



SMALL WONDERS

Pikaia Lodge
in the Galápagos Islands.

TWENTY INTIMATE HOTELS, VILLAS, AND LODGES WORTH ADDING TO YOUR SHORT LIST.

Nothing feels more special than checking into a boutique hotel, like you're being invited into an undiscovered little slice of the world: a dreamy room inside a Moroccan casbah, a coastal villa with a bird's-eye view in New Zealand, or a tree house fronted by its own private beach in Mexico. These 20 hotels – each with fewer than 20 rooms – prove that sometimes less really is more. ►

EDITED BY AMY CASSELL
ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY ELAINE GLUSAC

PIKAIA LODGE

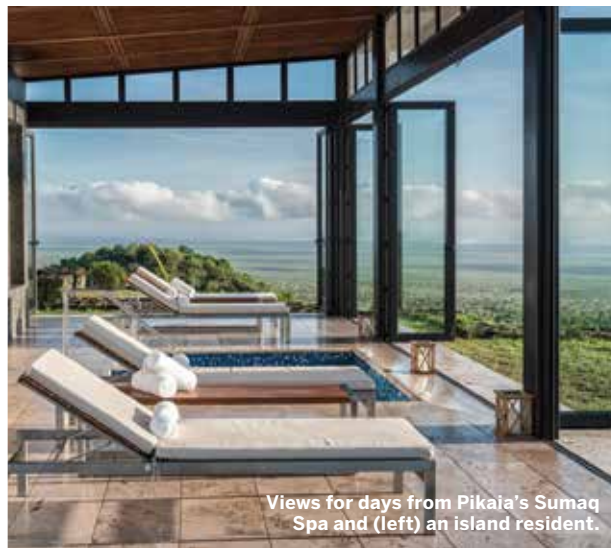
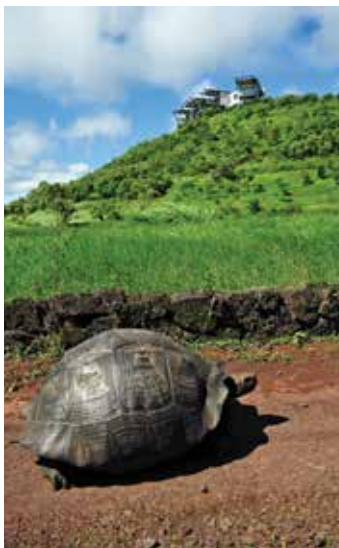
Santa Cruz Island,
Ecuador

14
ROOMS

A rare land-based option in the pristine Galápagos Islands, this eco-lodge practices the sustainability it preaches. Guest rooms showcase local materials (lava stone, teak, bamboo), and solar power feeds the island's electricity grid. Environmental bans on

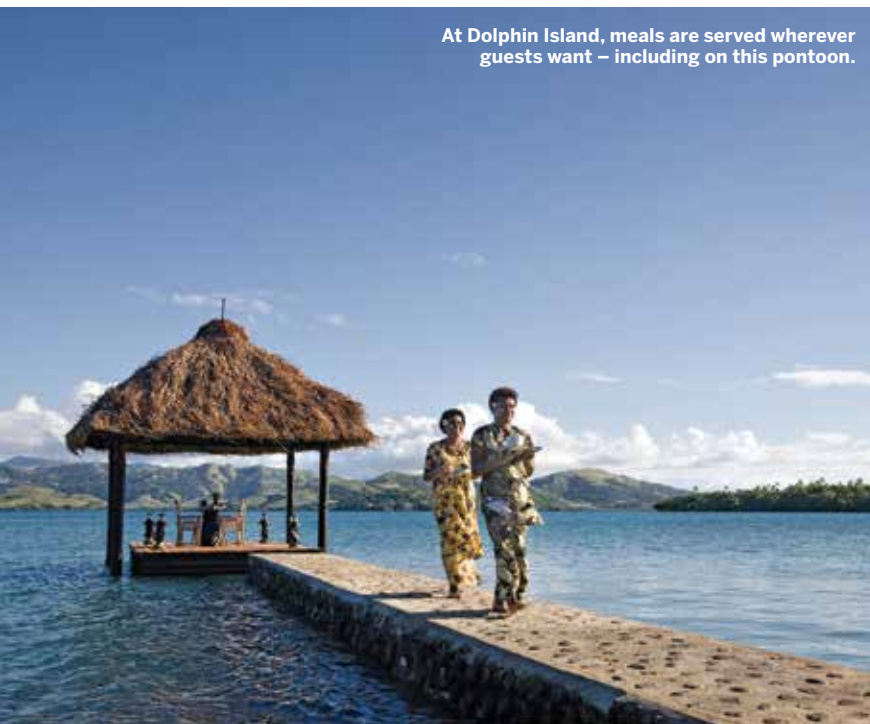
food imports have forged a clever kitchen that produces its own cheese, vinegar, and baking yeast, and serves Pikaia-grown coffee. There's a good chance you'll see a giant tortoise amble by outside during breakfast: After seeding the reclaimed cattle

ranch with 12,000 endemic trees, the lodge established a reserve to protect the island's unofficial mascot. *Four-day packages from \$4,372 per person, including airport transfers, marine activities, all meals, and a complimentary massage for two.*



Views for days from Pikaia's Sumaq Spa and (left) an island resident.

At Dolphin Island, meals are served wherever guests want – including on this pontoon.



DOLPHIN ISLAND

Fiji

4
BURES

TIP

"Ask the staff to serve you Champagne and dessert in the resort's beautiful open-air *bure*, across the island from the guest accommodations. It's the perfect spot for a romantic retreat."

– Leah Winck, Virtuoso travel advisor, Santa Monica, California

Play Robinson Crusoe on this 14-acre private island with intuitive staff who deliver cocktails to your hammock, sync your playlist with the sound system, or catch fish from shore on request. In the evening, while guests – no more than eight at a time – are distracted by the sunset, the staff quietly place 100 lanterns around the grounds, which makes for an ethereal walk back to the handsome, secluded *bures* – traditional Fijian wood and straw huts. *Exclusive-use rental, from \$737 per person for eight guests, including all meals, beverages, transfers, and activities.*

(PIKAIA LODGE) SIVAN ASKAYO



Modern seclusion: The four-bedroom Rahimoana villa at Eagles Nest.

EAGLES NEST

Russell, New Zealand



EDITOR'S
PICK

This North Island resort caters to the five-star hermit in all of us. The ridgeline estate drinks in the Bay of Islands' gorgeous glory, all turquoise water and green gumdrop islands (the largest villa, Rahimoana, even has sliding-glass walls and 300-degree views). But the thrill here, beyond the location, is in the gobs of privacy and beck-and-call service it affords. Each of the one- to four-bedroom villas is isolated from the others on the property's 75 subtropical acres. I was spoiled beyond reason with a multicourse seafood feast whipped up by a private chef in my kitchen, my own infinity pool and wraparound deck, and even nighttime songs (well, squawks, really) from resident kiwis. More freeing still: the abandon of doing as I pleased when I wanted – the staff stocked the refrigerator with breakfast fixings, delivered Thai takeout from town one evening, and generally adopted a “no job too big or too small” attitude. A resident trainer and spa therapist are on hand, one villa comes with a loaner Porsche Cayenne, and the kiwi songs are always complimentary. *Villas from \$907, including a bottle of Champagne on arrival, breakfast and fresh fruit platter daily, a guided nature walk, and Russell transfers.* – Marika Cain, managing editor

DAR AHLAM

Skoura, Morocco



This palm-fringed oasis near the Sahara, a five-hour drive from Marrakech, is no mirage – owner Thierry Teyssier prefers the word “fantasy.” Staff fulfill wishes with style: A rest stop with cushioned kilims surprises hikers, a massage awaits in an olive grove, and a picnic spread is laid out next to nearby ruins. Guest rooms in the nineteenth-century casbah are ornate and whimsical, bedecked in bright Moroccan textiles and tiles – fitting given that Dar Ahlam is Arabic for “house of dreams.” *Doubles from \$569, including breakfast daily and a complimentary massage for two.*



A Dar Ahlam suite and (above) the hotel's pool.

IMANTA RESORTS

Punta de Mita, Mexico

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ROOMS

Our new favorite way to whale-watch: while sipping *café con leche* on one of the balconies of Imanta's three-story, pagoda-like Tree House. All rooms at the secluded resort on Mexico's Pacific Coast are set in the jungle, but the Tree House, which can sleep a family of four, is the only one with a private beach, reached via a trail hidden beneath a spreading fig tree. Take a detour to one of three waterfall-fed private pools on the way to the shore. *Tree House from \$5,500, including breakfast daily and one complimentary dinner for two.*



Imanta Resorts' far-from-primitive Tree House, complete with satellite TV and Wi-Fi.



THE PITCHER INN

Warren, Vermont

11

ROOMS

Seasonal pursuits are abundant at this property in the Green Mountain National Forest: apré-snowshoeing evenings in front of the wood-burning fireplaces in winter, Mad River canoe paddles and

(PITCHER INN) COREY HENDRICKSON



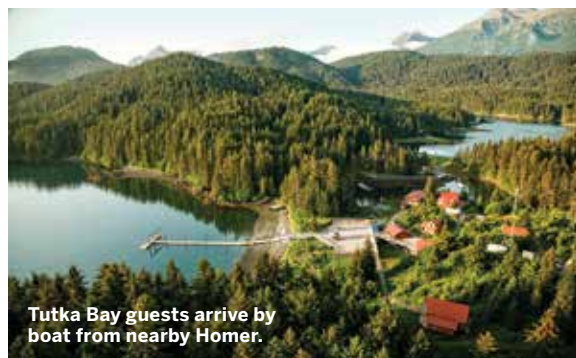
Clockwise from top left: Happy hour at The Pitcher Inn, seared scallops at 275 Main, and the Trout Room's tree-trunk bed frame.

posthike picnics come summertime. Individually designed rooms capture the gamut of New England design, from colonial farmhouse to fisherman's cabin, but the inn's rugged facade gives way to refined dining. Vermont's culinary bounty (think quail, artisan cheese, and wild mushrooms) shines at 275 Main, and the wine cellar's private table is popular for proposals, any time of year. *Doubles from \$375, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*

(MANDY AND KIRSTEN DIXON) GARY LATHAM

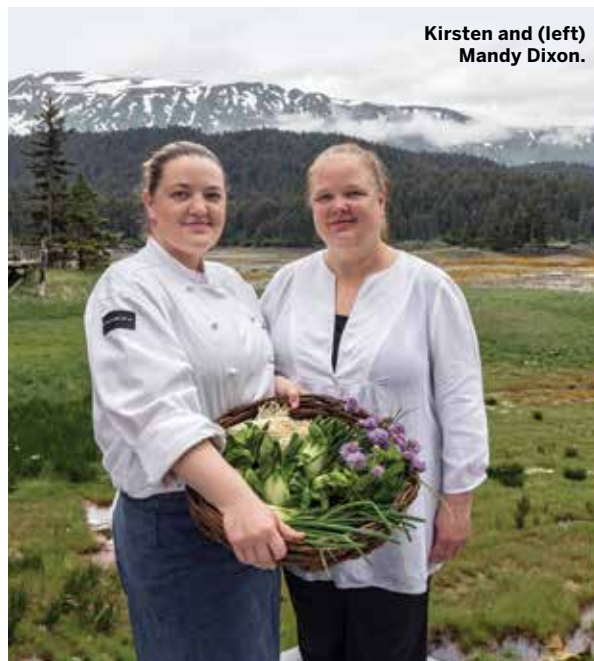
TUTKA BAY LODGE

Kachemak Bay, Alaska



Tutka Bay guests arrive by boat from nearby Homer.

The decision to leave Anchorage and open a remote fly-fishing lodge in 1982 has evolved into a rewarding family business for wilderness guide Carl Dixon and his wife, chef and cookbook author **Kirsten Dixon**. They own and operate the remote Winterlake Lodge near Denali National Park, and Tutka Bay Lodge, a coastal escape near Homer. Kirsten passed her love of cooking to daughter **Mandy Dixon**, who returned home in 2008 after a stint with chef Thomas Keller in Napa. (The pair's older daughter, Carly, teaches yoga and leads fishing excursions at the lodge.) Kirsten and Mandy oversee Tutka Bay's culinary program, which includes a team of chefs and a cooking school.



Kirsten and (left) Mandy Dixon.

Your cooking philosophy?

KIRSTEN: We combine global techniques with local and organic ingredients. For example, we spent a month in Morocco last year and found many similarities between Moroccan and Alaskan cooking ... we just use salmon instead of lamb.

The first family recipe you learned?

MANDY: A smoked-salmon cardamom spread my mom always made. When I left for college, it became my go-to party dip.

What are a few favorite ingredients culinary students

might find during summer foraging outings?

KIRSTEN: Salmonberries, hedgehog mushrooms, and sea lettuce – a seaweed that looks like green cellophane when it's dried. We put it in everything; I'll even sprinkle it on popcorn.

The best way to work up an appetite at Tutka Bay?

KIRSTEN: Kayak over to our oyster farm, a couple of miles away, and harvest your own oysters for dinner.

The perfect wine to pair with this bivalve bounty?

MANDY: I like New Zealand's Oyster Bay Wines, which is fitting. Standing outside with a good rosé is nice in the summer too.

Two-night packages from \$3,725 per person, including water taxi transfers, all meals and activities, and a \$100 lodge credit.



Tub envy: The Khwai Suite's outdoor bathroom.

BELMOND KHWAI RIVER LODGE

Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana

15
TENTS

On game drives at this lodge near Botswana's Okavango Delta, guests can spot African wild dogs, Angolan giraffes, and nearly 500 species of birds. The wildlife watch continues from the riverfront compound's Khwai Suite, home to perhaps the dreamiest outdoor bathroom in the bush, complete with a copper soaking tub, an open-air shower, and a plunge pool with prime views of hippos bathing nearby. *Khwai Suite from \$870 per person, including all meals and activities, and one complimentary massage.*

MUSHA CAY

The Exumas, Bahamas

5
VILLAS

Beachfront bungalows at Musha Cay.



David Copperfield's private archipelago is no illusion. The luxe, exclusive-use retreat maxes out at 24 guests, housed in five villas ranging from a two-bedroom beachfront bungalow to a 10,000-square-foot mansion with a pair of kitchens, a private sauna, and a wraparound porch. The retreat is popular for weddings and family reunions, with plenty of options for celebrating: Spread out on one of 40 private beaches, set sail on a 28-foot catamaran, or enlist the staff to create a treasure hunt for the kids. *Island rental (five-night minimum), from \$39,000 per night for 12 guests, including all meals, beverages, and amenities. Additional guests (up to 24), from \$1,500 per person.*



Seeing green at Scotland's Inverlochy Castle Hotel.

INVERLOCHY CASTLE HOTEL

Fort William, Scotland

17
ROOMS



Atlanta-based Virtuoso travel advisor **Claire Schoeder** shares why this nineteenth-century Scottish Highlands castle is one of her favorite places to visit.

1 "Room 23, Glen Nevis, sits alone on the third floor and is reached via a private staircase. A stay here feels like you're hidden away in your own luxurious world."

2 "Ben Nevis, the **UK's tallest mountain**, is the castle's backdrop. A walk around the grounds, no matter what time of year, never fails to bring me joy."

3 "Dinner at **Albert and Michel Roux Jr** is a memorable experience in a wonderful country-house setting. If you want to dine at 8 PM, make your reservation for 7:30 so you can enjoy canapés and aperitifs with fellow guests before being seated in the dining room."

4 "General manager Jane Watson has been at Inverlochy for 36 years. When I visit, she's often there to greet me. She treats guests like treasured visitors in a **well-loved home**."

5 "Take the hotel's **Rolls-Royce Phantom** out for a tour or have your travel advisor book it for one of your transfers. Nothing else makes you feel quite like a queen or a king."

Doubles from \$568, including breakfast daily and a luxury picnic or afternoon tea.



Aman-i-Khas tent perks: 20-foot canopy ceilings, sitting areas, and marble bathtubs.

AMAN-I-KHAS

Sawai Madhopur, India

10
TENTS



A PERFECT DAY On the outskirts of one of India's largest national parks, Aman elevates the classic wilderness camp from basic to beautifully equipped. Here, an ideal way to spend the day:

8 PM: Awake to kingfisher calls in a Moghul-inspired tent; your butler will soon be along with masala omelets. This morning's excursion: a trip to the Ranthambore Fort, an eighth-century fortress complex with ancient pavilions, temples, and mosques.

11 AM: Refresh with a dip in the *bawadi* (desert) pool, designed to resemble India's traditional stepwells.

12:30 AM: Lunch is served under a shade tree – order the Rajasthani *thali*, which incorporates fresh produce from the on-site organic garden.

2 PM: Hit the spa tent for a

Poornvandana massage, a traditional Ayurvedic treatment that employs several warm oils to boost circulation and encourage relaxation.

4 PM: Take a sundowner tiger safari into Ranthambore National Park. The former royal hunting ground is one of the best places in the country to see the animals in the wild.

7 PM: Recount the day's adventures beside the fire pit. A camp staff member will be happy to point out the constellations above.

Doubles from \$1,000, including all meals and one complimentary massage.

LA RÉSERVE PARIS APARTMENTS

Paris

10
FLATS

As luxury homestays continue to grow in popularity, La Réserve elevates the pied-à-terre – literally – ensuring that each of its one- to four-bedroom apartments on place du Trocadéro offers unobstructed views of the nearby Eiffel Tower. Savor them over a bottle from the wine cellar (each apartment has its own), stocked with vintages from the owner's vineyard in Bordeaux. Leave other provisioning to the butler, who's on call 24/7, and take advantage of access to Roland-Garros' famed clay tennis courts, home of the French Open. *Apartments from \$1,693, including breakfast daily, a bottle of Champagne, and one complimentary massage for two.*



Live like a Parisian at La Réserve.

ESTANCIA LA BAMBA DE ARECO

San Antonio de Areco, Argentina

11

ROOMS

Venture two hours north of Buenos Aires and you're in gaucho country, where Argentine cowboys populate the estancias (ranches) of the area's Pampas. **Martin Tatta** grew up near Estancia La Bamba de Areco, a colonial-style former private home, learning the gaucho ropes and honing another skill that's gained him notoriety beyond the ranch: Tatta is a bona fide horse whisperer, meaning he can tame a horse without using a whip or other aggressive methods. He showcases his work during daily performances for guests – an impressive series of graceful maneuvers and commands that the animals respond to calmly.



Polo, a national pastime, at Estancia La Bamba de Areco.



San Antonio de Areco's horse whisperer, Martin Tatta.

How did you learn to work so well with horses? I grew up on the farm with my father. No one taught me this; I just started interacting with the horses.

How do guests react to your performance?

Some are surprised, some quiet, and some even cry. They have a lot of questions: "How do you do it?!" "Where

did you get the confidence?" "How long does it take to train a horse?"

How long does it take?

Usually about a year and a half per horse.

The best way for guests to experience gaucho culture:

Take a guided horseback ride across the grounds. Before heading out, we show guests how we take

care of the horses and get them saddled up and ready for riding.

When you're not at La Bamba, we'll find you:

At a local pulperia [bar], drinking Fernet and Coke with other gauchos and singing traditional songs.

Doubles from \$590, including all meals and a private tour of San Antonio de Areco.

TIP

"An estancia visit is a great day-trip from Buenos Aires and a wonderful opportunity to experience gaucho culture. I recommend going on a weekday; weekends can get crowded with other travelers. Be sure to try some yerba maté tea and have a delicious *asado* [barbecue] lunch."

– Paula Lanusse, Virtuoso travel advisor, Buenos Aires

LA POSTA VECCHIA

Palo Laziale, Italy

19

ROOMS

Rome, of course, is filled with ruins, but only guests of La Posta Vecchia have access to the treasures at the hotel's private museum. On display: hundreds of relics and mosaics recovered from the 200 BC villa that used to exist where La Posta sits today. The other treasure at this seaside estate – a 40-minute drive west of the Eternal City – is the cuisine of chef Antonio Magliulo, who grows most of the produce for The Cesar restaurant in his organic garden. Guests can combine artifacts and antipasti with a private dinner in the museum. *Doubles from \$453, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*



Old-school seaside charm at La Posta Vecchia.

(MARTIN TATTA) NATACHA PISARENKO/AP PHOTO

THE LODGE, VERBIER

Verbier, Switzerland

9

ROOMS

Richard Branson's
winter wonderland.



EDITOR'S
PICK

When I'm lucky enough to breathe (or gulp, somewhat greedily) crisp Swiss mountain air, one phrase comes to mind: rarefied atmosphere. I find it in the heart of French-speaking Switzerland, two hours from Geneva, where Richard Branson's private lodge matches the ambience of the alpine village it inhabits – vibrant, clever, and elite. This typical Swiss chalet is an exclusive-use rental for up to 18 guests in the winter, with an indoor pool, indoor and outdoor hot tubs, and ski-in access. Ski season brings serious off-pisters who also appreciate a jet-setting social scene: After a few hours at Casbah, Carve, or Farm Club, they can dance the night away under the chalet's own disco ball – the bar never closes. The lodge's rooms can be booked separately in the summer, a season close to my Swiss-loving heart, for long hikes past blooming wildflowers and leisurely stops at mountain restaurants stocked with fondue and local wine. Take in the lofty views at Chez Dany or La Marlenaz before returning to the lodge – by now, it will feel like your very own. Thanks, Sir Richard. *Seven-night winter rentals from \$85,780 and summer doubles from \$900, including all meals and two complimentary massages. The Lodge, Verbier closes for the season from April 22 to June 1.* – Annie Fitzsimmons, digital editor

(MORGAN'S ROCK) LUIS GARCIA



Handcrafted cocktails
and (right) homemade break-
fast at Morgan's Rock.



MORGAN'S ROCK HACIENDA & ECOLODGE

San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua

18

BUNGALOWS

There's plenty of room to explore at this 4,000-acre escape, a combination laid-back beach lodge and all-out nature reserve. Start the day at the property's working farm, collecting eggs and pressing homemade tortillas for breakfast, then head out on a monkey safari or kayak tour through the estuary. Daybeds

hung from ropes underscore the tree-house feel of the resort's rustic bungalows and villas, which are perched above a mile-long private beach. After sunset, the surf often sparkles with phosphorescence. *Bungalows from \$265, including a welcome drink, a bag of local coffee, breakfast daily, and a \$100 resort credit.*



The Morgan's Rock pool over-
looks the lodge's private beach, a
protected sea turtle nesting site.



PALAZZO MARGHERITA

Bernalda, Italy



EDITOR'S PICK

The first time we tried to find Palazzo Margherita, the driver missed it completely. Slowly cruising back down Bernalda's main *corso* (avenue), we peered out the car window searching for clues, finally stopping to inquire at a tiny outdoor café where a couple of locals sipped espressos beneath red umbrellas. “*Sì, sì, sei qui,*” they said, motioning to a pair of discreet blue doors, devoid of signage. We had, in fact, arrived. The hotel is the sentimental passion project of movie director Francis Ford Coppola, whose grandfather hailed from this fifteenth-century town in Basilicata, an underappreciated southern Italian region. Those lucky enough to enter the 1892 palace discover a walled courtyard with an archway framing a garden dotted with fountains, trellises, and a stone path that leads to a glamorous black-bottomed pool. Above, iron balconies wrap around suites adorned with Murano chandeliers, hand-painted frescoes, elaborate tilework, and claw-foot tubs. After a day exploring the nearby cave city of Matera, we wanted nothing more than to stay cloistered behind the hotel's doors, order pizza and vino, and watch an Italian film in the salon-turned-screening room upstairs. *Doubles from \$520, including breakfast daily and a \$100 hotel credit.* – Elaine Srnka, editorial director

Coppola's Italian hideaway, clockwise from top: The reception area, the North Africa-inspired Francis Suite, and the hotel's pool and walled garden.

ISLINGTON HOTEL

Hobart, Tasmania



Islington's conservatory and (right) one of the hotel's many fine-art installations.



There are some striking views of Mount Wellington here, if you can take your eyes off the interiors. A stay at this 1847 Regency-style property may feel like a slumber party in a museum, albeit one with custom-made beds and a wine cellar. From Picasso, Warhol, and Hockney paintings to Han dynasty porcelain and eleventh-century Buddhist statues, art fills every room, including some of the private guest spaces. An adjoining glass conservatory opens onto the gardens, a sunny setting for tasting local Coal River Valley pinot noirs. *Doubles from \$315, including breakfast daily and a \$75 dining credit.*

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Uxua's sunny
Seu Pedrinho casa.

UXUA CASA HOTEL & SPA

Trancoso, Brazil

11
ROOMS



Joan Bailey, a Virtuoso travel advisor from Saint Petersburg, Florida, loves this relaxed escape for its bright design and easy beach access.

1 "The hotel is located on the Quadrado [square] of Trancoso, a 500-year-old **fishing village** full of restored buildings and artisan shops. I've never experienced a property so integrated with its surroundings in such a meaningful way."

2 "Guest rooms, aka casas, make you feel like you're sleeping over at a hip relative's home."

For Quadrado views, book the one-bedroom **Seu Pedrinho**."

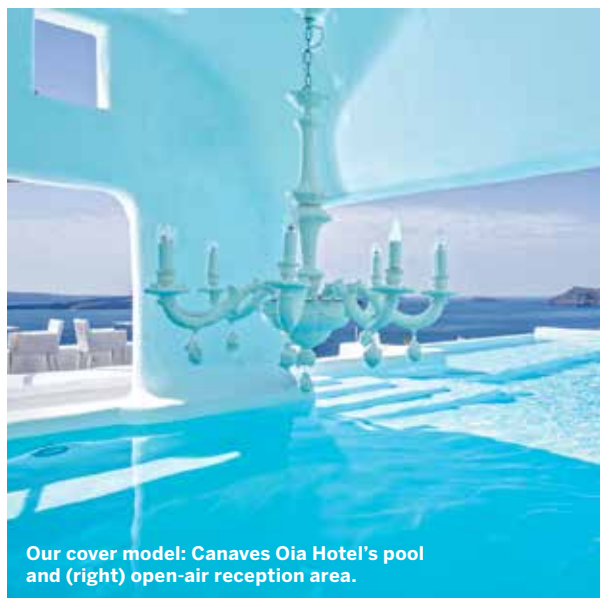
3 "I love the **vibrant, colorful flowers** – hibiscus, bougainvillea, native orchids, and more – that bloom around the hotel's bright courtyard."

4 "The hotel's Barra do Rio Trancoso beach is an eight-minute walk away. For the best views, post up

for the day in one of Uxua's **private cabanas**."

5 "You'll find Uxua Praia, the hotel's laid-back **beach bar**, in an old fishing boat that washed ashore nearby years ago. Fresh, fruity cocktails are juiced and mixed right in front of you."

Doubles from \$452, including a one-way airport transfer and breakfast daily.



Our cover model: Canaves Oia Hotel's pool and (right) open-air reception area.



CANAVES OIA HOTEL

Santorini, Greece

18
ROOMS

EDITOR'S PICK

Who isn't mesmerized by photographs of Santorini, where whitewashed Cycladic buildings and blue-domed churches cascade from the volcanic island's cliffs toward the Aegean Sea? What those pretty pictures don't show: hordes of tourists who crowd the streets of Fira, the capital city, when cruise ships pull into port. Upon arrival, I must admit feeling a slight pang of disappointment in my illusory dream destination – until I retreated to Canaves Oia Hotel in the village of Oia (pronounced *ee-ah*). Owned by Markos Chaidemenos and his family, it's exactly the idyllic escape I'd imagined, with a spare, contemporary design that would

please any minimalist. The bright-white buildings dazzle against the sky and sea, and many rooms are literally built into caves, where the white-on-white theme continues. As you explore the property via winding, stepped paths (leave the high heels at home), passing through dramatic doorways and bougainvillea-draped terraces, every turn brings that caldera view into focus. It's the perfect setting to stare into the sea, a glass of local white wine in hand, and ponder the lost city of Atlantis. Dream destination delivered – no Photoshop required. *Doubles from \$521, including breakfast daily, a bottle of wine, and a \$100 dining credit.* – E.S. VI