

EDITED BY  
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# 20 DREAM *escapes*

What's your idea of romance? The sexy streets of Manhattan? Staying in a secluded overwater bungalow in Tahiti? Sampling local seafood on Italy's Sorrento Coast? We've spanned the globe for unique experiences that will put you in the mood. *Opposite: time out at the Oak Bar at the Plaza Hotel in New York City.*



### Concrete measures

From top: the Brooklyn Bridge with the Manhattan skyline behind; the Baroque Ortaköy Mosque in Istanbul.

**NEW YORK CITY** From uptown's bustling avenues to the quiet, cobblestoned streets of downtown, New York is a study in contrasts. The greatest challenge is deciding where to stay. With its fireplace suites, **Lafayette House** (38 E. Fourth St.; +1 212 505 8100; doubles from \$615) feels like your own pied-à-terre. Uptown, **On the Ave** (2178 Broadway; [ontheave-nyc.com](http://ontheave-nyc.com); doubles from \$310) has a modern flair, including Italian black marble bathrooms. Pay a visit to the restored **Plaza Hotel** (Fifth Ave. at Central Park S.; +1 212 758 7777), where you can browse for art books at **Assouline** or try on vintage-inspired baubles at **Kenneth Jay Lane**, in the newly expanded shopping area. At the spruced-up **Oak Bar**, the wood panelling still glows warmly and the Central Park views are as stirring as always. Three blocks south, checkout the skyline from the Peninsula New York's new rooftop bar, **Salon de Ning** (700 Fifth Avenue; +1 212 247 2200). The vibe: 1930s Shanghai, with daybeds and mandarin-orange-flavoured cocktails. For dinner, **Café Cluny** (284 W. 12th Street; +1 212 255 6900; dinner for two \$140) is a portal to a Gallic village, where waitresses wear Audrey Tautou pigtails. End the evening at **Smith & Mills** (71 N. Moore Street; no phone), a tiny TriBeCa boîte in a former carriage house. The cozy banquettes can accommodate only a dozen-odd patrons. Bright lights, big city? From this vantage point, New York feels like a small town.

**ISTANBUL** Open-air restaurants, crowded bazaars, and a swoon-inducing location on the Bosphorus – this is a city made for wandering. You'll find Istanbul at its most alluring in the quaint neighbourhoods on the European side of the strait. For lunch, try the sea-bass sandwiches at **Mangerie** (69 Cevdetpasa Cad.; +90 212 263 5199; lunch

for two \$85), a rooftop spot in the Bebek district. In the waterside Arnavutköy area, Dilara Erbay dishes up grilled fish at **Abracadabra** (50/1 Arnavutköy Cad.; +90 212 358 6087; dinner for two \$120), housed in a wooden mansion. The nearby Rumeli Hisari fortress has panoramic views of the strait, making for a picturesque detour. After dark, there's **Anjelique** (5 Salhane Sk.; +90 212 327 2844), a sultry waterside club set against the glowing Baroque Ortaköy Mosque. Take your pick of the new hotels: the **Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at the Bosphorus** (28 Çiragan Cad.; +90 212 381 4000; doubles from \$850), in a 19th-century palace; **Wistanbul** (22 Suleyman Seba Cad.; +90 212 381 2121; doubles from \$540), an edgy blend of contemporary design and Ottoman influences; or the **Park Hyatt Maçka Palas** (35 Bronz Sk.; +90 212 368 1234; doubles from \$850), where several spa suites come with mini-hammams.

**ST. PETERSBURG** This former seat of imperial Russia has a surreal beauty, especially in the colder months when its fairy-tale architecture – the mint-green Winter Palace, the multi-striped onion domes of the Church on Spilled Blood – stands in sharp relief to the crystalline snow. The landmarks are worth a visit: the **Mariinsky Theatre** (1 Teatralnaya Ploshchad; +7 812 326 4141; [mariinsky.ru](http://mariinsky.ru)) opened a \$60 million concert hall in 2007. But save time to discover some local favourites. At the pan-Asian restaurant **Terrassa** (3 Kazanskaya Ul.; +7 812 337 6837; dinner for two \$130), ask for a seat on the glass-enclosed balcony overlooking Nevsky Prospekt. The less-discovered Vasilevsky Island, west of the city centre, is home to the low-lit **Restoran** (2 Tamozhenny Per.; +7 812 327 8979; dinner for two \$125), known for its house-infused

vodkas and *pelmeni*, Siberian dumplings filled with ground elk meat. Spend the night in one of the 60 new suites at the **Taleon Imperial Hotel** (59 Nab. Recki Nevy; +7 812 324 9911; [eliseevpalacehotel.com](http://eliseevpalacehotel.com); doubles from \$580), a favourite of Russian high rollers. Or book a room at the recently restored Art Nouveau **GrandHotel Europe** (1/7 Mikhailovskaya Ul.; +7 812 329 6000; [grandhoteleurope.com](http://grandhoteleurope.com); doubles from \$490).

**BUENOS AIRES** Though its grand boulevards and Belle Epoque-style palaces give Buenos Aires a genteel air, underneath lies an unmistakably bohemian heart. Nowhere is this more apparent than in up-and-coming San Telmo, famous for its Sunday antiques market. Along the narrow cobblestone streets, faded mansions have been transformed into hotels, such as the sweet **Cocker** (458 Juan de Garay; +54 11 4362 8451; [thecocker.com](http://thecocker.com); doubles from \$155, including breakfast) and the loft-style **Moreno Buenos Aires** (376 Moreno; +54 11 6091 2000; [morenobuenosaires.com](http://morenobuenosaires.com); doubles from \$160, including breakfast). Restaurants run the gamut from the innovative **La Vinería de Gualterio Bolívar** (865 Bolívar; +54 11 4361 4709; tapas for two \$125), where chef Alejandro Digilio plays with foams and candied lacquering in his pint-size space, to old-school parrillas (grills) like **Desnivel** (858 Defensa; +54 11 4300 9081; dinner for two \$38). This is prime tango territory, and if you can't make a show at the sultry **Bar Sur** (299 Estados Unidos; +54 11 4362 6086), catch a mini-performance in the windows of one of San Telmo's many dance schools. End the night at the atmospheric **El Federal** (599 Carlos Calvo; +54 11 4300 4313), a watering hole open since 1864. »



## URBAN retreats

Metropolitan life doesn't have to mean compromising on creature comforts; the hidden hearts of many cities offer quiet relief.

## wine retreats

**NAPA VALLEY** A pitch-perfect mix of wineries, restaurants and decidedly sybaritic hotels makes this the ultimate wine-lover's escape. But the best part: there's always something new to discover in the valley. Late last year, chef Michael Chiarello launched **Bottega Napa Valley** (6525 Washington Street; +1 707 945 1050; dinner for two \$120) in the town of Yountville. The menu is Italian, with dishes such as roast pork and honey-sage-roasted apples. Just a half hour drive north, in Angwin, the new **Cade Winery** (360 Howell Mountain Road; +1 707 945 1220) produces vintages in a solar-powered steel-and-wood space. The classics are still a draw, including **Angèle** (540 Main Street, Napa; +1 707 252 8115; dinner for two \$155), a wood-beamed bistro on the Napa River, and **Round Pond Estate** (886 Rutherford Road, Rutherford; +1 888 302 2575), known for its robust cabernets. Check in to the light-filled **Auberge du Soleil** (180 Rutherford Hill Road, Rutherford; aubergedusoleil.com; doubles from \$850), where the rooms – large stone fireplaces; private hot tubs – are made for couples. Or consider the intimate **Poetry Inn** (6380 Silverado Trail, Napa; +1 707 944 0646; doubles from \$770, including breakfast), set on a pastoral hillside.

**CHILE** A 2½-hour drive north from Santiago leads to the heart of Chilean wine culture, Colchagua Valley. More than 30 wineries are scattered among the region's colonial towns and haciendas, including **Emiliana Orgánico** (Camino Lo Moscoso, Placilla; +56 72 856 060; emiliano.cl) and Viña Montes (15 Parcela, Santa Cruz; +56 72 825 417). The most stunning of all is **Clos Apalta** (Km 4, Camino Apalta, Santa Cruz; +56 72 953 355; lapostolle.com), a new winery in the micro-valley of Apalta. With its rounded wood exterior and spiralling staircase, the structure resembles a deconstructed wine barrel. Clos Apalta shares a woody hillside with the **Lapostolle Residence** (+56 72 321 803; lapostolle.com; doubles from \$1000, including meals and tour), just four 90-square-metre *casitas* with exposed beams and

Cambodian silk curtains. For dinner, head to the nearby **Asador del Valle** (Los Boldos, Camino Isla Yaquil, Santa Cruz; +56 72 930 488; dinner for two \$60), a rustic restaurant where three chef brothers roast Patagonia lamb whole on the spit.

## on the waterfront

**MAURITIUS** Indian legend has it that the god Shiva was so captivated with this paradise on earth that he shed a tear, which fell to earth to form Grand Bassin lake in the island's lush interior. The lake now hosts the second largest Hindu festival outside of India while the island's renowned luxury resorts continue to be a major drawcard for honeymooners the world over. Mauritius has been judiciously adding five-star feathers to its already-brimming cap, and the latest is the indulgent **Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita** (Beau Champ; +230 402 3100; fourseasons.com/mauritius; doubles from \$1300) which has stunning rooms with private plunge pools facing onto the lagoon, an overwater spa with local treatments and the **Bambou** pool bar and restaurant, perfect for watching the sun set behind the mountains that tower over the resort. For a more health-conscious stay try the **Shanti Anand Maurice** (Riviere des Galets, Chemin Grenier; +230 603 7200; shantiananda.com; doubles from \$1000) the second outing of the famous Himalayan spa resort where wellbeing is the order of the day with full Ayurvedic treatments available. Or for a romantic dinner be sure to get to the waterside **Barlen's** restaurant at the island's venerable **Le Touessrok Resort** (Trou d'Eau Douce; +230 402 7400; letouessrokresort.com; dinner for two \$300) where fresh local ingredients are used in a tapas-style menu.

**HUAHIN** Snuggled between soaring stretches of golden sand and verdant karst mountains, Hua Hin is home to King Bhumibol's favourite palace, Klai Kangwon (meaning "far from worry"). But it's the empty stretches of beach north and south of Hua Hin where the best escapes are emerging. At the Frangipani wing of the **Aleenta Resort and Spa** (183 Moo 4 Paknampran, Pranburi; +66 3261 8333; aleenta.com; double rooms from \$300) has five charming rooms with views sweeping across the ocean. Nearby, the **Six Senses Hideaway** (9/22 Moo 5 Paknampran Beach, Pranburi; +66 (0) 32 618200; sixsenses.com; villas from \$500) is a classic; its 55 earthy pool-villas so private you can skinny dip. At the sleek year-old **Alila Cha-Am** (115 Moo 7, Tambol Bangkao, Cha-Am; +66 3270 9555; alilahotels.com; rooms from \$270), half an hour north of Hua Hin,

mini-bars are so well stocked (home-made nibbles and a full bottle of Laurent Pierre champagne) you may not want to leave the room – unless it is to claim one of the several beach side salas. For a dash of local culture, head to Hua Hin's popular **Chap-Chai Night Market** (Clock tower; daily from 6 pm), where you can haggle for sarongs and hand-crafted bamboo bowls. End the day at **La Mer** (111 Khao Takiab Rd; +66 32536205; dinner for two \$60), where the local specialty, *mao mok talay* (seafood steamed with herbs), is served with a gentle sea breeze and the sparkling lights of calamari boats trawling into the night.

**BORABORA** For the quintessential far-flung escape, there's nothing like this South Pacific idyll, where barrier reefs meet cobalt lagoons and volcanic peaks rise above the tropical rain forest and powder-soft beaches. On an isolated islet, the recently opened **Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora** (Motu Tehotu; +689 603 130; fourseasons.com; bungalows from \$1500) has 121 thatched-roof bungalows set on piers over the shallows, many with individual plunge pools and views of the lagoon and Mount Otemanu. The resort is all about bliss: a half-day sail to hidden snorkelling sites; a trip to a pearl farm; an afternoon lounging on the deck of a catamaran. For a more affordable stay, try the 80-room **Novotel Bora Bora Beach Resort** (accorhotels.com; doubles from \$230), a Polynesian-style retreat set above Matira Point. Nearby, you'll find the five-table restaurant **Villa Mahana** (+689 675 063; dinner for two \$217), where Corsican-born chef Damian Rinaldi Dovia reinvents native ingredients (Tahitian vanilla oil, curry, coconut milk) with classic Mediterranean techniques.

**BALI** This is a land of impossible beauty: wide beaches, elaborate Hindu temples, and terraced rice paddies unfolding in a chequer-board against the mountains. The resorts here are tailor-made for escaping into the landscape; among them is the five-month-old **St.Regis Bali Resort** (Kawasan Pariwisata, Nusa Dua; +877 787 3447; stregis.com; doubles from \$700), where polished villas open onto private pools, a blue-tinged lagoon, and Nusa Dua's white-sand beach. On nearby Jimbaran Beach, order lobster, shrimp or squid grilled over coconut husks at **Jimbaran Fish Grills** (no phone; lunch for two \$30). Afterward, continue to the southernmost point of the island's Bukit Peninsula for the views from one of Bali's most sacred temples, **Pura Luhur Uluwatu**, which commands a cliff above the surf. »

# WINE retreats

It's vintage relaxation:  
enjoying life's pleasures  
in a beautiful vineyard.

The Napa Valley's  
Auberge du Soleil.





## on the WATER front

Relaxing on a beach could be the easiest way to hide away from life's stresses and strains and restore a sense of calm and peace.

The Four Seasons  
Resort Bora Bora.

**KERALA, INDIA** This lush South Indian state – the birthplace of Ayurveda – is an intricate web of calm backwaters. Here you'll find the **Kumarakom Lake Resort** (*Kumarakom North Post, Kottayam; +91 481 252 4900; thepaul.in; doubles from \$680*), set on 10 hectares alongside Lake Vembanad. A world unto itself, the resort features 49 villas that were created with materials sourced from century-old ancestral homes and are full of traditional details: wooden gables, carved doors, massive brass locks. Sample the spicy curries (okra-and-tomato bindi masala) and exotic ice creams (pepper; nutmeg) at the restaurant **Ettukettu** (*dinner for two \$93*). A five-minute ride away is the 5.6 hectare **Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary**, filled with storks, herons, egrets and parrots. You can also rent one of the property's thatched-roof houseboats for a tour of the area's palm-lined fields and Hindu temples. By day, float past villages and fishing

canoes. Come night, you can be alone on the shimmering lake.

**PATMOS, GREECE** Just 36 square kilometres, this tiny island of the Dodecanese archipelago is only accessible via boat. The rewards, however, are well worth the trip. From the port of Skala, head to Chora, a walled hilltop village that's a maze of interlinked courtyards, chapels and whitewashed mansions – one of which serves as the town's only hotel. At the 17th-century **Archontariki** (*+30 22470 29368; archontariki-patmos.gr; doubles from \$395*) you'll find six modern-rustic suites with stone archways, teak furniture, and private rooftop terraces overlooking the Aegean Sea. Patmos has countless hidden coves and deserted beaches along its jigsaw coastline. Don't miss a stroll on secluded Diakofti Beach – then try the fried zucchini balls at the shorefront food stand. At dusk, make your way to **Benetos** »

The hilltop perch of the Kaimata Retreat.

## SECRET villages

These remote getaways are ideal locations for experiencing reviving time out on the coast or mountains.



(Sapsila; +30 22470 33089; dinner for two \$77), on the edge of Sapsila Bay, for fresh fish dishes such as grouper fillet with caramelised onions and herb-cruste seared tuna with wasabi and seaweed.

### secret villages

**OTAGO PENINSULA** Driving along low-lying Portobello Road, waves lapping at the car tyres, you really feel like you are getting away from it all in this South Island locale. This area has a ruggedly handsome quality and its diverse landscape, from sheltered coves to wind-pummelled cliffs, is home to myriad local wildlife. The best known is the **Royal Albatross colony** on Taiaroa Head ([albatross.org.nz](http://albatross.org.nz)) but the cute yellow-eyed penguins at **Penguin Place** (*Harington Point Road*; +64 3 478 0286; [penguinplace.co.nz](http://penguinplace.co.nz)) also make a good excuse for a romantic ramble at sunset when the petite sea birds bravely battle their way onshore amongst the crashing waves. For the ultimate getaway accommodation stay at **Kaimata Retreat** (297 *Cape Saunders Road, Otago Peninsula, Dunedin*; +64 3 456

3443; [kaimata.nz](http://kaimata.nz); doubles from \$315) an amazing lodge hewn from local timbers that is perched high above the bay. Snuggle into a hearty fire at the central fireplace, play a game, read a book or search for seals on the rocks below; sunrise here is also spectacular for early rising couples.

**CHASSIGNOLLES, FRANCE** Lost at a head-clearing elevation of more than 900 metres in the Livradois-Forez, France's largest national park, 30 kilometres southwest of Lyons, Chassignolles invites long, extravagantly lazy days spent communing with cows, admiring the accidental land art created by a farmer with some hay bales and stopping to smell the rock roses that fringe the lanes. There is only one place to stay: **Auberge de Chassignolles** (*Le Bourg*; +33 4 71 76 32 36; [aubergedechassignolles.com](http://aubergedechassignolles.com); doubles from \$90; dinner for two \$68). The eight rooms are basic, but the views are ravishing, whether of the village's 12th century church or the surrounding wildflower meadows. The English chef-

owner Harry Lester, an early and important crusader in the gastropub campaign, will be chalking his menu board with dandelion and-marigold salad dressed in sunflower oil, a citrusy fresh goat cheese, and a cherry-and-almond tart. If Chassignolles isn't heaven on earth, it will have to do.

**VICO EQUENSE, ITALY** A crenellated castle, pink-washed clifftop church and pebbled beach make Vico Equense perhaps the most dramatic – though surprisingly undiscovered – village on the Sorrento Coast. On the main coastal road, Annamaria Cuomo and Salvatore De Gennaro serve cured meats and cheeses at their epicurean market **La Tradizione** (969 *Via R. Bosco*; +39 081 802 8437; lunch for two \$60). At **Torre del Saracino** (9 *Via Torretta, Località Marina d'Equa*; +39 081 802 8555; lunch for two \$190), chef Gennaro Esposito creates innovative dishes, such as risotto with cod and figs, in a seventh-century tower. Stay just outside the village at the **Hotel Capo LaGala** (8 *Via Luigi Serio*; »

+39 081 801 5757; [hotelcapolagala.com](http://hotelcapolagala.com); doubles from \$400), a stone-studded cliffside lodge. The hotel has a nautical theme: porthole windows and hurricane lamps in the lobby, blue-and-white guest rooms accented with miniature model boats. Book one of the nine Classic rooms and take your breakfast (cappuccino and croissants) on the roomy balcony overlooking the Bay of Naples.

## desert getaways

**FEZ, MOROCCO** Though often overshadowed by Marrakesh, its fashionable neighbour to the south, this medieval city is the real soul of Morocco. And with new boutique hotels opening in restored riads and dars, Fez is quietly coming into its own. Housed in a 17th-century palace, **Riad Laaroussa** (3 Derb Bechara; +1 212 74 187 639; [riad-laaroussa.com](http://riad-laaroussa.com); doubles from \$300, including breakfast) has seven suites with mosaic floors and antique Fassi furniture, all looking out on an orange-tree-shaded courtyard. At **Dar Roumana** (30 Derb el Amer, Zkak Roumane; +212 35 741 637; [darroumana.com](http://darroumana.com); doubles from \$170), a century-old manse on a hillside, you can take Moroccan cooking lessons. The restaurant at **Riad Ibn Battouta** (9 Derb Lalla Mina, Ave. Allal el Fassi; +212 35 637 191; [riadibnbattouta.com](http://riadibnbattouta.com); dinner for two \$136) serves traditional dishes, such as lamb tagine, on a glass-roofed marble patio. Within the city's crumbling walls, 30,000 artisans fill the streets, brandishing everything from exquisite tiles to hand-worked leathers. For a traditional Berber rug, head to **Coin Berbère** (67 Talaa Kebira, corner of Derb el Horra; +212 35 636 946). At the newly opened **Arganza** (9 Rue dela Poste; no phone), you'll find shelves of argan oil – derived from a native tree – which is known as "Moroccan liquid gold" for its ability to diminish dry skin and wrinkles.

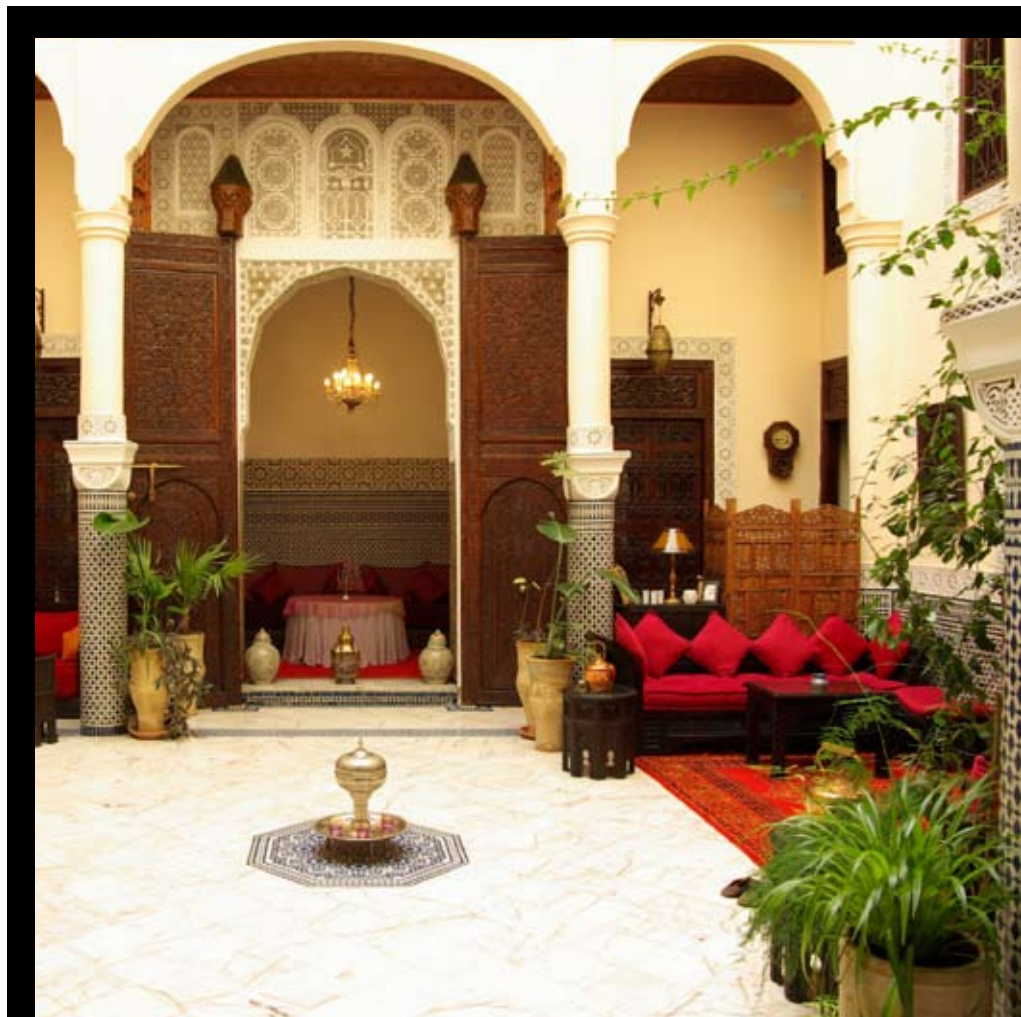
**SAN CAMP, BOTSWANA** The middle of nowhere, recast as one of the sexiest places on earth? Only in Africa – the stark Makgadikgadi Pans in northeastern Botswana, to be precise. The Uncharted Africa Safari Company's legendary **SanCamp** (+27 11 447 1605; doubles from \$3040), which opened in 1994 and is a favourite of safari enthusiasts such as photographer Peter Beard, has been completely updated. The tented main lodge is now far more roomy and luxurious, without sacrificing a shred of the original San's sensual charms: extra-long chaise longues in buttery leather; swing beds big enough for two. On the perimeter, six very

private white-canvas tents are appointed with tall four-poster beds and hand-woven textiles; the enormous glass showers open to the deep-blue skies above. If you want to see more of Botswana, Uncharted Africa arranges multi-day safaris through the Okavango Delta, where zebra and cheetah roam along dried floodplains, and the Western Kalahari lands of the Bushmen.

## mountainside hideaways

**TELLURIDE, COLORADO** Snowcapped mountains surround this mining-village-turned-ski-resort, where the scent of pine fills the air. Its streets are lined with 19th century gingerbread houses and family-run shops such as the **Between the Covers Bookstore**

(224 W. Colorado Ave.; +1 970 728 4504), a cosy bookshop with a cafe; and at **Coffee Cowboy** (123 E. Colorado Ave.; +1 970 369 4946) locals fuel up on fair-trade espresso before taking on the slopes. At **Honga's Lotus Petal** (133 E. Colorado St.; +970 728 5134), home to the town's best après-ski scene, bartender Sean Garatt mixes potent mojitos. For an intimate dinner, reserve a table at **La Marmotte** (150 W. San Juan Ave.; +1 970 728 6232; dinner for two \$130), a 125-year-old former icehouse. Book one of the new hotels in nearby Mountain Village; the easiest way to get there is by gondola, especially atmospheric at dusk, when the valley lights up from the glow of streetlights. At **Lumière** (118 Lost Creek Lane; +1 866 530 9466; »



# DESERT *getaways*

Dusty, ancient landscapes conjure up an old romanticism that provide elegant travel destinations.

RIAD-LAAROUSA-TBC



# MOUNTAINSIDE *hideaways*

African treasures that once hosted an A-list crowd and jungle retreats are the perfect get-away-from-it-all spots.

The former Hollywood haunt that is now the Fairmont Mt Kenya Safari Club.

*lumierehotels.com*; doubles from \$319), all residences and penthouses come with a fireplace and oversize soaking tub. Or consider the 100-room **Capella Telluride** (568 Mountain Village Blvd.; +1 877 247 6688; *capellatelluride.com*; doubles from \$295), set to debut this month. With a butler catering to your every need, you'll be more than ready to hit the trails in the morning.

**MT KENYA** Part of the romance of the **Fairmont Mt Kenya Safari Club** (Mt Kenya; +254 20 221 6940; *fairmont.com/kenya*

*safariclub*; doubles from \$370) is its history as an international haunt for Hollywood's A-list. Started by actor William Holden in the 1960s, this once-private members club became so popular as a getaway that Holden set up a studio in the grounds to shoot African-based epics, and Stephanie Powers and John Hurt maintain adjacent properties to this day. The **Mountain View Bar and Lounge**, which has seen more parties than most of us have had hot breakfasts, also has the added childish pleasure of being situated precisely on the

equator so you can choose which hemisphere to take your tipples in. For a memorable start to the day take a horse ride to the base of the mountain past albino zebras and waterbucks to a multi-course breakfast arranged by the club. The Mt Kenya National Park has its fair share of things that can hurt you, which is why the helpful rangers are standing guard nearby.

**LUANG PRABANG** Lying languidly at the spur-like confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, and surrounded by jungle-clad mountains, World Heritage-listed Luang Prabang is often described as one of southeast Asia's best preserved small cities. An increasingly popular destination for westerners, Luang Prabang has nonetheless managed to retain a certain somnolent and, yes, romantic, atmosphere. Rise at dawn for *tak bat*, a silent procession through the historic centre by alm-seeking monks in saffron-coloured robes, vivid in the early morning half-light. This minor spectacle (best viewed at a polite distance) passes close to the affordable and elegant 15-room **3 Nagas by Alila** (Ban Vatnong, Sakkaline Road, +856 71 253 888; *alilahotels.com/3nagas*; doubles from \$192). Closer to the commanding Mount Phousi, the city's spiritual and physical centrepiece and a popular sunset viewing location, is a new hotel, the 33-room **Villa Maly** (+856 71 253 903 904; *villa-maly.com*; doubles from \$388). Villa Maly, built in a part of a former royal residence from the 1930s, has just launched Luang Prabang's first lunch and dinner cruise boat, **Nava Mekong** (cruise and meal from \$46 per person; cruise complimentary with a two nights or more stay at Villa Maly). On terra firma try dinner at the French colonial-style **L'Elephant** restaurant, (+856 71 252 482; Ban Vat Nong; *www.elephant-restau.com*; dinner for two about \$90), which will also prepare picnic hampers on request for out-of-town excursions. +

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