

COUNTRY LIFE[®]

TRAVEL



Wallow in luxury

WINTER 2016/17

Amazing places to stay

Looking for a delightful hotel or scintillating resort? We report from the front line



Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa Mauritius

Why go there? It's a long way to go—much further than Tipperary—but Mauritius must possess some of the most benign climatic conditions in the world. Sunny days, but not too hot; a good breeze in the afternoons, which makes sailors and kite surfers happy; and a delightful lack of nasty bugs, flies, snakes or spiders. The resort is set beneath Le Morne mountain, a World Heritage Site; its almost two miles of white-sand beaches fringe the lapis-blue lagoon.

Highlights Water sports are a short walk from any room. The hotel has Hobie Cats for sailing and there is waterskiing from

a pontoon. Our friend loved the kite surfing and if only I played golf, the course is one of the best, and most scenic, on the island. One morning, we travelled out to dive off the boat and swim with dolphins, an extraordinary and special experience. You can nearly always find a quiet spot to relax beneath a palm-leaf sun shade near the water and, if you don't want to move, a flag by your sun bed will summon a smiling waiter to take your order.

Food The four main restaurants offer an eclectic mix of Italian specialities, fresh seafood and Creole-influenced dishes. Some

of the tables are right on the beach for that feet-in-the-sand sensation.

Rooms Spacious and private, ours had a view out to sea over well-tended lawns and tropical gardens. Balconies afford a welcome retreat from the midday sun.

Rupert Uloth

Seven nights in a Deluxe Room on a B&B basis at Paradis Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa, including economy-class flights from London and private hotel transfers, from £1,286 per person sharing (01483 445621; www.beachcombertours.uk)



Rosa Alpina San Cassiano, Italy

What's special about the area? The Dolomites provide some of the most beautiful mountain landscapes anywhere. Narrow, sugar-coated valleys of snow are set against the pink-tinged cliffs and vast vertical walls of rock towering above. It is a paradise for skiers in winter with a circuit around the Sella massif, one of the most spectacular of the world.

The tour can be done easily in one day, without removing your skis and passing through the four Ladin valleys: Val Gardena, Alta Badia, Val di Fassa and Arabba. In summer, they are coated in a carpet of wildflowers, including the white brooch-like edelweiss.

Why choose Rosa Alpina? A five-star hotel that's rated by many as the best of all skiing hotels in the world. Confirming what he thinks is best about Europe, Boris Johnson was one of the other guests, as we relaxed after a day in the mountains at the excellent Michelin-starred St Hubertus restaurant run by Norbert Niederkofler. Every detail is taken care of for you so that you can make the most of your precious time, whether you are *schussing* down the slopes or sipping local wines beside the fire.

Mark Hedges

There is a special five-night ski package, including ski pass, ski rental and tasting menu, from €1,710 per person (00 39 0471 849 500; www.rosalpina.it)

Bohemia Suites & Spa Gran Canaria, Canary Islands

Why go? Bohemia Suites & Spa is a phoenix rising out of what has, for decades, been the sun-and-fun package holiday destination of Playa del Ingles, in the sunny south of Gran Canaria. This arty boutique hotel, for adults only, is an alluring destination for a long weekend chill-out, set in a thoughtfully landscaped garden crammed with native island flora.

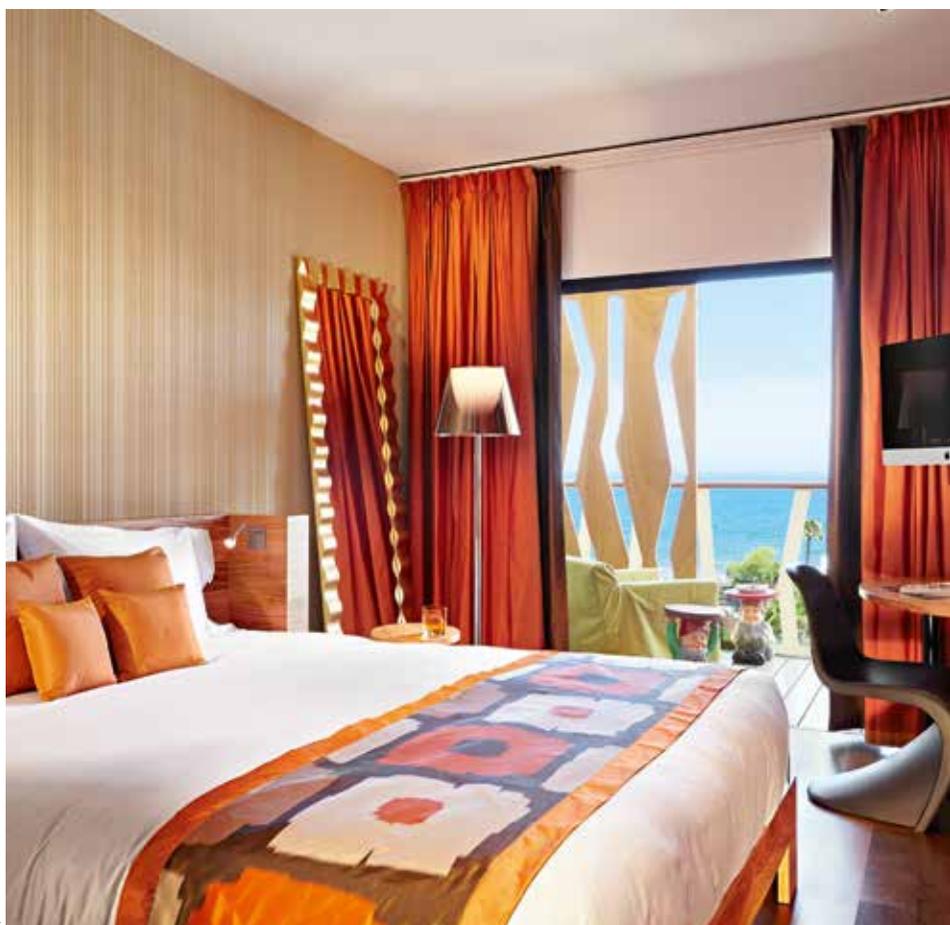
What did you do? Not very much! The gardens and pool areas are a pint-sized oasis of peace; the rooftop cocktail bar has amazing views. One day, we hired a car and headed for the island's dramatic, unspoilt interior and its world-class botanical gardens.

What are the rooms like? Eclectic, colourful and fun, equipped with a range of state-of-the-art gadgetry for tech-minded travellers.

What did you eat? Lots of fresh fish and outstanding breakfasts in the stylish rooftop restaurant with panoramic views.

Kathryn Bradley-Hole

Nightly rates at Bohemia Suites & Spa start from €272 for a Deluxe Double room and from €352 for a Junior Suite, including breakfast and VAT (00 34 928 563 400; www.bohemia-grancanaria.com)





Hotel Torre di Bellosguardo Florence, Italy

What's it like? A frescoed *palazzo* with a 13th-century hunting tower built for Dante's friend, the poet Guido Cavalcanti. Confiscated by Lorenzo il Magnifico for his involvement in the Medici Plot, it has only been sold once—to a German baroness in 1913. She entertained foreign royalty, artists, writers and musicians here and the place retains an old-world charm resonant of the Florence of Henry James and E. M. Forster. Sensitively restored by her son, it opened as a hotel in 1988 and is now run by her grandson and his wife, Amerigo and Ana Franchetti. Anybody who prefers faded grandeur and atmospheric comfort to luxury will adore this place.

What did you do there? Walked from the terraced gardens down through an olive grove and fields, through the Boboli Gardens and over Ponte Vecchio to explore Renaissance Florence.

What is really special? The setting, high on a hill, with the view of Paradise: Florence, framed by dark cypresses and sculptural pines, spread out below against the blue Tuscan hills.

Mary Miers

Double room from €260; suite from €310 (00 39 055 2298145; www.torrebellosguardo.com)

Hotel Esencia Riviera Maya, Mexico

Why go there? For barefoot luxury (shoes are optional) and total relaxation of body and mind. Esencia is perfect for those in need of a digital detox and to escape their emails—although the wi-fi is lightning-quick if needed.

Food The Pool and Garden Restaurants give variety, with lots of fresh seafood and hints of elegant Mexican cuisine. Top-notch guacamole and ceviche are stars, plus delectable avocado fritters, which became a daily lunchtime ritual. There are weekly barbecues with fresh-off-the-boat seafood accompanied by imaginative sides and sauces. The juice bar will counteract the creative cocktails, which can be brought to your sun lounger.

Rooms Its 29 rooms and suites keep it exclusive. Stay in a garden or a master suite for ultimate privacy, including your own plunge pool and outdoor shower.

Highlights You don't sign for anything until the end of your stay. The Zen of the morning yoga sets you up for a day of relaxation. The service is discreet, but friendly and there are complimentary Havaianas flip-flops.

Hetty Chidwick

Rooms start from \$615 (£494) plus taxes on a B&B basis (www.hotelesencia.com). Scott Dunn offers seven nights' B&B from £2,320 per person based on two people sharing a Garden Room, including all airport transfers and flights from the UK (020-3468 9119; www.scottdunn.com)





Riad Les Yeux Bleus Marrakech, Morocco

What's special? A charming, unpretentious *riad* tucked away down three pink alleyways, it opened its solid door to a sensual and exotic feast. Moroccan music plays, a fountain is trickling, birds are fluttering through open roofs between trees as bougainvillea leaves gently fall.

Who does it suit? Although it caters for all ages, it's undoubtedly ideal for those seeking peace and quiet. It's reasonably priced and offers rooms that are small but compensated for by their intimate and stylish decor.

Why go? Set in the Bab Doukkala district, it's only 10 minutes' walk to the city centre. There are lovely fires lit in the winter and even a small *hammam*. Upstairs, peek over the walls and there is a rooftop view of the Medina.

Adam Jacot de Boinod

Double rooms from €170 per night (www.marrakech-boutique-riad.com; 00 212 5243 78161)

Hotel Roemer Amsterdam, The Netherlands

What's special? The Roemer is one of the smaller Vondel hotels in the Amsterdam chain of owner-designer Arjen van den Hoff. It has a real intimacy and an unobtrusive atmosphere. It has the peaceful presence of an omniscient Buddha statue and the aura and aroma of candles, tastefully designed in Art Deco style. There's no restaurant, but there are lots within walking distance.

Why go? Both the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum are only five minutes' walk away. Discreetly set back from a crescent road with a little frontage, it's simply extremely convenient.

The design of the sitting room is refreshingly contradictory. There

are Zen spider lights, designer furnishings and little quirks such as mounted butterflies and kitsch portraits. It has a muted colour scheme using black, white and grey palettes to create a minimalist theme.

Who does it suit? It has all the slick, rather than chic, decor and accessories to make it ideal for the young urban professional. Within walking distance of Vondelpark, it is both conveniently in downtown Amsterdam and right by the fashion district, whose centre is the junction of P. C. Hoofstraat and van Baerlestraat.

Adam Jacot de Boinod

Deluxe double room from €98 per night room only (00 31 20 589 0800; www.hotelroemer.com/en) ➤



Amaryllis Barge, France

What is it? Operated by Belmond, the company formerly known as Orient Express, it's one of seven barges cruising the rivers and canals, five in central and southern France and two more for next year, which will be based in Alsace and Champagne.

Highlights? Being handed a glass of Champagne as soon as you board is a sign of things to come: our luxurious cabin looked resplendent. A crew of six, including a captain, a cook and even an on-board guide to accompany you on excursions, caters to your every need.

Where did you go? The days start to slip gently into one another as the *Amaryllis* progresses through pretty little towns and villages such as Chalon sur Saône.

Jeff Mills

Prices for 2017 start from €6,319 per person, including transfers from Paris (0845 077 2222; www.belmond.com)





Pine Cliffs Algarve, Portugal

Why go? As recently as 1950, the Algarve coast of Portugal consisted of a string of impoverished fishing villages strung along the Atlantic coast. Today, it is, of course, one of the most successful holiday destinations in Europe. This is no place for the culture vulture, but the Algarve is as near perfect as possible for a family holiday.

What is it like? A luxury resort overlooking the cliffs and beaches of the Algarve coastline next to the old town of Albufeira. At its centre is the Pine Cliffs Hotel, which this summer, completed a multi-million Euro renovation. This comprises both a hotel with more than 200 rooms and suites and some 300 apartments set in 178 acres of landscaped gardens, including a nine-hole golf course on the cliff top.

What does it offer? There are 11 restaurants, most of them serving excellent seafood from the adjacent Atlantic. There is a children's village, with a great range of supervised activities (surprisingly including cricket), numerous swimming pools, a golf academy and a tennis academy. It's difficult to imagine a more comprehensive range of attractions to allow harassed parents a breather.

Michael Sissons

Two-bedroom Deluxe Golf Suite from €334 room only for two nights; two-bedroom Deluxe Townhouse from €378 room only for two nights (00 351 289 500 300; www.pinecliffs.com)

JW Marriott Venice Resort & Spa Venice, Italy

What is it like? Part of the group's top tier of hotels, the Marriott Venice stands on a private island, 10 minutes by courtesy shuttle from Piazza San Marco. Superbly sympathetic to the building's original architecture (it once housed a sanatorium), the now deconsecrated church stands in a working olive grove and the split-level villas have been cleverly constructed within the old brickwork.

What did you do there? Weary travellers will be hard-pressed to resist a visit to the award-winning GoCo spa: the elegant, lattice façade hides eight treatment rooms, a heated indoor-to-outdoor vitality pool and a mosaic-clad *hammam*. During our visit, we also enjoyed a Prosecco-fuelled and delightfully messy cooking course and a feast of fresh produce and Italian specialities in the Sagra rooftop restaurant.

What is really special? On arrival, you're whisked by private water taxi from the terminal to the hotel's self-styled 'James Bond Entrance'. In a notoriously crowded city, the Marriott's biggest luxury is its sense of space: there's an enviable 40 acres to explore.

Rosie Paterson

Double rooms start from £280 per night (00 39 041 852 1300; www.jwvenice.com)

