

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVELLER

HOTEL AWARDS

2021

FAR MORE THAN JUST A PLACE TO STAY, HOTELS CAN MAKE OR BREAK A TRAVEL EXPERIENCE. AND AS WE TENTATIVELY BEGIN TO EXPLORE THE WORLD AGAIN, WHERE WE CHOOSE TO CHECK IN MATTERS MORE THAN EVER. OUR AWARDS CHAMPION THE NEW AND IMPROVED PROPERTIES THAT HAVE STOOD OUT FROM THE CROWD OVER THE PAST YEAR — WHETHER IT'S AN EXCITING NEW REFURB, OUTSTANDING ECO CREDENTIALS, SPECTACULAR ARCHITECTURE OR UNFORGETTABLE GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCES THAT LINGER LONG IN THE MEMORY

IMAGE: FREDERIK WISSINK

THE WINNERS

Grand Redesigns

MANDARIN ORIENTAL
RITZ, MADRID

City Slicker

THE HOXTON, ROME

Good Egg

XIGERA SAFARI LODGE,
BOTSWANA

Lord of the Manor

CASTELLO DI RESCHIO,
ITALY

Love Shack

BÀI SAN HỒ,
VIETNAM

Castaway

KISAWA SANCTUARY,
MOZAMBIQUE

Boutique Break

CAN FERRERETA,
MAJORCA, SPAIN

Leave the World Behind

ANGAMA SAFARI
CAMP, KENYA

On the Money

THE HARRISON CHAMBERS
OF DISTINCTION, BELFAST

Comeback Kid

NOMAD LONDON, LONDON

Design Den

PARADERO TODOS
SANTOS, MEXICO

Gourmet Getaway

TILLINGHAM, EAST SUSSEX

THE JUDGING PANEL

JULIA BUCKLEY
Freelance travel writer

LEECOBAJ
Freelance travel writer

EMMA GREGG
Freelance travel writer

LAUREN JADE HILL
Freelance travel writer

LAURA HOLT
Travel writer and editor

FRANCISCA KELLETT
Travel writer and editor

JULIET KINSMAN
Sustainable travel consultant

TRAVIS LEVIUS
Luxury travel writer

JOHN O'CEALLAIGH
Luxury travel consultant

PÓL Ó CONGHAILE
Freelance travel writer

JONATHAN THOMPSON
Freelance travel writer

**& THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
TRAVELLER (UK) TEAM**

GRAND REDESIGNS

Sometimes grande dames need a little TLC. These veterans are back and more elegant than ever

★ MANDARIN ORIENTAL RITZ, MADRID

A three-year renovation — the biggest in the building's 110-year history — has finally come to completion. It's been well worth the wait: the landmark property, just moments from the Museo del Prado, has reopened to reveal its belle époque character lifted to new heights. There's a certain Roaring Twenties vibe to the revamp, albeit with a 21st-century spin: expect soaring pillars, glittering chandeliers and no fewer than five restaurants overseen by acclaimed Spanish chef Quique Dacosta. From €750 (£638). mandarinoriental.com



RUNNERS-UP

ECLIPSE AT HALF MOON, JAMAICA

A mere mention of Jamaica's most-lauded hotel conjures images of idyllic shores, and now Half Moon has a sparkling new addition. Unveiled at the end of last year, Eclipse consists of 57 spectacular breezy rooms and suites that re-energise the 1950s icon's accommodation. Pull yourself away from the rooms and you'll find a new infinity pool to bask in, as well as two restaurants and views of the private beach, framed by swaying palms. From \$525 (£379). halfmoon.com

LA MAMOUNIA, MARRAKECH

Among Morocco's most storied hotels, this landmark has attracted royalty, starlets and dignitaries for nearly a century. Now, the five-star has tapped culinary maestros Pierre Hermé and Jean-Georges Vongerichten to completely overhaul its culinary credentials — including two new restaurants, L'Italien and L'Asiatique — in spaces reimagined by design studio Jouin Manku. The result is both slick and grand, from the nearly floor-to-ceiling chandelier in the Salon de Thé or the subterranean Oenethèque. From MAD7,400 (£595). mamounia.com



IMAGES: MANOLO YLLERA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Palm Court at Mandarin Oriental Ritz, Madrid; The Lobby Bar at The Hoxton, Rome; cocktail served at The Hoxton, Rome; Deluxe Room at Mandarin Oriental Ritz, Madrid
OPENING SPREAD: Hill Pool Villa at B&B San Hô

CITY SLICKER

Is there a new des res in town? We wanted to reward the hottest new hotels on the block — temples of slick design, stellar service and feel-good vibes that draw in the locals as much as the travellers

★ THE HOXTON, ROME

It's no exaggeration to say the lines between work and home life have been well and truly blurred over the past year, but there are some hotels that have the concept down to an art. With lobbies that feels like the neighbourhood's living room and classy cocktails to end the day, The Hoxton's formula has always been a winner wherever it's put down roots, and it's never felt more successful than now, with the launch of its latest property in the Eternal City. The group's 10th edition — adding to its roster of hotels in cities such as Amsterdam, Paris and New York, not least its trio of London pads — has transformed a modernist building in the Parioli neighbourhood into a 192-bed urban retreat, with a dusty pink facade and a decor inspired by 1970s furniture and classic Italian cinema, with some salvaged Murano glass chandeliers to boot. The all-day Cugino is a bar-bistro in which you'll be as comfortable for breakfast as you will for aperitivo hour. You don't get that working from your bedroom. From €169 (£144). thehoxtton.com

RUNNERS-UP

CAPELLA BANGKOK, BANGKOK

One of the most talked-about openings of the past year, Capella Bangkok has landed a prime spot on the iconic Chao Phraya River. It provides a pocket of tranquillity within the city: unwind in the shady Auriga Wellness spa. Capella Culturalists, meanwhile, curate local experiences for visitors. From THB12,900 (£279). B&B. capellahotels.com

THE SOCIAL HOUSE, NAIROBI

This is no ordinary African city boutique hotel, expertly dodging both colonial tropes and the corporate feel of many regional options. Instead, locals pack out four fabulous bars and restaurants, with menus ranging from Scandinavian to Peruvian-Japanese. Bed down in one of 83 rooms with smartphone controls, and contemporary decor. From \$129 (£93). thesocialhouse.ke

GOOD EGG

We're commending the hotels putting community, sustainability and conservation at the heart of their operations

★ XIGERA SAFARI LODGE, BOTSWANA

Relaunched in January 2021, Xigera is truly immersed in the Moremi Game Reserve — so much so, in fact, that it takes its name from the pied kingfishers that hover over the silvery channels of the Okavango Delta. In a part of Africa where every lodge makes sustainability a priority, Xigera goes the extra mile. It already has a state-of-the-art renewable energy centre, composter and water treatment plant, and electric safari vehicles are next. It's rooted in people as much as it is nature, too, with eye-catching fabrics, hand-crafted furniture and sculptures by celebrated contemporary African artists making this a beautiful place to rest your head after a day in the bush. From \$3,180 (£2,283), all inclusive, including local airport transfers. xigera.com



LORD OF THE MANOR

With their exceptional attention to detail, opulent surroundings and golden treasure trove of experiences, these stately stays are fit for royalty

RUNNERS-UP

THE HOTEL BRITOMART, AUCKLAND

New Zealand's first Five Green Star eco-certified hotel produces greenhouse gas emissions around 50% lower than the building code requires. But that's not all: they've thought of everything, from eco-friendly paint and driftwood door handles to organic linen. The ocean-friendly seafood restaurant champions underrated but healthy and delicious local species. From NZ\$287 (£145). thehotelbritomart.com

CIELO LODGE, COSTA RICA

This striking newcomer was once a logging site but has been transformed into an eco-lodge that's entirely off-grid, powered by solar panels and small-scale hydroelectricity with wastewater used for landscaping. And this is Costa Rica, so expect a full immersion in nature, with wildlife walks along a series of waterfalls, or a night-time frog trail. From \$410 (£295), full board. cielolodge.com

★ CASTELLO DI RESCHIO, ITALY

Properties like this don't — and can't — come around often. Count Benedikt Bolza used to live in this 1,000-year-old castle, but this year he moved out, turning the estate and its former chapel into a stunning, 36-room hotel. The location sells itself: tucked among the green furrows of the countryside, with cypress and pine trees. But what sets Reschio apart is that it's a swirling modern excavation of the past. Bolza, an architect, has designed everything, from the beams to the lampshades, as well as a Roman-style spa in the former wine cellar, and a lush, foliage-filled Palm Court injecting some 21st-century frippery. Rooms deviate slightly from the stone-walled aesthetic, too, and are almost city-chic, with modern four-posters alongside deco-style lamps and mid-century chairs — with the exposed beams and bucolic views reminding you this is ultimately rural Umbria at its best. From €790 (£672), B&B. reschio.com

RUNNERS-UP

AIRELLES CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES, LE GRAND CONTRÔLE, FRANCE

This is as exclusive as it gets, with just 14 rooms in the palace itself. There's gilded stucco, chandeliers and regal upholstery, with bold-patterned accessories in the rooms. Guests get out-of-hours access to the grounds, and there's also a Marie Antoinette-inspired afternoon tea. From €1,735 (£1,468), B&B. airelles.com

BIRCH, HERTFORDSHIRE

It's a country house hotel, but not as we know it. The Grade II-listed property, for years a conference centre, has been transformed into a warren of co-working spaces and lounges. The vibe veers towards festival over hotel, with everything from a cocktail tipi to roaming chickens. From £150. birchcommunity.com

IMAGES: PHILIP VILE; THE RED CARNATION HOTEL COLLECTION; FREDERIK WISSINK

FROM LEFT: Courtyard at Castello Di Reschio; bedroom at Xigera Safari Lodge; infinity pool at Băi San Hô



LOVE SHACK

Honeymoon spots, lovers' retreats and palatial boudoirs for two — these romantic retreats are enough to sweep even the most discerning travellers off their feet

★ BĂI SAN HÔ, VIETNAM

Set between rice fields, rolling hills and a kilometre of coral reef, in an unspoilt corner of the country, Băi San Hô is the stuff that honeymoons are made of. If you're familiar with Namibia's rock-hewn Sonop retreat, or Cambodia's village-style Phum Baitang, you'll have been anticipating this latest outpost from Zannier Hotels, the Gallic group that runs a white-gloved finger over every place it opens. Here, villas borrow the Vietnamese vernacular: all thatched roofs and woven bamboo walls, crowned by muslin-draped beds and come-hither bathtubs. Snorkel trips to secluded bays set the tone for the activities and Làng Chài is the restaurant, set right on the gossamer-fine sands. Most decadent of all is the Yin and Yang treatment at the spa, with a ginger-and-brandy bath for two and a herbal, energy-balancing massage. If you're looking for a romantic escape, this place is hard to beat. From VND9.5m (£298), B&B. zannierhotels.com

RUNNERS-UP

KALESMA, MYKONOS, GREECE

This Cycladic hideaway is as good-looking as a Greek god: set on a five-acre site in the Aegean, a string of whitewashed buildings trail like a bridal veil towards the sea. Appropriate, given there's a chapel where you can make things official. From €1,200 (£1,025), B&B. kalesmamykonos.com

THE JOHRI, JAIPUR

There are just five suites in this former haveli (mansion), with beds set between carved arches and stone columns, swing chairs, hand-embroidered textiles and lattice windows. The Moti Pearl suite also has its own romantic rooftop terrace — and then there's the fresco-adorned bar and restaurant, plus the sandalwood-scented ayurvedic spa. From 22,000 rupees (£213), B&B. thejohrijaipur.com

CASTAWAY

After the past 18 months, these halcyon hideaways suddenly feel more enticing than ever. From ocean-side villas to secluded stays in paradise, we've found the most outstanding desert island escapes

★ KISAWA SANCTUARY, MOZAMBIQUE

A 740-acre retreat on the southern tip of Benguerra Island — itself nine miles beyond mainland Mozambique — Kisawa is a hideaway where guests can go days without seeing another soul. Each with its own beach, infinity pool and kitchen, its dozen bungalows are vast but cossetting in their minimalist comfort and come with a dedicated butler to sort out practicalities. On standby, a Mini Moke car allows for spontaneous jaunts to deserted beaches but it's also worth taking to the water — this is the balmy, wildlife-rich Indian Ocean, after all. The WWF National Marine Park adjacent to Kisawa is still firmly off the tourist trail, which means guests might just be the only ones there to admire its manta rays, dugongs and whale sharks. It's blow-the-budget territory, but more than worth the splurge. From €5,000 (£4,244), all-inclusive. Minimum three nights. kisawasanctuary.com

RUNNERS-UP

DOMAINE DE MURTOLI, CORSICA, FRANCE

Twenty-five years after revamping a string of shepherds' huts, the owners of this rural retreat have converted the farmhouse into a stylish hotel, tucked between the organic gardens. Guests have full access to the estate, with its wild walks and peaceful Mediterranean sands. From €223 (£190). murtoli.com

ONE&ONLY MANDARINA, MEXICO

Perched on a cliff above the wave-lapped Riviera Nayarit — the location alone of this eco-minded sanctuary is enough to have you reaching for your passport. Add private dining and a lush spa, and you might consider opting for the castaway life entirely. From \$1,090 (£784), B&B. oneandonlyresorts.com



LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND

Many of us have fallen back in love with the great outdoors, and we're praising the properties that bring us closer to nature, from tucked-away treehouses to luxurious lodges

★ ANGAMA SAFARI CAMP, KENYA

Just like its mother camp, Angama Mara, this new, exclusive-use fly-camp — with only four tents — delivers old-school serenity with an ultra-stylish, 21st-century twist. Writing desks, extra-king-size beds and double bucket showers take comforts far beyond the realms of a conventional safari camp, and the list of experiences on offer are the stuff of daydreams. Expect picnics 'in the middle of nowhere', hot air balloon rides and tailor-made, guest-focused safari drives that take in the sun-blessed savannah and Big Five. This is a rare and intimate experience, all stage-managed by a team whose attention to detail is out of this world. From \$1,400 (£1,006) per night, full board, including activities and transfers from the nearest airstrip. Minimum three nights. angama.com

BOUTIQUE BREAK

Behold the shining jewels of the hotel world: stand-out properties that shimmer with exquisite style, excellent service and just a handful of sumptuous rooms

★ CAN FERRERETA, MAJORCA, SPAIN

Farm paths that once funnelled livestock now feel the trot of shoes on stone in the south Majorcan village of Santanyi, thanks to a restoration by local architect Gerard Bastidas. This once-derelict farmstead is now unrecognisable as Can Ferrereta, transformed into a boutique sanctuary that makes an unforgettable first impression. Knobbly, butterscotch-coloured walls and olive-gnarled grounds muster alongside a cool, canvas-like interior, showcasing works by Catalan artists, including Joan Miró. Restaurant Ocre, meanwhile, occupies an erstwhile wine cellar, serving market-bought vegetables alongside smoked Majorcan cheese. Over at the old shepherd's hut, a pool house beckons, while a barn-style spa uses products rooted in the island's geography, including citrus fruits from Sóller and salts from Es Trenc. Mark our words: this is one you'll want to talk about until the cows come home. From €315 (£269), B&B. hotelcanferrereta.com

RUNNERS-UP

VILLA DAGMAR, STOCKHOLM

A slick addition to the opulent Östermalmstorg neighbourhood, the Swedish capital's new leading lady is set within a 19th-century art nouveau building and comes with its own flower shop and concept store, Gazebo. The garden bar's the place to be, with a glass ceiling inspired by the British Museum's Reading Room. From SEK2,550 (£213). hotellivadagmar.com

ARTHAUS BEIRUT, BEIRUT

With Ottoman-inspired rooms and a garden peppered with Roman relics, there was much anticipation for Nabil and Zoe Debs' new hotel. But the explosion in the Lebanese capital's port last summer brought the Gemmayze district to its knees. Arthaus has already partially reopened, with its 25 rooms complemented by a concierge service. From \$320 (£230). arthaus.international

RUNNERS-UP

THE TREEHOUSES AT LANRICK, PERTSHIRE

Sylvan simplicity is the name of the game at this off-grid site, rooted around five stylish, cabin-style treehouses. Branch off to Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park, five minutes' away, or soak in the outdoor tub. There are picnic and barbecue spots around the grounds, and log burners for chilly evenings. From £200. lanricktreehouses.co.uk

CAMP SARIKA BY AMANGIRI, UTAH

This rugged offshoot of ultra-luxe icon Amangiri carves its own niche with 10 one- and two-bedroom canvas-roofed pavilions with plunge pools, industrial-chic furnishings and otherworldly desert-views. The pavilions' finest feature, though, is the outdoor space in night-time hours, where guests can toast s'mores on a firepit beneath the stars. From \$2,100 (£1,509), B&B. aman.com



FROM LEFT: Aerial view of Kisawa bungalow, at Kisawa Sanctuary, Mozambique; bathroom at Kisawa Sanctuary, Mozambique; bedroom at Can Ferrereta, Majorca

IMAGES: ELSA YOUNG/KISAWA

ON THE MONEY

We're championing the hotels offering real bang for your buck. After all, who doesn't love a deal?

★ THE HARRISON CHAMBERS OF DISTINCTION, BELFAST

What happens if your ideal city stay doesn't exist? You create it. At least, that's Melanie Harrison's attitude. Taking inspiration from her travels, she's transformed a 19th-century merchant's home near the city's Botanic Gardens into a chic shrine to local authors, lavish antiques and frisky design. It's a welcome, quirky addition to Belfast's hotel scene: expect freestanding baths on reclaimed floorboards, rooms named for local heroes like C S Lewis and singer Ruby Murray and *Bridgerton*-style four-poster beds beneath lush wallpapers. It's personal and playful — and if you book direct, there's a free breakfast, too. From £109. chambersofdistinction.com

RUNNERS-UP

KLOÉ, KUALA LUMPUR

The Malaysian capital's bargain boutique hotel boom continues with this sophisticated new pad. Its location couldn't be more fun, thrust as it is in the heart of Bukit Bintang, home to scores of outdoor bars and street food stalls. There are eye-popping city views from the smart rooms, which meld a polished concrete aesthetic with herringbone floors and Malaysian-made furniture and ceramics. Don't miss the outdoor pool surrounded by dusky-pink deck chairs. From 288 ringgit (£49). kloehotel.com

HOTEL LES DEUX GARES, PARIS

Step back in time at this jaunty, Anglo-French collaboration close to the Gare du Nord. British interior designer Luke Edward Hall has done his best impression of retro French style in the form of pink, green or sky-blue walls, candy-striped headboards and clashing curtains. Throw in an old-school bistro — complete with striped banquettes, mirrored walls and a claret-coloured bar — and this is prime Paris for a bargain price. From €88 (£75). hoteldesuxgares.com



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Hans Sloane Aristocrat Suite at The Harrison Chambers of Distinction, Belfast; the restaurant at NoMAD London; bathroom at NoMAD London; Anthony Trollope room at The Harrison Chambers of Distinction



IMAGES: COURTESY OF SYDELL GROUP; SIMON LUTON/CHAMBERS OF DISTINCTION; PHILIP LAUTERBACH

COMEBACK KID

Call it the 'chrysalis effect' — storied landmarks transformed into beautiful, brilliant gems of the hotel world. There's a knack to a successful transformation, and these are the butterflies of their kind

★ NOMAD LONDON, LONDON

It's a brave move to open a luxury hotel in the middle of a pandemic, but that didn't stop NoMAD. The US group has brought its distinctive panache to its first international property, housed in a plum spot in the heart of Covent Garden: the former Bow Street Magistrates' Court and Police Station, which once hosted defendants including the Kray Twins, Emmeline Pankhurst and Oscar Wilde. Today, its 91 bright bedrooms and suites are offset by a dusky, sophisticated vibe elsewhere in the property. The real star of the show, however, is the orange-tree-filled, glass-ceilinged restaurant, which retains the triple-storeyed atrium layout of the old courtyard it's housed in. There's also Side Hustle (a Mexican-influenced take on a classic British pub) and a private events space in the original magistrates' courtroom, now decorated with hand-painted murals. From £480. thenomadhotel.com

RUNNERS-UP

BOTTLEWORKS HOTEL, INDIANAPOLIS

Once part of the world's largest Coca-Cola bottling plant, this 1920s property is awash with details like art deco-style doors, spiral staircases and terrazzo floors. Swing by The Garage Food Hall, located on the site where Cola-Cola delivery trucks once parked. From \$199 (£144). B&B.bottleworkshotel.com

THE BODMIN JAIL HOTEL, CORNWALL

This former prison, built in 1779, has been transformed from a semi-ruinous site to one of the UK's most intriguing boltholes. Its dark history is balanced by modern architecture and plush decor — as evidenced in the old chapel, now a sophisticated restaurant and bar. From £203. bodminjailhotel.com

DESIGN DEN

Architects can really flex their muscles when creating hotels. These properties are palaces of precision and detail, full of daring aesthetics and extraordinary design



PARADERO TODOS SANTOS, MEXICO

The sun-blushed desert of Baja California might not be the most obvious place for brutalist-inspired architecture, but Mexico-based Yektajo Valdez Architects has seamlessly combined the two worlds with a stretch of low-rise concrete buildings enveloped by farms and flanked by Mojave yucca, agave and cactus. The beauty of this retreat is anchored in the surrounding landscapes, which always come front and centre thanks to the hotel's considered layout. Some of the 35 suites come with rooftop access, while others feature locally made hammocks and outdoor soaking tubs. The Living Room is a homely space decked out with woven rugs, jute cushions and billowing curtains, while the half-moon-shaped sunbathing spot, with its constellation of loungers arranged around a 130ft infinity pool, is ideal for fans of photogenic minimalism. From \$550 (£400), B&B.

RUNNERS-UP

KRUGER SHALATI, SOUTH AFRICA

Parked on the disused Sabie railway bridge in Skukuza, this is a brilliantly original boutique safari lodge. The deft conversion of both train and bridge includes two modern rooms in each carriage, as well as a pool deck hanging over the Sabie River. From 7,950 rand (£390), full board, including local airport transfers. krugershalati.com

SHIROIYA HOTEL, JAPAN

Two hours northwest of Tokyo in Maebashi, a 1970s high-rise has been merged with a *Teletubbies*-esque grassy knoll. Of the 25 rooms, four were specially designed by a roster of international creatives. There's top-notch food at the cafe and restaurant, an art tour and also a Finnish sauna. From £425, full board. shiroiya.com

GOURMET GETAWAY

Some hotels truly raise the culinary bar. Here's to those offering the best epicurean experiences



TILLINGHAM, EAST SUSSEX

Savvy gourmets with a hankering for homegrown wines have long been flocking to this beautiful, 70-acre, vine-stitched estate, quietly content with their Sussex secret. Nature is the star of the show here, with livestock and a walled kitchen garden brimming with fruit and vegetables. Most enticingly, perhaps, are those all-important vines that have already earned Tillingham a solid reputation in the wine world, tended to by founder and winemaker Ben Walgate, who produces an array sustainable, biodynamic-led bottles. Menus are similarly steeped in locale, with charcuterie, orchard fruits and South English cheeses all playing starring roles (alongside oven-charred pizza). And best of all? There are now 11 blissful rooms in the former hop barn, where guests can drift off after an afternoon spent wine tasting. From £165, B&B. tillingham.com

RUNNERS-UP

INIALA HARBOUR HOUSE, MALTA

Awarded a Michelin star months after opening, Iniala's restaurant ION – The Harbour is a marker of the island's growing culinary clout. Fine dining chef Alex Dilling has arrived from London for a residency, although things are more casual at breakfast: try the 'Full Brexit', a playful nod to Malta's links with Britain. From €250 (£212). Two nights minimum. inialamalta.com

VENTOZELO HOTEL & QUINTA, PORTUGAL

All the decadence of the Douro is decanted into this historic, 1,000-acre farm in wine-rich northern Portugal. The highlight is the farm-to-fork restaurant, where the menu is dictated by nature's changing seasons. From €115 (£97), B&B. hotel.quintadeventozelo.pt



Pool area at Paradero Todos Santos, Mexico