths of green, many feature plunge pools and views over the Gulf of Thailand. An upbeat vibe permeates throughout as resident DJs preside over private pool parties and sophisticated diners imbibe at the seaside Cha restaurant and Splash Bar. The hip feel extends to the resort's Chuan Spa, a veritable temple to well-being: here, traditional Thai and Thalgo treatments are offered along with signature traditional Chinese medicine-themed therapies, founded on the five elemental forces of fire, earth, water, metal, and wood. Laze away on the white-sand beach, or take a running jump off the resort pier, which extends 250 meters out to a secluded sala (146/24 Moo 4, Lamai Beach; 66-77/960-888; kohsamui.langhamplacehotels.com; doubles from US\$260).

Paresa, Phuket

These striking digs, designed by Bangkok's UKD Architects, fit right in with the holiday homes that line this stretch of rocky cliffs known as Millionaires' Mile. Soaring ceilings and dark local timber make a dramatic impression in six villas, each replete with vast beds and deep terrazzo bathtubs, infinity pools, and spa facilities. Diavolo, the resort's cliff-top eatery, boasts panoramic views and a menu ranging from crispy pizzas to aromatic *pad thai*. Browse the small boutique, or tool around the property in a chauffeured buggy. The four-kilogram rose quartz suspended over the pool is said to enhance the heart

chakra, though a treatment in the fragrant spa may be a surer path to bliss (49 Moo 6, Layi-Nakalay Rd., Kamala; 66-76/302-000; paresaresorts.com; doubles from US\$428).

Phulay Bay, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Krabi

Size certainly mattered to Thai architect Lek Bunnag, who designed the 54 airy pavilions and villas at the world's first Ritz-Carlton Reserve on a grand scale. There's plenty of space under the elevated ceilings for enormous ultra-plush beds, perfect for sprawling out after days spent by the resort's equally oversize infinity pool. Bunnag incorporates Middle Eastern and Moroccan interior touches among Lanna-inspired mosaics and Thai silks. All lodgings include plunge pools and verandas sheltered behind high hedges and eggplant-hued walls. The rocky beachfront is not swimmable, so ask the genial staff for boat transport to surrounding spits of sand, where butlers can organize gourmet beach picnics. The resort's ESPA offers indulgent treatments in 11 rooms with open, bamboo-clad walls, and the spa's RAW café serves surprisingly addictive vegan cuisine, which features scrumptious Thai mango pancakes around the clock (111 Moo 3 Nongthalay, Muang; 66-75/628-111; reserve.ritzcarlton.com; doubles from US\$635).

Soneva Kiri, Koh Kood

Flanking the northern shore of remote Koh Kood, Six Senses' first Soneva resort outside the Maldives boasts eco-friendly features like a recycling station, plastic-free amenities, and organic kitchen gardens, all without stinting on luxury. Guests arrive on an adjoining island by private plane (offset, naturally, with a carbon tax) and then check in to one of the 29 villa complexes scattered across the headland and beach, each with a pool, outdoor bathroom, living area, dressing room, and a deliciously soft bed draped with a mosquito net to maximize enjoyment of nighttime sea breezes. Children will delight in The Den, a giant bamboo play house, while the young-at-heart will enjoy stargazing from the observatory or a four-course dinner in the Dining Pod, a large rattan basket suspended amid the forest canopy and serviced by a flying waiter harnessed to a zip line (66-39/619-800; sixsenses.com; villas from US\$1,192).

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara, Abu Dhabi

Although less than two hours' drive from Abu Dhabi's international airport, Qasr Al Sarab feels a world away. Tucked amid the towering golden dunes of the Liwa Desert's Empty Quarter—home to wild gazelles and rare oryx—the resort has been built like a medieval Emeriti fort, with earthen walls topped with crenellated parapets. The 206 guest rooms are just as romantic, each finished with finely carved dark-wood furniture, stone floors, wrought-iron lampshades, rich Persian carpets, and terrazzo bathtubs, and opening onto a private terrace from which you can watch the sun set crimson over the dunes. Book a villa and spend the day lounging beside your own plunge pool while nibbling on freshly baked pistachio pastries washed down with pots of bitter Omani coffee, or hop aboard a four-by-four for a desert tour with one of the in-house guides, who will shed light on the local ecosystem (*Liwa Desert*; 971-2/886-2088; qasralsarab.anantara.com; doubles from US\$305).

Yas Hotel, Abu Dhabi

Swathed in thousands of LED lights, this futuristic building by U.S. architects Asymptote is edgy, aerodynamic, and all about spectacle. Straddling Abu Dhabi's Formula One racetrack, its striking exterior is matched by a seamless white lobby punctuated by plush purple lounge chairs, and a sleek rooftop pool shaded by the building's glass canopy. The 499 gray and tan guest rooms are just as high tech, with a remote control to operate gadgets and generous bathroom amenities by Ohné. Situated on man-made Yas Island, the hotel is well outside the city, but right in the thick of the island's US\$40-billion development, which counts among its tenants the fire-engine red Ferrari World theme park and a 296,000-square-meter mall. With 14 lounge and dining options, including Levantine restaurant Atayed, Yas is a destination unto itself (*Yas Mariner Circuit*; 971-2/656-0000; theyashotel.com; doubles from US\$490). ☉

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