

SPECIAL REPORT: LIFE-CHANGING TRIPS THAT HELP THE WORLD

Condé Nast Traveler

WIN!
A \$25,000
DREAM
TRIP
Page 36

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

MAY 2008

INTRODUCING

QUICK TRIPS

3 PERFECT DAYS

IN AUSTIN,
PALM SPRINGS,
MINNEAPOLIS,
AND MORE

2008 HOT LIST WORLD'S TOP NEW 136 hotels*

105 Restaurants

76 Spas

28 Nightclubs

*including 36 under \$250

ULTIMATE
HAWAII
STEP-BY-STEP
ITINERARY

BRAZIL'S
SECRET BEACHES

SYDNEY NOW!
WHERE TO STAY
EAT, SHOP, PLAY



Hot

Tables

FOR THE FIRST
11 HOT TABLES
CHECKED THE
NEXT PAGE

2008

Our team of roving epicures visited 32 countries—from Chile to the Czech Republic, Thailand to Tunisia—to track down the world's most exciting new restaurants. Hundreds of meals later, 105 made the cut. And with tasting menus, tapas, and texture-bending molecular gastronomy, there's something for every palate.

ORDER
HERE

110

BEER TO GO

Love Shack »Fort Worth
With live music and the Lone Star State's best burger, this honky-tonk spot is attracting the hippest cowboys and cowgirls.

105
New
Eats

'Gusto al 28 » Rome
This meatless spot has innovative homemade pastas and seafood dishes.



DAZZLING
INTERIORS HAVE
CRISP WHITE
WALLS, SOARING
CEILINGS,
PORTHOLE
WINDOWS, AND
A MEZZANINE
THAT FEELS
LIKE A TOP DECK

guests—wander in bikini-clad and barefoot. But resort food this isn't. The sashimi is fresh from Tokyo, and even the burger, made with rice and topped with chicken teriyaki, surprises. The 11-course kaiseki tasting menu is a good choice (and carefully calibrated portions won't leave you comatose); standouts include the foie gras and steamed okra custard, and the beef grilled over charcoal with pumpkin and magnolia leaf. Instead of saving room for the ho-hum desserts, spring for the Naoki Wagyu steak, served with hand-grated wasabi (66-76-324-100; entrées, \$19-\$81).

TUNISIA

Bamboo Lodge » Tunis

In up-and-coming Tunis, where the dining scene is still in its infancy, Bamboo Lodge is a rare find. Seasoned co-executive chefs from Ivory Coast and Vietnam deliver dishes influenced by East Africa, West Africa, and the Antilles. Expats love the modern-meets-exotic decor—banquettes draped with woven fabric, and the odd mask or spear on walls done in deep earth tones—and the attentive service. But the food is compelling in its own right. Start out with the puff pastries filled with spiced fish or the lemongrass and coconut soup, then move on to *yassa de poulet* (chicken slow-cooked with onions and lemon), *tép bou dien* (tomato-based stew of rockfish, carrots, cabbage, manioc, and eggplant), or other African specialties (4 Rue de Syrie; 216-71-832128; entrées, \$10-\$21).

UNITED STATES

Fraiche » Culver City, California

Both a chef-driven serious restaurant and a laid-back gathering place, Fraiche seems to capture a new attitude in L.A. dining. The spacious, union hall-sized restaurant from chef Jason Travi and front man Thierry Perez combines modest prices, a bustling atmosphere, and cooking that's personal, rigorous, and confident. The wood-beamed ceiling and rough stone walls give off an ancestral quality, while the sidewalk terrace is perpetually filled with groups chatting over tiered seafood plates. Travi's lusty dishes reflect an appreciation for Italian traditions and ingredients—standouts include *passatelli in brodo*, a regional specialty. Desserts from his wife, Miho Travi, shine: A dreamy Paris-Brest is a wonder of puff pastry and praline cream curlicues (9411 Culver Blvd.; 310-839-6800; entrées, \$21-\$26).

Whisknadle » La Jolla, California

A fresh addition to the San Diego area, Whisknadle is the product of two big talents: owner Arturo Kas-

sel, who recently returned to his West Coast roots after managing Manhattan hot spot Kittichai, and chef Ryan Johnston, a Thomas Keller protégé. The light-filled dining room is sleek and mostly white, with a casual open-air patio that's perfect for people-watching. Johnston's menu is based on locally grown organic produce from Milpa and Chino Farms (made famous by Alice Waters). Dishes might include pale ale-braised short ribs over spicy carrots and polenta or crisp chicken with saffron-laced risotto and harissa. The affordable and accessible wine list is divided into clever sections like "When in Rhône" and "Italian Stallions." Even the desserts employ organic ingredients: The chocolate peanut butter ice cream is simply sinful (1044 Wall St.; 858-551-7575; entrées, \$16-\$27).

Comme Ça

» Los Angeles, California

Chef David Myers takes the idea of the modern brasserie and layers it with every French allusion it can carry—beginning with the striped awning (*très avenue Montaigne*) that marks its spot on Melrose. Inside are white banquettes, a stocked raw bar, and a cheese counter to rival the best-stocked *fromagerie*. Blackboard-sheathed walls are scrawled with a tangle of French phrases, and the hip staff wear short-sleeved plaid shirts and thin ties. Myers has climbed the gastronomic ladder—Boulud and Trotter are among his mentors—and practices haute cuisine at his austere first restaurant, *Çona*. Here, he loosens up stylistically, but the food remains exceptional: spectacular *moules frites* flecked with tarragon; roasted marrow bones accompanied by a profoundly rich oxtail jam; and beef *paleron*, a traditional French cut, braised to spoon-soft consistency in red wine. Myers may have come up in the strictest of kitchens, but Comme Ça captures the relaxed style and tumultuous atmosphere that may have fascinated him all along (8479 Melrose Ave.; 323-782-1104; entrées, \$24-\$28).

Osteria Mozza

» Los Angeles, California

The offspring of two celebrity chefs, Mario Batali and Nancy Silverton, Osteria Mozza could have suffered from one too many talents; thankfully, it doesn't. The ponytailed bon vivant's orange clogs may not be a regular sight, but Silverton is there nightly, ensuring that things run smoothly and manning the mozzarella bar. The designers have outfitted the high-ceilinged dining room as if it were straight out of Restoration Hardware, but the professional wait-

staff are anything but off-the-rack: Informed and honest, they steer diners to standouts like the sublime burrata cheese with bacon, marinated escarole, and caramelized shallots or the grilled octopus tinged with lemon. It's hard not to love the single oversized ricotta ravioli served in a pool of brown butter. Olive oil gelato, made famous at Batali's New York tables, shows up here alongside olive oil cakes with rosemary brittle. Another Batali trademark—although not nearly as sweet—is the loud sound track. Grab a seat at the bar and let the exceptional wine list and the sight of Silverton hand-pulling mozzarella help you tune out the noise (6602 Melrose Ave.; 323-297-0100; entrées, \$17-\$29).

Ubuntu » Napa, California

The newest player in Napa's culinary scene, Ubuntu is part yoga studio, part hip restaurant. Named for an African Bantu term that roughly translates as "humanity toward others," the casual spot dishes up organic vegetarian fare, much of it from the restaurant's biodynamic garden. The floors and furnishings are made from reclaimed wood, and the exposed-stone walls are covered with colorful photographic panels. Bypass the so-called cool plates for the exceptional hot dishes—particularly the signature cauliflower in a cast-iron pot. Desserts such as the vanilla bean cheesecake with sour cherries are divine (1140 Main St.; 707-251-5656; entrées, \$8-\$19).

Purple Palm

» Palm Springs, California

Food is not generally considered a Palm Springs strong point, but chef Jim Shiebler is working hard to correct that. The former culinary school instructor has enlisted 30 of his protégés as apprentice sous-chefs; the result is a flawlessly run restaurant where Escoffier's classic prescriptions reign—including a five-day-long recipe for demi-glace. In a low-key space overlooking the garden and pool of the newly renovated Colony Palms Hotel (see "Hot List"), Shiebler weaves subtle global accents into the largely Mediterranean menu without any gratuitous fusion flourishes. The seared Hudson Valley foie gras with port-poached apple brûlée is accented with passion fruit and Kaffir lime butter, while the simple salad of butter lettuces has edible pansies and a sweet citrus-peanut dressing; among entrées, try the tender Colorado rack of lamb with feta-rosemary glaze and Gruyère-laced artichoke gratin. The crème brûlée with fresh papaya and raspberries is memora-

ble (572 N. Indian Canyon Dr.; 760-969-1800; entrées, \$23–\$38).

Ducca » San Francisco, California
Drawing on a range of culinary traditions, Ducca pulls off unexpected combinations like oxtail gnocchetti with citrus gremolata, and monkfish in jalapeño and mint marinade. Seafood dominates, but the menu has enough variety to please a picky crowd, and the service is as warm as the fire pit out on the terrace. Murano glass chandeliers, some playfully grouped in threes, highlight the designers' attention to detail: a copper-handled fork, French cuffs on the waiters' shirts. And if you're staying at the recently revamped Westin Market Street, your room is just an elevator ride away (50 Third St.; 415-977-0271; entrées, \$9–\$34).

Spruce » San Francisco, California
It's tempting to dismiss Spruce as a case of all style and no substance. The slick Presidio Heights spot has the usual hip elements: funky space (1930s auto garage); edgy industrial decor (exposed steel trestles; textured sisal walls); and buzzword ingredients (burrata, foie gras). But this is San Francisco, and even designer denim-clad crowds aren't going to stand for limp lettuce. Chef Mark Sullivan, of Woodside's much-loved Village Pub, gets his produce from the restaurant's own farm, and the quality shows in the refreshingly simple shaved zucchini salad and the ravioli stuffed with sweet celeriac and mascarpone. Heirloom tomatoes are a seasonal treat, but the fat, juicy burger, served with top-notch fries, is delicious year-round. The wine list is encyclopedia-sized, and there are expertly mixed cocktails. At the front, a small counter sells homemade charcuterie (try the decadent duck mousse), cheese, and prepared foods (3640 Sacramento St.; 415-931-5100; entrées, \$28–\$38).

Spago » Beaver Creek, Colorado
Every winter, the beau monde of the ski set settle into the rustic luxe Ritz-Carlton Bachelor Gulch. This year, they have more cause to work up an appetite on the slopes: the arrival of Wolfgang Puck's Spago. Happily, this outpost lacks the pretension of its sister restaurants. New York designer Tony Chi's soaring space has communal oak tables,

brown-and-white-hide up-holstery, and oversized black-and-white murals of the Rocky Mountains by Denver photographer John Fielder. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the stunning mountainscape. The food is everything you'd expect from the celebrity chef (including sky-high prices): Signature dishes like steamed Hong Kong-style bass with baby bok choy and jasmine rice, and spicy tuna tartare served in sesame-miso tuile cones, don't disappoint. Save room for the sinful 12-layer flourless chocolate cake—after a hard day on the mountain, you've likely earned it (970-343-1555; entrées, \$40–\$95).

Michael's Genuine Food & Drink » Miami, Florida

The restaurant at the epicenter of the red-hot Design District is Michael Schwartz's informally chic indoor/outdoor hangout, priced to encourage repeat visits. There are no food pyrotechnics—just perfect, ingredient-driven dishes, many straight from the wood-burning oven. Plates are sized from snacks to extra-large, which encourages sampling: Try the sweet-spicy pork belly with kimchi and pea shoots; the juicy heritage chicken with pine nuts, raisins, and arugula; or the grilled local swordfish with artichokes and saffron aioli. The addictive crisp-outside, soft-inside chili and lime-spiked hominy are a must (130 N.E. 40th St.; 305-573-5550; entrées, \$12–\$46).

Downtown at the HiSAM » Honolulu, Hawaii

Half the pleasure of dining at Ed Kenney's latest spot—the Oahu-born chef also runs Honolulu's wildly popular Town bistro—is the location. Far from the madding beach crowd, this über-minimalist dining room is inside the Hawaii State Art Museum, in the leafy city center. Then there's the food. Imaginative but not overwrought, the ever-changing menu highlights produce from Oahu's best farms. Recently there was a perfectly dressed salad of beets, ricotta salata, and pistachios, followed by a roasted pork



MATHIAS DAHLGREN HAS REMARKABLE FOOD, FAULTLESS SERVICE, AND SPECTACULAR VIEWS OF THE ROYAL PALACE

loin sweetened just so with spiced butter rum and dates. Like the entrées, the desserts come and go with the latest harvest, but, luckily, the olive oil cake is a constant. For now, Downtown at the HiSAM serves lunch only, although with the arrival this summer of its liquor license, the place will be open for dinner, too (250 S. Hotel St.; 808-536-5900; entrées, \$9–\$16).

Aigre Doux » Chicago, Illinois
This lovely restaurant, run by the husband-and-wife team Mohammad Islam and Malika Ameen, has it all: intelligent food, friendly service, a well-chosen wine list. The restrained, elegant decor harks back to the 1930s with slatted walls of cherrywood curving above the woven leather banquettes, all the way up to the double-height ceiling. The kitchen skillfully balances flavors and textures (*aigre doux* means "sweet sour") in dishes such as thin-crust pizza topped with rabbit, figs, crispy bacon chunks, pickled fennel, and goat cheese; hamachi sashimi with avocado and a brûlée of tart yuzu; and glazed duck breast with bok choy, almond-laced quinoa, and cherry compote. Ameen is the pastry chef, and her fine desserts

Condé Nast Traveler presents

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL

HOT LIST

2008

THE YEAR'S 136
TOP NEW HOTELS*

*including 36
UNDER
\$250 A NIGHT

Hotels are like cars: Newer models can dazzle with flashy looks and marketing hype, but only after you test-drive them does their true performance come to light. After scrutinizing the thousands of hotels that opened in the last year, we checked in to the most promising—incognito, of course—appraising the location, service, design, and value. We came across our fair share of lemons. But the 136 properties that won us over are the most global group yet. Spanning a record 53 countries (including new-to-the-list destinations Easter Island, Romania, and Rwanda), they range in size from a three-suite safari camp in South Africa's Londolozi Private Game Reserve to a 3,000-room tower on Macau's Cotai Strip, and in price from \$70 for a winsome inn near Angkor Wat to \$3,900 for a three-tent pool villa in the Maldives, complete with massage table and personal butler. What makes a hotel a keeper? Read on.

ARGENTINA

Legado Mítico, Buenos Aires
Moreno Hotel, Buenos Aires
Casa Los Sauces, El Calafate
Puerto Valle Hotel, Esteros del Iberá

AUSTRALIA

Emporium Hotel, Brisbane
Qualia, Hamilton Island, Queensland

AUSTRIA

Schloss Velden, A Capella Hotel, Velden
Ring Hotel, Vienna

BELGIUM

Hotel Matelote, Antwerp
The Dominican, Brussels

BHUTAN

Taj Tashi, Thimpu

BOTSWANA

Selinda Camp, Selinda Reserve

BRAZIL

Hotel Fasano, Rio de Janeiro

CAMBODIA

Hotel Be Angkor, Siem Reap
Viroth's Hotel, Siem Reap

CARIBBEAN AND ATLANTIC

Hermitage Bay, Antigua
Cove Atlantis, Bahamas
Agua Resort & Spa, Dominican Republic
Aquamare, Virgin Gorda

CHILE

Explora en Rapa Nui-Posada de Mike
Rapu, Easter Island
Tierra Atacama Hotel & Spa,
San Pedro de Atacama

CHINA

Hotel Côté Cour SL, Beijing
The Regent, Beijing
Hotel of Modern Art-HOMA Libre,
Guilin
Venetian Macao, Macau
Kayumanis Nanjing Private Villa,
Nanjing
Hyatt on the Bund, Shanghai
JIA Shanghai, Shanghai
Lapis Casa, Shanghai
URBN, Shanghai

COSTA RICA

El Silencio Lodge and Spa, Bajos del Toro
Arenas del Mar Beach and Nature
Resort, Manuel Antonio National Park

CROATIA

Adriana Hvar Marina Hotel & Spa, Hvar

CZECH REPUBLIC

Icon Hotel, Prague

EGYPT

Four Seasons Alexandria at San Stefano,
Alexandria
Oberoi Zahra, The Nile

ESTONIA

Hotel Telegraaf, Tallinn

FINLAND

Hotel GLO, Helsinki

FRANCE

Domaine de Verchant, Castelnau-le-Lez
La Maison du Paradou, Le Paradou
Hôtel Particulier Montmartre, Paris
Le Bellechasse, Paris
L'Auberge Basque, St-Pée-sur-Nivelle

GERMANY

Das Kranzbach, Garmisch-Partenkirchen
Charles Hotel, Munich

GREECE

Grecotel Amirandes, Crete
Mykonos Grace, Mykonos
Andronis Luxury Suites, Santorini
Mystique, Santorini

HUNGARY

Lanchid 19 Hotel, Budapest

INDIA

Le Colonial, Fort Cochin
Ista, Hyderabad
Visalam, Sivaganga
360° Leti, Uttaranchal

JAPAN

Peninsula Tokyo, Tokyo

KENYA

Sanctuary at Ol Lentille, Laikipia

MALAYSIA

Majestic Malacca, Malacca

MALDIVES

Banyan Tree Maldives Madivaru,
Ethere Madivaru Island
Beach House at Manafaru Maldives,
Manafaru Island

MEXICO

Aqua Cancun, Cancun
Cabo Azul Resort & Spa, Los Cabos
Hotel Hacienda Mérida, Mérida

QATAR

La Cigale Hotel, Doha

ROMANIA

Carol Parc Hotel, Bucharest

RUSSIA

Ritz-Carlton, Moscow

RWANDA

Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge,
Parc National des Volcans

SINGAPORE

St. Regis

SOUTH AFRICA

La Residence, Franschhoek
Milton Manor, KwaDwe Private
Game Reserve
Granite Private Suites, Londolozi
Private Game Reserve

SPAIN

Hotel Ferrero, Bocairent
Hospes Palacio del Bailio, Córdoba
Hotel Iturregi, Getaria
L'Avenida Hotel, Mallorca
Hotel Claude, Marbella
Corral del Rey, Seville
Valdepalacios, Torrico

SRI LANKA

CASA Colombo, Colombo

SWITZERLAND

Le Richmond, Geneva

THAILAND

Seven, Bangkok
Alila Cha-Am, Cha-Am
At Niman Conceptual Home, Chiang Mai
Villa Water Orchid, Chiang Mai
Six Senses Hideaway Yao Noi,
Koh Yao Noi
SALA Phuket Resort and Spa, Phuket

TURKEY

Serinn House, Cappadocia

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Palace the Old Town, Dubai
Raffles Dubai, Dubai

UNITED KINGDOM

Luton Hoo Hotel, Golf & Spa,
Bedfordshire
Hotel du Vin, Cambridge
Haymarket Hotel, London
Hotel TerraVina, Southampton

UNITED STATES

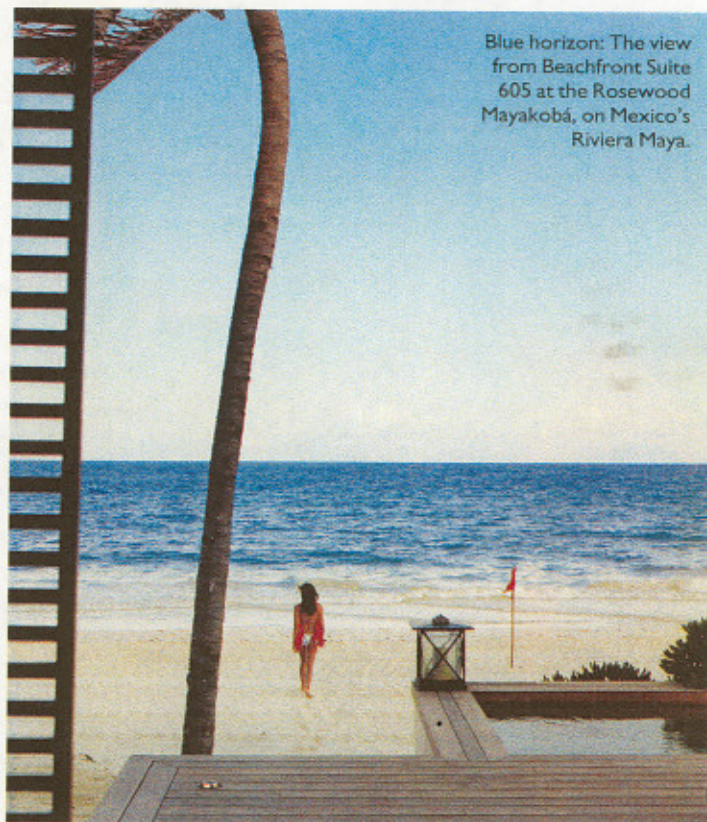
Grand Del Mar, Del Mar, Calif.
Solage Callistoga, Napa Valley, Calif.
Colony Palms Hotel, Palm Springs, Calif.
Ivy Hotel, San Diego, Calif.
Hotel Oceana, Santa Monica, Calif.
Arrabelle at Vail Square, Vail, Colo.
St. Regis, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
Angler's Boutique Resort, Miami, Fla.
Tides South Beach, Miami Beach, Fla.
Hotel Sax, Chicago, Ill.
Trump International Hotel & Tower,
Chicago, Ill.
Liberty Hotel, Boston, Mass.
The Palazzo, Las Vegas, Nev.
Bowery Hotel, New York, N.Y.
Duane Street Hotel, New York, N.Y.
The Plaza, New York, N.Y.
Renaissance Providence Hotel,
Providence, R.I.
Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, Tex.
Sky Lodge, Park City, Utah
Hotel Terra, Jackson Hole, Wyo.

VIETNAM

InterContinental Hanoi Westlake, Hanoi

THE WORLD

Queen Victoria



Blue horizon: The view from Beachfront Suite 605 at the Rosewood Mayakobá, on Mexico's Riviera Maya.

INDONESIA

Bambu Indah, Bali
The Calyx, Bali
Ritz-Carlton Jakarta, Pacific Place, Jakarta

IRELAND

Solis Lough Eske Castle, Co. Donegal
Lisnoughrey Lodge, Co. Mayo
Ritz-Carlton Powerscourt, Co. Wicklow

ITALY

Residenza 100 Torri, Ascoli Piceno
J.K. Place, Capri
Villa Laetitia, Rome
Falconara Charming House & Resort,
Sicily
Castello Banfi-Il Borgo, Tuscany
Ca' Sagredo, Venice
Palazzo Barbarigo, Venice

La Purificadora, Puebla

Mandarin Oriental, Riviera Maya
Rosewood Mayakobá, Riviera Maya

MOROCCO

Angsana Riads Collection Morocco,
Marrakech
Riad Noir d'Ivoire, Marrakech

THE NETHERLANDS

Grand Hotel Amrâth, Amsterdam

NEW ZEALAND

Farm at Cape Kidnappers,
Hawke's Bay

OMAN

Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay,
Zighy Bay

PORTUGAL

Quinta da Romaneira, Douro Valley

KEY TO SYMBOLS

- ☞ = Bar/lounge ☼ = Beach ☺ = Free Wi-Fi ♨ = Gym ♨ = Pool
♨ = Spa ♨ = Hot Spa 2008 ♨ = 24-hour room service
🔥 = Hot 🔥🔥 = Hotter 🔥🔥🔥 = Hottest

request Quinta do Portal (all rooms here are named after wines), or for something special, go for one of the rooms with a private terrace (44-1223-227330; hotelduvin.com; doubles, \$273-\$375). ☹ ☹ ☹

Hotel TerraVina, Southampton

☛ A fine wine cellar and the local terroir are the essence of this country hotel, the latest enterprise of Hotel du Vin founder and sommelier Gerard Basset and his hotelier wife, Nina. Two new wings flanking the brick Victorian house emphasize earth tones and a natural country look, albeit with some shortcomings: The plank walls do not blend well with the old house, and the stairs are cramped and steep. Yet a stay at the TerraVina is still a delight. The staff are simultaneously unobtrusive and efficient, and the 11 rooms, although snug, are light and inviting. Chef Rory Duncan's cuisine is based on locally sourced and organic ingredients, superlatively prepared in an open galley kitchen and served in an attractive space overlooking a garden. Close by are the lovely meadows and paths of the New Forest, now a national park, where you can ramble or ride (a bike or a horse) and glimpse the forest's famed wild ponies. **When to go:** In spring, when the rhododendrons are in bloom, or anytime from May through September, when you can bask in the rays on a sunny terrace. **Which room to book:** An upper room with a terrace for privacy and a treetop view; if a big bathtub at the foot of the bed is your thing, ask for a room with one (44-23-8029-3784; hotelterravina.co.uk; doubles, \$263-\$420). ☹ ☹ ☹

UNITED STATES

Grand Del Mar, Del Mar, California

☛ If Hearst could do it all over again, this is how he might render his sprawling California castle. Tucked in the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Reserve just north of San Diego, the resort, built with a nod to the Spanish colonial revival style popularized by Addison Mizner, pays homage to both old-world design and New Age lifestyles, blending hand-stenciled ceilings and herbal reflexology, gold-leaf balusters and flat-screen TVs that double as electronic abstract paintings. But the vibe is modern California, especially around the pool area with its white sand beach, on the velveteen golf course, and in the gardens, a Wi-Fi hotspot where guests are glued to laptops. Even the smallest of the 249 rooms are spacious and extravagant, outfitted with gilt mirrors and solid Empire-style furnishings, the showers

outfitted with marble seats for watching a mini television mounted on the bathroom wall. The restaurant Addison has gained a reputation as one of San Diego's finer French dining rooms, while Amaya delivers mouthwatering Mediterranean bites. After dinner is when the Grand seems most like Hearst Castle, especially the lobby lounge, where a blazing hearth, live classical music, and a jolly good selection of port transform retro into reality. **When to go:** The Grand Del Mar makes a great base for special events in the area, like the Thoroughbred races (July and August), the PGA tournament at Torrey Pines (January), or the Street Scene music festival (September). **Which room to book:** Rooms in the 330s have balconies overlooking a leafy courtyard or views of the golf course (858-314-2000; thegranddelmar.com; doubles, \$395-\$470). ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

Solage Calistoga, Napa Valley, California

☛ After populating Napa Valley with a series of romantic retreats, Auberge Resorts lets loose with an eco-luxe escape for the stylish, hybrid-driving, biodynamic wine-swilling set. This 89-room resort underwhelms at first glance simply because the stand-alone studios are surrounded by scrubby young plantings instead of more mature vegetation. But that is the one weak point of this otherwise polished property. After settling in for a few hours, you feel as though you are ensconced in a sweet utopia, where guests bicycle to morning yoga, nibble on fruit and granola at the open-air Solbar restaurant, and lounge by the long pool lined with sago palms. The homey, light-filled guesthouses are done in cooling taupe and sage tones and have huge slate-floor bathrooms, spare dark-wood furniture, complimentary bicycles, and shaded patios (which will be infinitely more appealing once the trees grow in to afford more privacy). The service is helpful and practiced, and there are fun details such as welcoming cupcakes and full-sized coffeepots and bathroom amenities. **When to go:** Early fall, for the grape harvest and perfect 70-degree sunny days. **Which room to book:** The Capella Suite has a private patio with a hot tub, and its massive living room is anchored by a fireplace (866-942-7442; solagecalistoga.com; doubles, \$450-\$675). ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

Colony Palms Hotel, Palm Springs, California

☛ A speakeasy and brothel for naughty weekend movie-industry types in the 1930s, the 56-room Colony Palms has a

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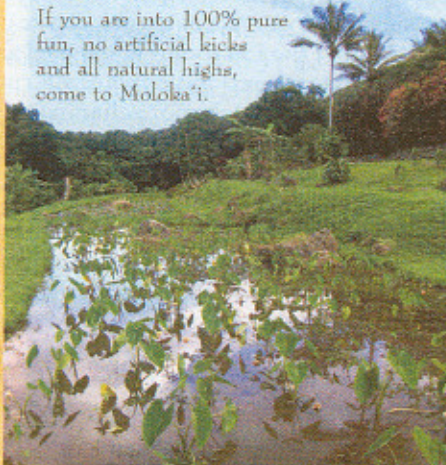
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new incarnation as a cool restaurant-hotel. Located in a part of downtown Palm Springs now favored by the West Hollywood crowd, the motel-style Spanish colonial revival buildings surround a garden

UNDER
\$250

with cypress trees and a pool that is an oasis of palm-fronded, brightly flowered old California. Martyn Lawrence-Bullard, who has designed houses for Cher, among others, has boldly updated the interior decor with arresting Suzani appliqué pillows, Indonesian settees, Moroccan tray tables, and black-and-white thirties-style photography of scantily clad starlets. A huge Moroccan daybed fronts one side of the pool outside the superlative Purple Palm restaurant (see "Hot Tables"). **When to go:** From September through November, the summer heat has abated and the light is gorgeous. **Which room to book:** One of the Casitas, with an outdoor whirlpool in a private courtyard (800-557-2187; colonypalms.com; doubles, \$179–\$339).

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Ivy Hotel, San Diego, California

While the leather-bound lobby and erotic specialty suites (with group showers and stripper poles, for example) draw most of the notice, the Ivy's voyeuristic vibe is really built around more subtle features. From the overstuffed beds made up with Thai linens, one has the option of gawking at a giant flat-screen TV or your companion voguing in the translucent shower cube. But substance also accompanies the sexy style. Each of the 159 rooms is assigned an amiable and efficient butler who will run a bubble bath or fetch more champagne. The rooftop sundeck (where after-dark movies are screened) is strewn with daybeds, private cabanas, and wicker "pods" for two. At Quarter Kitchen, chef Damon Gordon's offbeat repertoire includes truffled leek empanadas and caviar tacos. The Ivy's nightlife scene remains a hot ticket in the Gaslamp Quarter, with the crowd gathering to watch the city lights (and one another) at the rooftop Eden bar, before descending into the depths of Envy for techno and bottle service rendered by servers in pleather minidresses. **When to go:** The Gaslamp rocks year-round. **Which room to book:** Rooms in the southwest corner

(like Nos. 648, 520, and 419) offer bird's-eye views of the Gaslamp's Victorian brick facades and the modern skyline beyond (877-489-4489; ivyhotel.com; doubles, \$279–\$479). ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Hotel Oceana, Santa Monica, California

Snuck in among the posh apartment buildings on the north end of Santa Monica's beachfront boulevard, the revamped Oceana looks and feels more like a home. This palm-shaded complex—set around a heart-shaped pool—is an unassuming 70-room seaside retreat that attracts a mix of couples, families, and showbiz execs. Stuffed with brightly colored sofas and offbeat artwork, no two rooms are exactly alike, and most are fairly roomy. While all the usual mod cons are there (flat-screen TV, Wi-Fi), someone has also taken the time to outfit each room with books that one might actually pick up. Guests can relax alfresco around a fireplace beside the pool or in an Ocean Lounge that does triple duty as library, restaurant (the menu is a blend of traditional steak and lobster, and New Age bites like hamachi tuna carpaccio), and bar (whose trademark milk shakes are infused with vodka or rum). But Oceana's trump card is location: Palisades Park and the beach are across the street; Santa Monica Pier and the shop-filled Third Street Promenade are within walking distance. **When to go:** Southern California gets its best beach weather in September and October. **Which room to book:** Third-floor suites with balconies or picture windows overlooking Palisades Park and the Pacific (800-777-0758; hoteloceanasantamonica.com; doubles, \$365–\$895). ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Arrabelle at Vail Square, Vail, Colorado

What happens when a twee European-inflected ski town meets a high-profile hotel? Enter the 36-room Arrabelle at Vail Square, in the revamped Lionshead area. This intimate property skillfully blends attention to detail with rustic charm: Generously sized rooms are styled with simplicity and accented in deep red, creamy beige, and walnut woods, while mountain views are framed by oversized windows. Amenities such as heated bathroom floors, a sunken Jacuzzi bathtub, and a gas fireplace make it hard to leave the room, and thanks to an unfailingly gracious personal butler, you almost don't have to. While the lobby

is rather underwhelming—save for the crackling fireplace to sit by as you slip on your ski boots (with the assistance of a ski butler, naturally)—it's the Great Room, on the second floor, that's the real gem, with floor-to-ceiling windows and an elevated veranda. The best perk? The resort's Volvo XC70 is available for complimentary use up to 100 miles. **When to go:** The ski season is in full swing from December through March; July brings wildflowers galore and a monthlong music festival. **Which room to book:** For a wholly uninterrupted view of Vail Mountain, book a second- or third-floor Premier Room, each with its own private balcony (970-754-7777; arrabelle.rockresorts.com; doubles, \$270–\$1,650). ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

St. Regis, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Melding the brand's urbanity with the town's identity as a top yacht market and cruise port, the 187-room St. Regis resembles a glossy Art Deco ocean liner, from its curvilinear marble lobby, filigreed banisters, and velvet taupe banquettes sprinkled through the lobby, to the seventh-floor pool deck that gives guests a sight line over any potential beach-boulevard riffraff and straight into the ocean. Room decor is simple, with beige upholstery and dark wood, and floor-to-ceiling windows overlook the Atlantic or the Intracoastal Waterway. A can-do attitude, rare in South Florida, makes up for any service missteps: When one guest lost her valet ticket and the hotel's inability to locate her car threatened to make her late for an appointment, a chauffeur drove her in the house Bentley. Oceanfront Cero is a romantic dinner spot but shockingly overpriced for breakfast. And the hotel would do well to provide free chairs and towels on the beach, instead of leaving guests to be accosted by umbrella vendors. But quibbles aside, and taking into account the upcoming Trump and W hotels flanking this one, you'll want to be the first on your block to catch the wave of new Fort Lauderdale. **When to go:** Early March is best for plenty of sun and minimal crowds. **Which room to book:** Pool Terrace rooms open onto the palm-planted deck, with the ocean beyond (954-465-2300; stregis.com; doubles, \$289–\$709). ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Angler's Boutique Resort, Miami, Florida

If this 47-room newcomer on the edge of SoFi (south of Fifth Street) is

KEY TO SYMBOLS

☺ = Bar/lounge ☺ = Beach ☺ = Free Wi-Fi ☺ = Gym ☺ = Pool ☺ = Spa ☺ = Hot Spa 2008 ☺ = 24-hour room service ☺ = Hot ☺ = Hotter ☺ = Hottest