

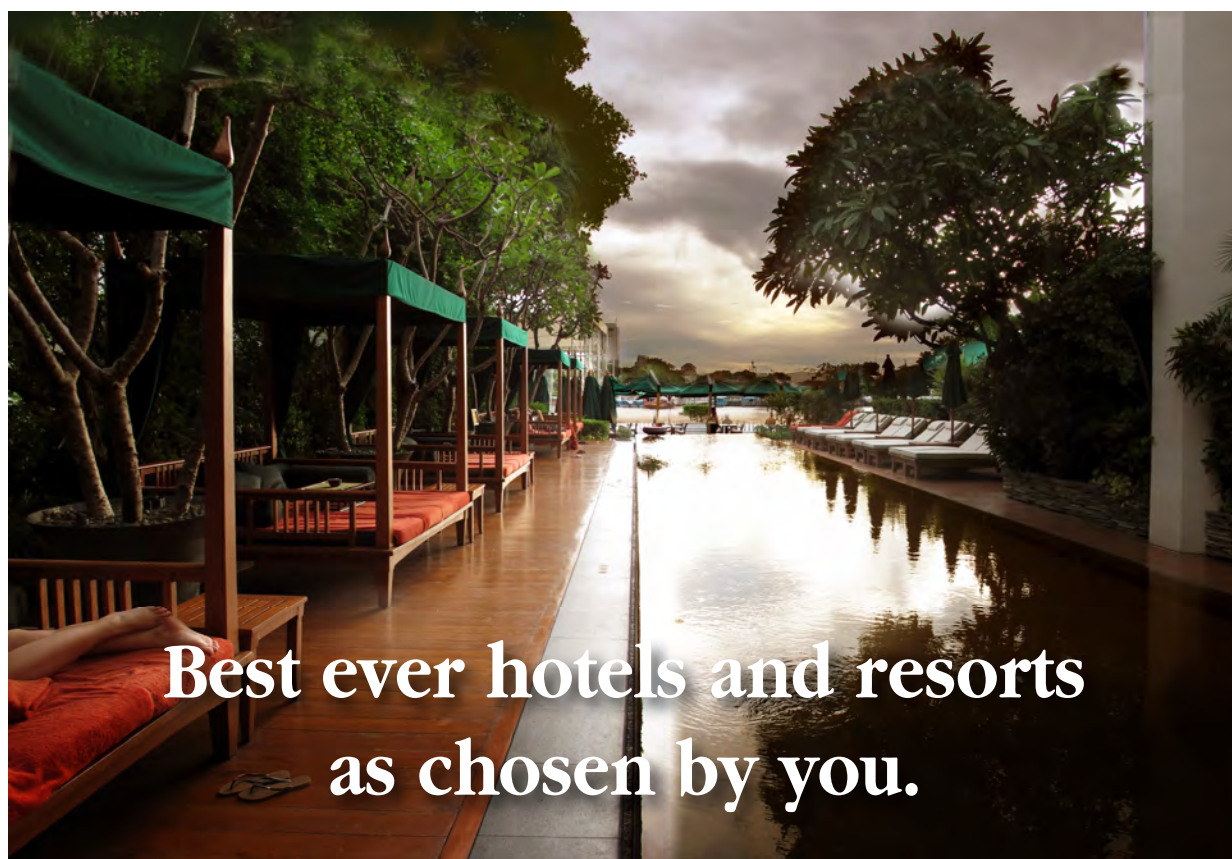
Founded in 1991



JANUARY 2021 AWARDS

The Gallivanter's Guide 100 CLUB

HONEST ADVICE FOR THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS



Best ever hotels and resorts
as chosen by you.

The second pool at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok, on the edge of the Chao Phraya River; a unique hotel that has fostered excellence over many decades.

This year, due to the unprecedented disruption of life as we know it, our annual reader poll asked you to vote for your Best Ever hotel and resort experiences.

The results were, in some cases, predictable; but in others quite shocking. Four Seasons, which has topped so many of these polls over the years, virtually disappeared in every category.

Studying the results, it felt to me as if I were looking at a poll from the 1990s, when Mandarin Oriental Bangkok was voted Best Hotel Worldwide in 1993,

Aman for Best Service and Amankila for Best Beach Resort. It was only in 1994 that Four Seasons had any impact, when its Milan property won Best European Hotel. Meanwhile, in that same year, Amanpulo won Best Beach Resort Worldwide, just as it has done in 2020, 26 years later.

Perhaps we are witnessing the nostalgia that many of us feel for those great days of hotelkeeping, when hospitality, service and cuisine were the criteria for excellence, and technocracy was a word yet to be invented.

Throughout the year, a large number of you have continued to travel; most putting normalcy over the much touted virtues of social distancing, disinfection, masks and hand sanitizers. Judging by your emails, you are avoiding the prison camp atmosphere currently fostered by many hotels and resorts and, instead, are seeking out the sort of hideaways that attempt to behave normally yet responsibly, allowing you to relax and encouraging your commitment to wellness in all its guises. Let us hope that the Toxic Twenties are well behind us....



Best ever City Hotel Worldwide. Mandarin Oriental Bangkok.

The revitalised Lord Jim's restaurant, at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok; an hotel that has never stood still.

I first stayed at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok when it was still called The Oriental, back in the early 1980s. Unlike most hotels, this has been nurtured over the years by a very small number of passionate General Managers. The legendary Kurt Wachtveitl was GM for over 40 years, followed by Jan Goessing, who oversaw a sea change in staff welfare. Then came the indomitable Amanda Hyndman, who had the courage to push ahead with a complete renovation of the Author's and Garden Wings; embracing the true history and authenticity of this venerable Grande Dame. Greg Liddell followed Amanda and set about orchestrating a massive renovation of the River Wing, including Lord Jim's restaurant, the Lobby and the swimming pools. In 2020, Anthony Tyler took over the helm, having worked at the hotel as Assistant Food & Beverage Manager, back in 1998. All these people care passionately for this icon of hospitality and this is why I, and it appears you, returned there year after year. An astonishing 25% of you voted for Mandarin Oriental Bangkok, usurping many years of dominance by Four Seasons George V, Paris,

which, having suffered not merely from the impact of the pandemic, but also from the trials and tribulations that Paris has suffered of late, failed to feature in any category. It seems that you crave consistency in all its forms, and it is no wonder, therefore, that Mandarin Oriental Bangkok is your Best Ever experience. Not only does

it have impeccable and caring service, but also gloriously comfortable, elegant rooms and suites, an astounding number of world-class restaurants and an unbeatable location on the edge of the Chao Phraya River; its legendary Spa and Rim Nam Terrace just a boat ride away from the main hotel. Long may it flourish.



The glorious terrace at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok; perfect for breakfast by the River of Kings.



Best ever Resort Hotel Worldwide. Amanpulo, Philippines.

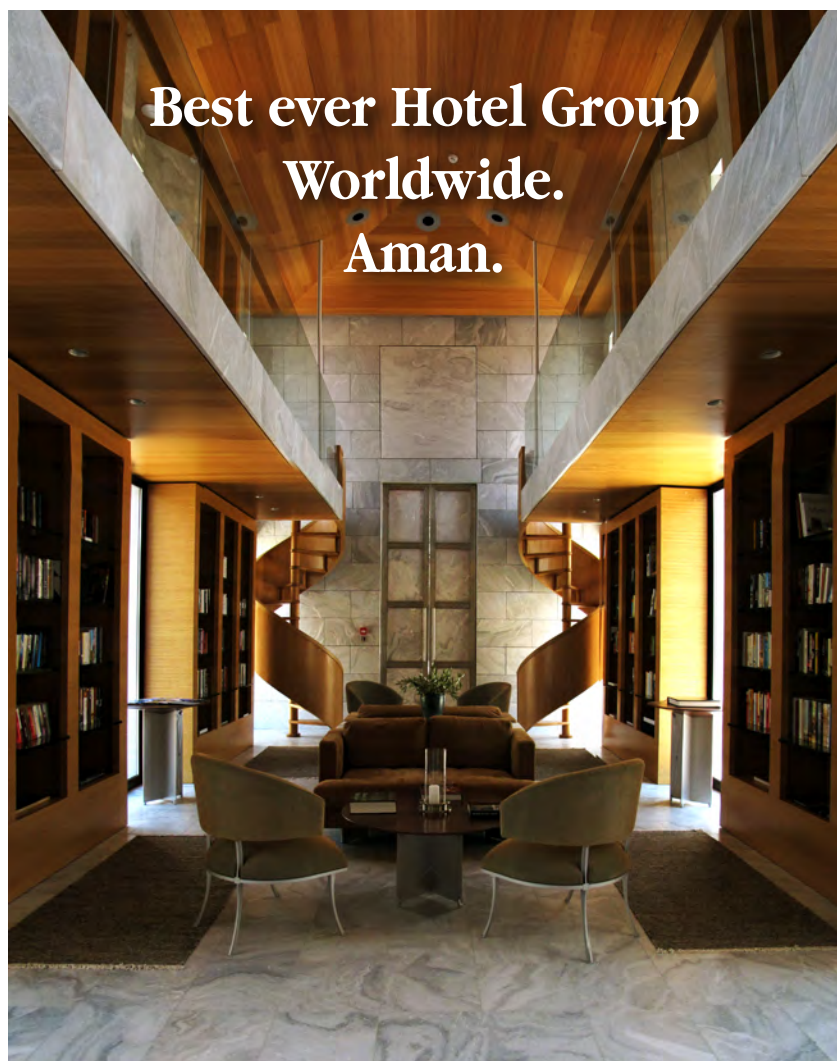
Casita Villa, #32, at Amanpulo, just steps from one of the world's most stunning white sand beaches.

Amanpulo won Best Beach Hotel World-
wide back in 1994, just a year after it
first opened its doors and persuaded us all
to journey to the remote Pamalican Island
in Palawan, Philippines, via a private plane
from Manila. I remember that first year well;
the magical, if noisy low-level flight over
the Sulu Sea; an hour of gazing at the my-
riad islands of this unique archipelago, and
finally, a surprisingly calm landing on the
resort's own airstrip, there to be immersed
in the sort of resort experience that you
never forget and can never replicate. That
first Christmas and New Year, the then
President of Peninsula Hotels was sitting at
the beach bar along with a raft of interest-
ing, like-minded guests who grinned like
children on Christmas day, opening this ex-
traordinary gift to hospitality. We all knew
that this was something very special in-
deed, and over the years Amanpulo did not
disappoint, as it evolved with the decades,
built an extraordinary hilltop Spa, enticed
us with new restaurants and never forgot
that its guests were its most important
asset. Naturally socially isolated, Amanpulo
may have been out of bounds for many of
us in 2020, but few of us do not long to
return.

My first experience of Amanresorts was
in 1988, when Amanpuri opened in
Phuket, Thailand. From then on, many of
us 'collected' Amans along with our Aman-
junkie tee-shirts and, unsurprisingly, bump-
ed into numerous fellow junkies as each
new resort opened. Never in the history of
hotelkeeping has an hotel group been so
influential, despite the fact that its founder,

Adrian Zecha initially had no intention of
creating an hotel group, but merely a sanc-
tuary in Phuket for friends and family. The
rest, of course, is history, and although the

group is no longer owned or operated by
Zecha, its essence lives on and, although
you complain somewhat at the loss of cer-
tain iconic GMs, you cannot fault its style.



Best ever Hotel Group Worldwide. Aman.

The Library at Amanzoe, Greece, typifies the group's unique architectural style and intimacy.

Europe is awash with great hotels, but in the mainstream media, we mainly hear of the Grandes Dames; many of which are famous for being famous. London certainly has its fair share of big names, but in terms of pure hospitality, The Beaumont, in Mayfair, is a force unto itself. Created by the renowned restaurateurs, Chris Corbin and Jeremy King, who had never operated an hotel before, The Beaumont opened its doors in September 2014 and I must admit to wondering whether a flair for Food & Beverage could translate into a great hotel. Indeed it could! Jeremy King asked himself what he, as a guest, would want from an hotel, then set about implementing his ideas. When I first stayed there, I was impressed with the extraordinarily guest-friendly room designs. Everything I wanted seemed to be on hand; the right lighting, the most comfortable of beds, bathrooms with plenty of space for my toiletries and a quirky Art Deco style that belied the modernity of the property. The Beaumont became my London home, and after I first wrote about it, it became home to many of you, too. General Manager, Jannes Soerensen, arrived via Le Bristol in Paris and managed to add another layer of excellence. Then the hotel was sold and currently, it is closed for a major renovation and the addition of new suites in a neighbouring building. It re-



Best ever European City Hotel. The Beaumont, London.

The welcoming Lobby of The Beaumont, in London's Mayfair.

mains, however, a template for excellence, garnering 26% of your votes.

There are not as many great resort hotels in Europe as one would expect, but the Ed Tuttle designed Amanzoe stands apart as a masterpiece of resort design, opened to great acclaim in the summer of 2012, in the heart of mainland Greece's Peloponnese. Indeed, one Member stayed there three times in 2020! Just 90 minute's drive from Athens, and even quicker via helicopter, this modern classic seems to be de-

signed to capture the best sunsets and to coddle you in warm Greek hospitality. The private Aegean-set beach is a buggy ride away, but oh so civilised once one arrives; replete with cabanas, bar, restaurant and swimming pools, which compensate for the imported sandy beach. A serene Spa, with a high, viewsome yoga studio, helps you relax, whilst the bars and restaurants serve up lashings of simple Greek, Japanese and International fare. A truly perfect hideaway.



Best ever European Resort Hotel. Amanzoe, Greece.

Utter tranquillity pervades the classically designed Amanzoe; one of the late Ed Tuttle's architectural masterpieces.

Luke Bailes' Singita brand seems to understand the high-end market better than anyone in the African safari business, yet it still manages to be of the place and seriously eco-conscious. Cutting edge contemporary design coupled with kindly service and unusually good cuisine makes for lasting memories at Singita Lebombo; a safari lodge that celebrates modernity but, very firmly, keeps its sense of place. Set on high, over the N'wanetsi River, the Lodge has just 13 glass-walled suites, with cushy viewing decks overlooking Kruger National Park. Singita has a 33,000-acre private concession here in the Park, so the opportunities for game viewing are endless. Most appreciated by you is the airy, 2-bedroom, fully-staffed Villa, with private pools for each suite. Towering euphorbia trees rise from the surrounding rocks, where the public areas offer unusually civilised amenities, including a library, all-day bar-deli and espresso bar.

You struggle, as I do, to find any truly high-end hotels and resorts in Central and South America, so it was no surprise that 32% of you voted for Four Seasons Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo. Perched on a bluff over the Pacific, this 1,400-acre retreat is perfect for both couples and fam-



Best ever Hotel/Resort in the Middle East & Africa. Singita Lebombo.

Contemporary design manages to merge perfectly with nature, at Singita Lebombo.

ilies, offering a staggering array of activities on land and at sea, which means that the active minded can cycle, explore, swim, snorkel and sail from sunset to dusk, whilst those of us who just want to relax can visit the Spa, indulge in some Rum cocktail mixology at La Reserva, play a leisurely round of golf, or even stargaze. The spacious Suites

and Villas are best; elegant, yet with a touch of the tropical. All day dining at Añejo has a Latin American spin, including their much-loved tapas, whilst Pesce serves classic Italian, focusing on the region's abundant seafood. Cocktails on the beach, around the pool or in the bar are endlessly inventive (and lethal).



Best ever Hotel in Central & S. America. Four Seasons Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo.

Endless experiences on land and at sea, with a private plunge pool for quieter moments, at Four Seasons Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo.



Best ever Hotel/Resort in India. The Oberoi Udaivilas.

On the edge of Lake Pichola in Udaipur sits The Oberoi Udaivilas; a magical world unto itself that has yet to be bettered.

Although many of you, including me, love Amanbagh, the resort that you remember most fondly is The Oberoi Udaivilas. Indeed, a staggering 51% of your vote lauded this extraordinary palace on Lake Pichola, which opened in 2003. It took ten years for the Oberoi family to gain permission to build this tribute to the 16th Century Miwar dynasty, then another ten years to construct it, which included train-

ing a raft of craftspeople in the ancient techniques; a single door taking six months to make. With impeccable service, cuisine and spa, set in 30 acres of manicured gardens, a pool suite here is perfection.

Few realise that One&Only Reethi Rah is set on a man-made island, with 60% of its land reclaimed from the sea. The advantage of this is that every butler-serviced villa, whether on land or overwater, has its own

sandy cove. One of the more glamorous resorts in the Maldives, Reethi Rah is an ever popular social hub during the winter holidays and has managed to evolve and improve over its 15 year history. Despite your love of Cheval Blanc Randheli in the Maldives (also designed at a later date by Jean-Michel Gathy), the older Reethi Rah, which continues to lure you back, garnered 35% of your vote.



Best ever Resort in the Indian Ocean. One&Only Reethi Rah, Maldives.

A beach-set Spa Suite beckons, at One&Only Reethi Rah, in the Maldives.



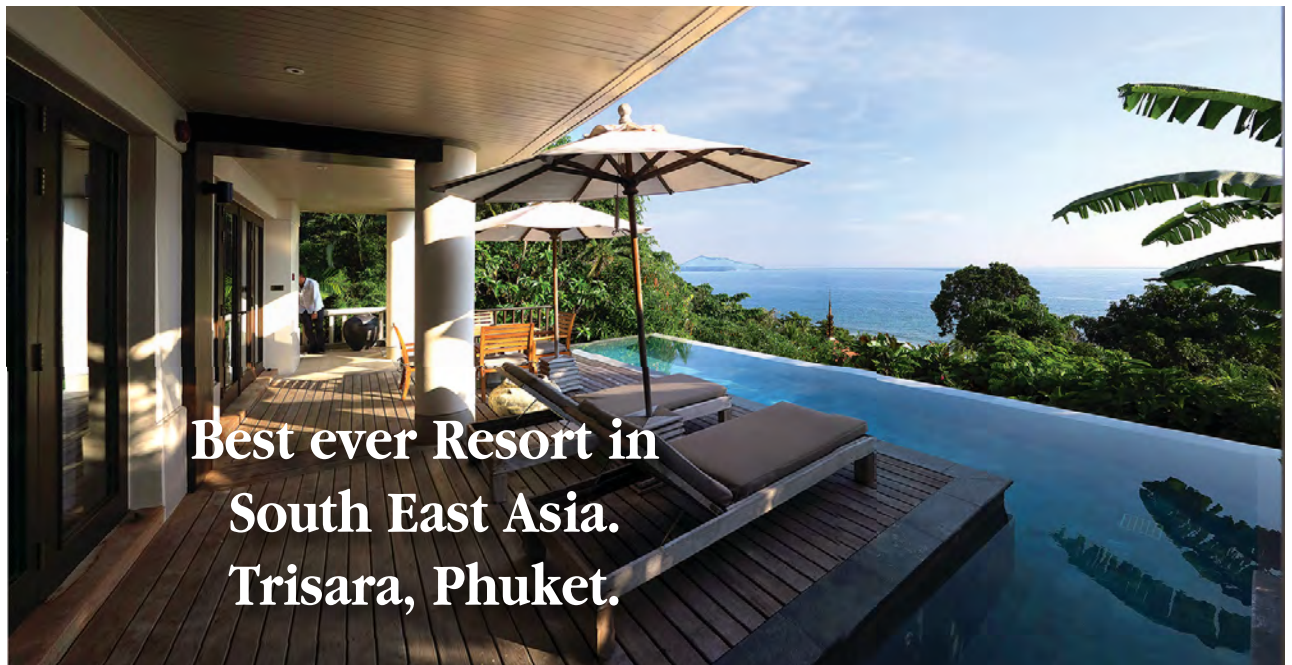
Best ever City Hotel in South East Asia. Mandarin Oriental Bangkok.

One of the newly renovated Authors' Suites in the River Wing, at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok.

South East Asia is awash with top notch hotels, with numerous new openings and, in Bangkok, even more on the horizon, including Rosewood, Four Seasons, Capella and Aman. Sometimes, however, the older hotels have already secured the best position, and sometimes they manage to not only retain their supremacy, but to exceed it. Such is the case with Mandarin Oriental Bangkok, which defines the word 'iconic'. You definitely agree, as an unprecedented 74% of you voted for it.

In 1988, Anthony Lark opened Amanpuri in Phuket, aged just 27. He stayed there as GM until 2000, when he left to join Montara Hospitality, thence to co-design, develop and open Trisara in 2004, which is set in the unsullied midst of the National Park. This intimate resort has continued to evolve, earning a coveted Michelin star for its fine dining restaurant, PRU and praise for its stunningly renovated chemical-free Spa and 35 acres of manicured gardens. You gave it 42.5% of the vote. Now respon-

sible for Montara's future developments, Lark has taken a back seat at Trisara, with Karim Irrgang moving up as General Manager. Many of you have returned here year upon year, taking, perhaps, one of the Residential Villas and hiring a yacht for the week from the Trisara fleet. Here, every Villa and every Residence has a pool and unimpeded sea views of the Andaman Sea. Couple that with the sublime service and cuisine and you can see why it is named Trisara - the garden in the third heaven.



Best ever Resort in South East Asia. Trisara, Phuket.

The pool deck of Villa, #305, at Trisara, Phuket, where a laid-back style belies the sheer professionalism of this extremely private resort.

Initially, when Aman Tokyo opened its doors in 2014, on the top six floors of the Otemachi Tower, you loved it for the late Kerry Hill's extraordinary architecture; but in its first couple of years, there were plenty of teething problems in the areas of service and cuisine. Over time, however, these aspects have been finessed to better meet your expectations and today, Aman Tokyo stands out as one of Japan's most coveted city hotels. A sublime mix of contemporary style and Japanese tradition, the soaring public areas are flooded with natural light, whilst the views from the hotel's minimalist rooms and suites envelop the financial district, the Imperial Gardens and, on a clear day, Mount Fuji. This category attracted a very fragmented vote, which included small accolades for Rosewood Hong Kong and Four Seasons Seoul. Aman Tokyo, however, scored 14% of your vote.

In Australia and New Zealand, yet again, we see the now predictable win for Park Hyatt Sydney. Indeed, 31% of you voted for it, with a smattering of votes for The Langham Sydney, Southern Ocean Lodge and Longitude 131°. Only Blanket Bay scored anything in New Zealand, and frankly, your disappointment with this region's hospitality is palpable. There are some destinations in this world that simply do not care too much about great hotels and, as with Canada, prefer the comforts of home, the great outdoors and the occasional good dinner at a classy restaurant. Park Hyatt Sydney delivers the traveller's dream of picture-postcard views of the Sydney Op-



**Best ever
Hotel/Resort in East Asia.
Aman Tokyo.**

The 30-metre indoor pool at Aman Tokyo; a haven of serene design.

era House, the Harbour Bridge and some big airy rooms and suites; but is it a world-class hotel? And does it really matter? Probably not. However, if someone did get around to creating a worldclass hotel in Australia or New Zealand, then I have no doubt it would feature here in an instance!

Despite a plethora of top notch hotels in New York, the past few years have seen a west coast dominance when it comes to the best of the best, perhaps because the location allows for more of a resort feel. The Dorchester Collection has topped this category for some time, with the Bel-Air



**Best ever
Resort Hotel in Australia & New Zealand.
Park Hyatt Sydney.**

With unrivalled views of the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge, Park Hyatt Sydney captures the unique vibe of the city.



Best ever City Hotel in North America. Beverly Hills Hotel.

The iconic main pool at The Beverly Hills Hotel epitomises the Hollywood dream..

and the Beverly Hills Hotel vying for position. The Beverly Hills Hotel scored 22.5% of your vote and I think this is mainly due to its excellent service, under legendary hotelier, Ed Mady, who has managed to maintain a balance between this property's iconic beginnings in 1912 and 21st Century requirements. The hotel's original owner, Margaret Anderson's motto was "Guests are en-

titled to the best of everything regardless of cost!". This credo lives on. Glorious hummingbird-filled gardens, Hollywood glamour, exceptionally private bungalows and a raft of nostalgic restaurants continue to lure us back.

Still the best resort in the entire region, Amangiri is one of the most magical spots on earth, tucked away in Utah's isolated

red rock country and nestled in 600 acres between soaring mesas and canyons that traverse numerous National Parks. Whether you stay in a suite in the main resort or in the newer tented Camp Sarika, you had better book well ahead, as this unique hide-away is the staycation of the year, scoring 28.5% of your vote. The Spa is particularly noteworthy, as are the stunning public areas



Best ever Resort in North America, Bahamas & Caribbean. Amangiri, Utah.

The welcoming Spa Reception at Amangiri, which incorporates the four elements of water, earth fire and air.



Best ever Ski Hotel. Aman Le Mélézin, Courchevel 1850.

Since its major renovation, Aman Le Mélézin in Courchevel becomes your best-loved ski experience.

that suck in the otherworldly vistas beyond. The Caribbean, meanwhile, was barely mentioned, save for the acclaimed Cheval Blanc St-Barth Isle de France, which, you say, is the best for service, cuisine and comfort.

Although Alpina Gstaad scored well in this section, your best ever ski experience was, you say, at Aman Le Mélézin in Courchevel, especially since its massive renovation, which finessed this French château

style hotel, with its stunning Ed Tuttle designed interiors, extensive Spa and unrivaled ski-in, ski-out access to Les Trois Vallées and Courchevel 1850. Set on the Bellecôte Piste, skiers will have their boots warmed,



Best ever Independent Hotel/Resort. The Siam Bangkok.

River View Suit, #308, at the Siam Bangkok, which shows the world just how good independent hotels can be.



Best ever Hotel Spa Worldwide. The Siam Bangkok.

The lofty Opium Spa Reception, at The Siam Bangkok.

whilst non-skiers can relax in the Spa, revel in a variety of restaurants, including Japanese at Nama, and excellent après ski cheer in the Bar. Aman Le Mélézin garnered a staggering 40.5% of your vote.

I have been going to The Siam in Bangkok since it first opened in 2012 and, like you, have marvelled at its quality across every aspect, from the impeccable, caring service, under GM, Nick Downing and his team, to its world-beating Opium Spa and outstanding cuisine. Gorgeously designed by Bill Bensley and the Siam's visionary owner, Kriss Sukosol, this is surely a masterclass in how to create an independent hotel born of passion and commitment. Filled with Sukosol's collection of museum quality antiques and set against cool Art Deco interiors, this 39 suite and villa gem tumbles down from Bangkok's Royal enclave to a floating jetty on the Chao Phraya River; every step you take a marvellous distraction. 16.5% of you rate The Siam as you best ever independent hotel/resort. I tend to agree!

The best Spa experiences I have ever had were invariably in Asia, but compared to elsewhere in the region, the therapists of Thailand have an innate ability. Couple this with a serene, beautifully designed Spa, it

is not merely the pristine hair and nail salon, the yoga classes, high-tech gym, or the Muay Thai boxing programmes that differentiate this place, but the fact that this is

the only exclusive Sodashi Spa in the world. More than ever these days, wellness is a priority, so the avoidance of toxins in all their forms is key, especially as current research shows that we absorb more toxins through our skin than from what we eat! Here, traditional Thai protocols merge with Sodashi's superb chemical-free skincare to create a true nirvana. 24% of you agree.

It is no surprise that many guests at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok never leave the property, as this is not merely an hotel, but an urban resort that has more restaurants than many towns. Even breakfast presents a dilemma. Should we sit outside at The Verandah and order à la carte, or get a table on the river and indulge in the spectacular cook-to-order stations of the Riverside Terrace? I do both. Indeed, during a stay, I attempt to indulge in as many of the hotel's restaurants as possible, as they are all superb. After listening to some jazz over cocktails in the Bamboo Bar, my next stop is The China House, for the best Peking Duck. Lunch is at Lord Jim's, with the freshest seafood, then dinner at Michelin-star Le Normandie, or Thai on the terrace of Sala Rim Nam, or authentic Italian on the Ciao Terrazza, Japanese at Kinu by Takagi and, of course, tea in the Author's Lounge. This world of gastronomy well deserves your vote of 28.5%, as it is truly unique.



Best ever Hotel/Resort Cuisine Worldwide. Mandarin Oriental Bangkok.

The China House restaurant, at Mandarin Oriental Bangkok; a world of gastronomy.



Gallivanter's Gossip

THINKING ON THE SMALL SIDE, the new 7-Suite, **The Residence by Atzaró**, which opened last month, is the perfect hideaway, at the foot of Table Mountain in Cape Town (see right). With live-in staff and one extra suite for your own staff, this little designer gem is just right for these pared-down times. atzaro.com

OPENING THIS SPRING on Italy's Lake Orta, is **Casa Fantini**, which has just 9 rooms and 2 Suites; all with peaceful lake views (see right). Created by owner and designer, Daniela Fantini to resemble a family home, expect handcrafted furnishings, and bathrooms with chic Fantini Rubinetterie fittings (the family business). Michelin starred Chef, Paolo Bullone has created seasonal menus from mostly local, artisanal ingredients. casafantinilaketime.com

AFTER JUST TWO YEARS in São Paulo, Brazil, Four Seasons has walked away from its management of **Four Seasons Hotel São Paulo**. The hotel, which opened in October 2018, has been closed since the start of the pandemic.

IN ZURICH, where the recently opened **Hotel Alex** is, sadly, no longer a Campbell Gray Hotel, **Mandarin Oriental** enter the fray and will manage and re-brand **Savoy Baur en Ville**, to open in 2024.

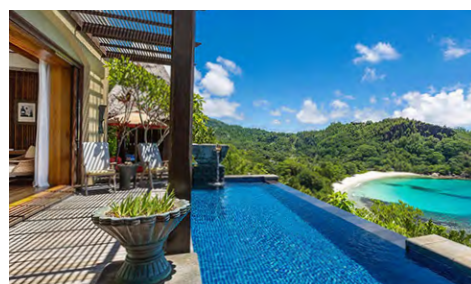
OPENING AT THE END OF 2022, on the Caribbean island of Grenada, is **Six Senses La Sagesse**. Set on a headland, with 28 acres of lush landscape, the resort is designed to resemble a (very upscale) Caribbean village. This low-rise property includes 56 rooms, 7 1-bed Villas and 5 2-bed Villas.

IF YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THE SEYCHELLES did not include great service, then take a look at the just-opened **Anantara Maia Seychelles Villas** on the west coast of Mahé, with just 30 expansive pool villas. Given Anantara's reputation for service, this could be exactly what we are all looking for right now (see right).

DUBBED BY US AS FLOATING AMANS, **Aqua Expeditions** will launch their custom designed **Aqua Nera** in April this year, with 20 immaculate suites. This sleek new boat will sail the Peruvian Amazon, with 3, 4 and 7-night itineraries, featuring cuisine by the renowned Chef, Pedro Miguel Schiaffino. aquaexpeditions.com

AS IT APPROACHES ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY, **Amanyara** in Turks & Caicos has just completed a full refurbishment of the resort. Meanwhile, **Aman New York** will open this spring in Manhattan's 1921 Crown Building, with 83 rooms and suites, all with working fireplaces. Design is by Jean-Michel Gathy.

DAVID, PHILIPPE AND I SEND YOU ALL our warmest **Season's Greetings** and thank you, sincerely for your support over this difficult year. Let us hope that 2021 will bring kinder times for everyone.



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