

2 BANYAN TREE

LIJIANG, YUNNAN PROVINCE, CHINA

This has possibly the most dramatic entrance to any hotel – through a wooden archway the visitor is greeted by a floating pagoda behind which soars the magnificent Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. And once you have finished exploring the resort with its landscaped gardens, pools and fountains, all you will want to do is head for that peak. Barely 15kms away, it is a sacred place which has, for centuries, protected the Naxi tribespeople... see it in the early morning tinged with pink for an unforgettable experience. Another day head for Lijiang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known as the Venice of the Orient for its canals, bridges, narrow streets and carved wooden houses. And be sure to find plenty of time to luxuriate in the spa. Opt for a Yunnan Bounty – a melange of herbal steam, pearl barley scrub, red rice and ginseng conditioner and a Gu Shi hot stone massage... bliss.

DON'T MISS A traditional tea tasting in the old town which the hotel will arrange. A real insight into local culture.

BOOK IT Abercrombie & Kent offers seven days from £2,495.

0845 485 1642; abercrombiekent.co.uk



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3 NEELESHWAR HERMITAGE

KERALA, INDIA

On the unexplored northern part of the Malabar coast and flanked by a freshwater lagoon is this near-perfect haven of peace and pampering. There are just 12 cottages, designed and built along the traditional fisherman's thatched huts but each one with enough comforts to keep a five-star hotel groupie enthralled. The Priya (which means beloved in Sanskrit) spa provides ease and calm. After an initial consultation with the doctor, a tailor-made programme of traditional ayurvedic therapies will be prescribed although you can also have acupuncture, reflexology, facials and scrubs or even a Thai massage and a French manicure. Yoga is a speciality and is offered every morning.

DON'T MISS Guided evening meditation, wonderfully and deeply relaxing – you'll leave like a zombie.

BOOK IT Healing Holidays offers seven nights from £1,590 per person including flights. 020 7843 3597; healingholidays.co.uk

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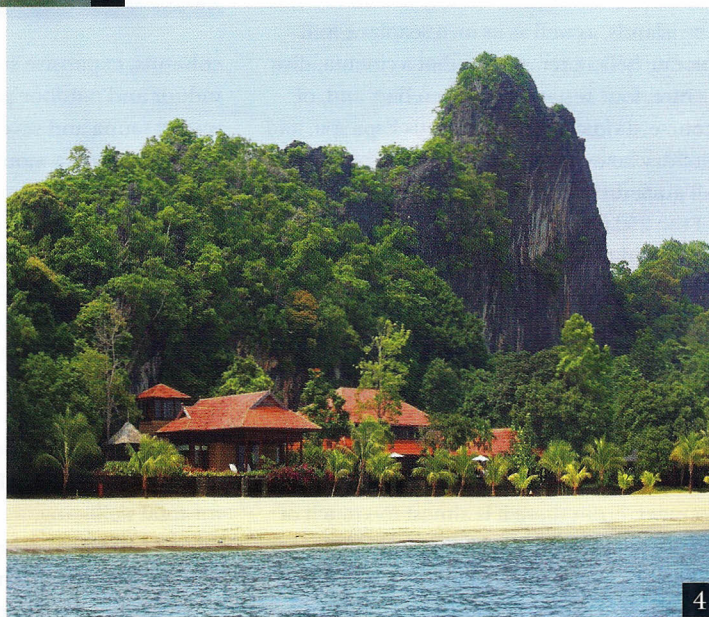
4 FOUR SEASONS

LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA

It's worth the trek to Langkawi off the North West coast of Malaysia, for the Geo Spa alone. This fabulous family resort inspired by a Malay village – all sprawling accommodation, mile-wide beach and cracking kids' club – is slap bang in South East Asia's first UNESCO Geopark. The Ila spa is outstanding; far from purely pampering, treatments are almost medicinal in their restorative qualities, while therapists are hand-picked for their intuition. In the feminine ritual you sit on a commode and have hot cleansing herbs wafted up your nether regions, while the treatment for men will boost your bloke's masculine vigour using tongkat ali oil, a testosterone-enhancing herb. There's even a family treatment where children can join you for scrubs, massages, a giggle-induced dip in a pool and a sweet bonding singing session.

DON'T MISS The Mangrove Safari. This boat trip around the local mangroves pulsing with wildlife is fascinating.

BOOK IT Select Collection offers seven nights from £2,105 per person including flights. 020 7491 7171; selectcollection.co.uk



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THE BEST...



The pool at Villa Greda in Arraial d'Ajuda.



Bobby Patey stands by the pool at Round Hill, the villa in Jamaica, 1959. Right: a scarlet macaw

THE BEST

INSIDER BRAZIL

Don't attempt to bung Rio, the Amazon, Iguazu and the beach into 10 days. The country is huge and flights long and uncomfortable. Go chic-19th-century and go to Casa Turquesa in Paraty, a Brazilian mini-Burano accessible from Rio or São Paulo, with coloured houses, restaurants, boutiques and art galleries along the car-free cobbled streets. Architect Renato Tavolaro converted the old colonial townhouse on the harbour pier into nine adorable rooms. (dehouche.com)

THE BEST Renaissance

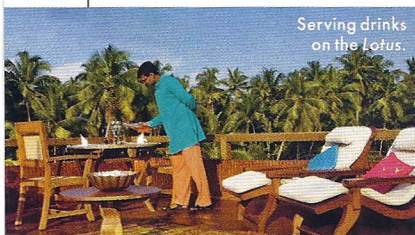
Just when you thought the Caribbean was over, kicked into touch by the Indian Ocean, Jamaica stages a comeback. San Antonio, playground of Errol Flynn, now has a scene of music, food and glamorous hotels. Björk, Snoop Dogg and the late Amy Winehouse have used the recording studio at Geejam Hotel; the Jolly Boys, local heroes, play live mento at Mike's Supper Club; the Trident Castle has eight pretty bedrooms—just take the whole thing for a party—and the Trident Hotel has 13 Jamaican-Georgian studio villas with pools and a cool Japanese mixologist in the Time Bar. Or drink at the Bush Bar in the rainforest or the Roof Club on West Street, where Sinatra and the Rat Pack hung out. And the Blue Lagoon Restaurant and Villas opens this autumn. (dialaflight.com)

WINTER SUN

By VICTORIA MATHER

THE BEST BOAT

After Rajasthan, the next stop is southern India. Romance is sailing the backwaters of Kerala—until you get bitten by mozzies on a rubbish boat. The Lotus is a new teak über-eco-boat that uses no plastic and discharges no waste. Picture large double bedrooms with delicious bathrooms, dreamy sheets, air-con, yoga and sundeck from which to see the languorous fishing and local canal lifestyle. (greavesindia.com)



Serving drinks on the Lotus.

THE BEST Curry

It's the one you cook yourself in Sri Lanka, which is the top spot, along with Burma, for winter adventure. Stay at Amangalla in Galle and you go with the chef to the morning markets to buy fish, meat, fruit and vegetables and gorge on street food. Then cook up a killer curry in a beautiful outdoor kitchen in a paddy field. James Jayasundera is the Sri Lanka specialist who knows everyone, what you should do and where you must go. (ampersandtravel.com)

Lalitha Piedasa, a chef at Amangalla.



THE BEST

BEACHY JUNGLE

Andaz, the designer diffusion line of Hyatt, is opening at Christmas in Costa Rica. You get jungle and beach with low-key charm, but there was nowhere to stay until now. The Andaz Papagayo will have allure, designed by Costa Rican architect Ronald Zurcher, to match its fashionista sister on Fifth Avenue, New York. (papagayo.andaz.hyatt.com)

A sign for surf school in Costa Rica.



THE BEST PENTHOUSE

Tasmania is where the smart money is going in Australia since MONA, the ultimate art hotel, opened. Tassie is Oz's little gem, a miniature food, wine and art paradise, and Hobart is the hip port. High above the city buzz is a new eyrie from Avalon, who have superb modernist mountain and beach retreats.

Avalon City Retreat is a glass omnipod with iPods, swung on top of a nine-storey building, with 360-degree views, swanky kitchens packed with goodies, two double bedrooms with jersey-knit sheets, cashmere throws, a deck, barbie and table for 10—have a ball. Not for the halt or lame, as there's a final 24 steps from the lift. Far below the ferry chugs to MONA. And, yes, it includes WiFi, but no maid service, so you'll need to pick up your own socks. (avalonretreats.com.au)



Avalon City Retreat. Inset, above left: a 1958 travel guide.

