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# LETTER FROM THE *EDITOR IN CHIEF*

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Hello my friends,

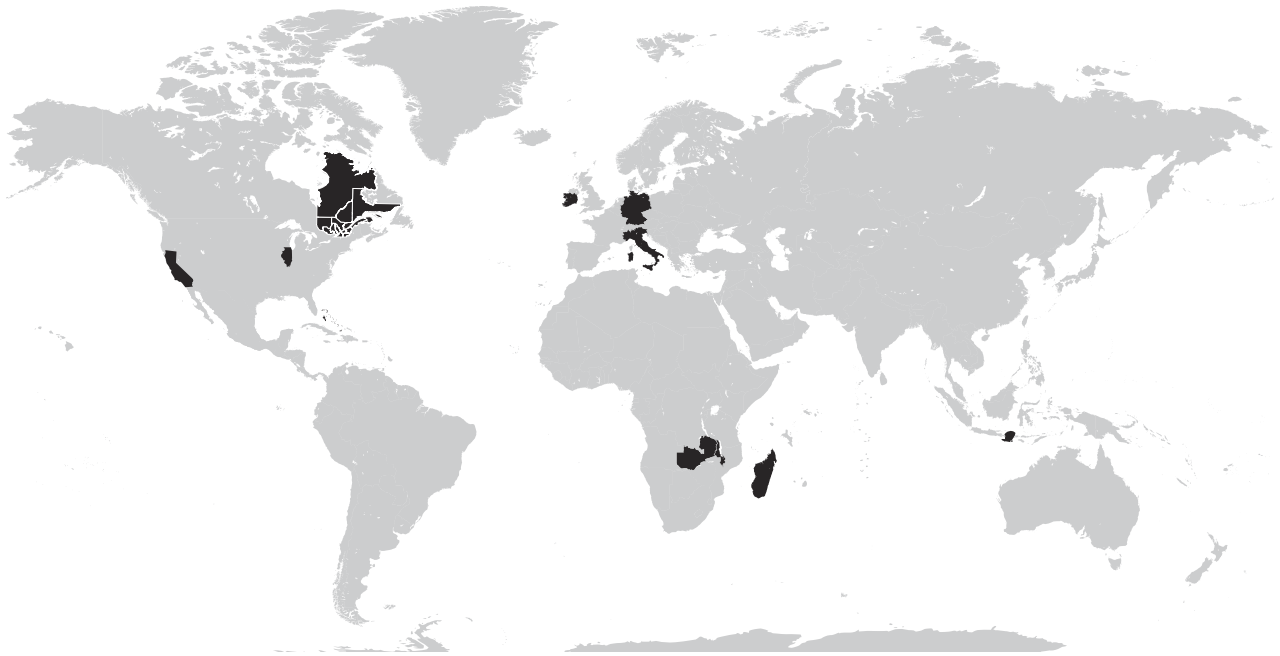
I say it every autumn, and I will say it once again, I love this season and every aspect of it. The light is more subtle and paints everything with a gorgeous brush. Do you see and feel the same? Do you plan your trips, during this season, based more on the emotional tug of a destination because of the autumn breeze or the color of the leaves on the trees? Well, we have you covered from cozy Mendocino, California all the way to a nurturing spa experience in Bali. If relaxation on vacation is your jam, then join us in Dresden for another spa uncommon experience. This time of year, is there really too much of a good thing? We think not. Our Swellegant stays will have you packing for a taste of real Irish hospitality, at Adare Manor and then heading the siren song to become a castaway in Malawi. We are traveling outside the obvious, obviously. Come join us on this fabulous journey and get inspired to take your next trip. As always, we can't wait to hear from you. Please share your travels with us on social media **@SwankyRetreats**, and reach out to me personally **@PetaPTravels**.

See you inside and remember, enjoy the fall.

Yours,

Peta

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# THE SWANK TEAM



**ALEXANDRA MAE**  
**EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

When you look up "wanderlust" in the dictionary odds are that a picture of me is in the definition.



**AMY SEDEÑO**  
**EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

As a self-proclaimed @hotelista I do quite a bit of traveling, and from holding a tarantula in an ancient site in Guatemala to drinking high tea in Dubai, and petting grey whales in Baja, you bet I've got stories to tell.



**ANDREW INNERARITY**  
**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

I prefer to let the images do the talking.



**ANN MARIE SCHEIDLER**  
**EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

"Thailand was the trip of a lifetime for this Chicago girl...a sensory overload in the best of ways. The people, the food, the landscape: all unforgettable."



**AVA ROSALES**  
**FEATURES EDITOR**

Wherever the destination may be, it's the villa life for me.



**BRIANA LOZANO**  
**EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

My favorite place to travel to is one I have never been to before! New cities, new sights, new food, new music, new people, new memories, new ways of life. The only way to truly know, is to see it for yourself. I am forever wanderlust. Thank you, Briana



**DYLAN BENOIT**  
**CONTRIBUTING EDITOR**

I'm a chef with Champagne taste and a beer budget, but always seem to find myself surrounded by the most amazing people in the most amazing places. From eating termites in the Honduran jungle to learning how to make dim sum in Hong Kong, for me treasure is in the story.



**JEFFREY SOBEL**  
**CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

All I need is a book, a bourbon and a boat to a new destination - I'll be just fine.



**SERGIO OLIVARES**  
**CREATIVE DIRECTOR**

When I am not at a music concert, you might catch me hunting down new and exciting roads to drive on the weekends. "I live my life a quarter mile at a time." - Dom Toretto.



**SOPHIE IBBOTSON**  
**EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

I'm an entrepreneur, writer, and lover of wild places. I like nothing more than exploring new destinations with extraordinary landscapes, rich cultures, and preferably a sprinkling of remarkable wildlife, too. A jaw droppingly beautiful place to stay is the icing on the cake.

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# SWELLEGANT STAYS

*The indefinable sense of style that makes us swoon:  
swanky, swell & elegant.*



## **Adare Manor**

County Limerick, Ireland

Ireland is full of lore, green hills, cliffs, castles and manors. We love the idea of being able to spend a few nights in the lap of luxury and absorb the history that surrounds one at this manor. Adare Manor is a neo-Gothic architectural masterpiece, once the family seat of the Earls of Dunraven. Today it is a warm and welcoming 5-star luxury resort located in Adare Co. Limerick, defined by its spectacular setting, authentic historic character, and the impeccable service of its world-class staff.

The manor borrows its name from the nearby village of Adare, the charm of which is not to be missed. Antique shops, traditional thatched-roofed cottages, and the river Maigue all make up a charming frame for the grandeur that is Adare Manor and its long winding entrance to its awaiting valet.





The 840-acre estate that surrounds the Manor House is an attraction in and of itself, and not to be overlooked (as if it could be) during a stay. The estate is comprised of sweeping parklands, cultivated gardens, formal French gardens, magnificent mature trees, and one of Ireland's best trout rivers, the aforementioned Maigue. For the avid golfer, there is little one needs to do to enjoy some time on one of the best championship courses in the world. If water hazards, bunkers, bogeys and birdies are not for you, try your hand at falconry, fishing, archery, cycling, clay pigeon shooting, horse riding, woodland walks, or whiskey tasting. Those are my top seven activities out of a slew of offerings at the manor. With rooms rates ranging from about \$378 a night to upwards of

\$2,500, depending on when you plan to visit, there is something for almost every budget.

Since reopening in November 2017, the highly experienced team at Adare Manor has enjoyed tremendous success on the world stage, winning awards and accolades both nationally and internationally, so rest assured that no matter which category you book, you will be in very good hands. Enjoy some of the best Irish hospitality within the grounds of Adare Manor, and be sure to try a cup of tea in front of the fireplace with its original mantle.

**[www.adaremanor.com](http://www.adaremanor.com)**

## **Hotel Latitude 15 Degrees**

Lusaka, Zambia

Urban Lusaka is not the first place you'd expect to find a chic, design led hotel with impeccable service. But Latitude Hotels are challenging preconceptions across Southern and East Africa, and Hotel Latitude 15 Degrees is rightly renowned as the best city hotel in Zambia. It's a property where any guest - however demanding - would be delighted to stay.

Driving through the gateway, you're instantly within a lush oasis, the bustle of the city forgotten. The trees are lush and cast ample shade, and the immaculate lawn contrasts attractively in colour and texture with the sparkling outdoor pool. Well-heeled guests - locals, expats, business travellers, and tourists alike - lounge on rattan garden furniture beneath broad, white parasols, sipping on imaginative cocktails from the bar.



Inside, the architects have pulled off no mean feat: every space is flooded with natural light, but it stays cool even in the heat of the day. Impressive, large scale artworks by African artists provide a focal point to every room, and in between carefully chosen objets d'art offer further pleasure to the eye. The furniture varies significantly in style and materials, but it is all sustainably sourced and frequently recycled or upcycled, too. The same design theme is executed consistently and with exemplary attention to detail in every part of the hotel, from the lounge to the co-working space, and the spa to the restaurant.



The 32 bedrooms at Latitude 15 are cool, crisp, and calm, the kind of spaces where you step over the threshold and let out a deep sigh of contentment. Bouncing on the large beds is definitely tempting, though you'll have to remove the jewel-coloured velvet cushions before you try. Whether you're in Lusaka on business, for a city break, or at the start or end of safari in one of Zambia's world famous national parks, Latitude 15 is an unparalleled place to stay.

**[www.latitudehotels.com](http://www.latitudehotels.com)**





## **Mumbo Island**

### **Malawi**

Calling all castaways! Your uninhabited island beckons. In the middle of Lake Malawi - a national park and one of the African Great Lakes - sits Mumbo Island. The only way to get here is by boat, it is completely off grid, and when you step onto the jetty, you leave the stresses of the hectic modern world behind you.

Mumbo Island is in a pristine, natural state, and the tiny camp embodies the concept of barefoot luxury. Only 14 guests can stay here at any one time, sleeping in canvas and wooden chalets which are reminiscent of tree houses. Hammocks swing gently on the decks in the breeze, shaded by a canopy of trees. You can stare out at the lake from your bed, a chair, or the en suite bathroom window, and a tropical bird might well flutter in to keep you company.



Mumbo Island's owners take sustainability very seriously, protecting their delicate ecosystem and the wildlife living within it. All the decor has been done by local artisans; it's a wonderful showcase for their skills. Furnishings include 100% cotton linens, grass mats and cane furniture made locally, and attractive glasses and bottles made from recycled materials. In the wood and reed bathrooms, the bucket showers are solar heated, the shampoo and shower gel is biodegradable, and the odourless loos produce a rich compost which is transported regularly back to the mainland to give tree saplings a headstart in reforestation projects.

Communal areas at Mumbo also open straight out onto the beach, shaded by a giant baobab tree. Everything here is built of timber, thatch, and canvas, so the structures are hardly visible until you get close.

Hike one of the island trails, snorkel, or kayak, preferably accompanied by one of Mumbo Island's guides to help you identify the fascinating bird life. Then, as the sun begins to sink in the sky, sail around the island in a traditional dhow, toasting the sunset and the beauty of the lake with a gin and tonic or glass of crisp South African white wine.

**[www.safari.co.uk](http://www.safari.co.uk)**





### **Time+Tide Miavana**

Nosy Ankao, Madagascar

Madagascar - “The Eighth Continent” - is a world unto itself. 90% of all the flora and fauna found on the surface is endemic; you can see it nowhere else on Earth. From 100 types of lemurs to 300 kinds of birds, not to mention two-thirds of the world’s chameleon species, this bio-diverse hotspot in the Indian Ocean is without doubt one of the great wildlife spotting destinations.



Time+Tide Miavana allows guests to immerse themselves in the magical Madagascan wilderness without sacrificing life's luxuries. Situated on the private island of Nosy Ankao, you arrive at the resort by helicopter to find a tropical paradise surrounded by untouched coral reefs. The 14 stylish villas all face the ocean, and their marine inspired colour scheme and prominent yet sensitive use of natural materials ensure they perfectly complement their environment.



The resort is centred on an attractive piazza, which gives it a village feel. A turquoise pool abuts the white sand beach, and as you dine the restaurant soundtrack is the crashing of waves on the shore. Time+Tide Miavana has its own museum, a cabinet of curiosities packed with natural history finds and also cultural artefacts from across Madagascar, a tour of which certainly enriches your stay.





Every villa at Time+Tide Miavana is a secluded space for self made castaways. Light floods in through floor to ceiling windows, making the most of the ocean views. A personal butler caters to your every need, whether you are lounging by your private pool, relaxing in the study or lounge, or fancy breakfast in bed. The only thing you need to do is decide how to spend your day: bicycles and electric buggies are on hand should you wish to explore the island, a therapist can come and deliver spa treatments in your villa, the Scuba diving and snorkelling is world class, and expert naturalists can guide you on safaris above and below the waves.



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Bonjour mes amis,

In Europe, ski season is in full flow. I've come to Courchevel in the French Alps to breathe in the fresh mountain air, feast my eyes on the snow covered landscapes, and to explore Les Trois Vallées (the Three Valleys) the largest linked ski area in the world.

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wooden chalet, but is  
and gives it a more  
meticulously. The colour  
mountains themselves), a  
lines between the lodge and

# LETTERS FROM...

By The Swank Team

towards  
and the pool  
dipped my toes in  
what a treat it'd be to come

There's no chance to swim in the gardens.  
Hotel Mansour Eddahbi Marrakech. The spa area  
and the outdoor swimming pool is a turquoise jewel. I can  
at any great speed, for a few dozen lengths, then lounge  
gently warm afternoon sun. A few guests were stretching  
and I was tempted to enter the hammam, but in the end  
glass of tea.

in set faster than I had expected, and at night  
romance in the air. Couples cooed up to  
Mansour Bar & Lounge, then down  
and grant diners a little  
and occasional giggles.

imposing  
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can sit  
a sun  
sensitive  
the surf  
heat by

I came to

lightly

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stretching

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up to

then down

and occasional giggles

# A LETTER FROM *North America:* **CHICAGO,** **ILLINOIS**

By Peta Phipps





The air is crisper and the playful days of summer have become recent memories. I am more than happy to warm up to autumn and all the fun of the season. Writing you from Chicago, where—in a few months, things will definitely be a bit colder. The coolest thing about this city is how walkable it is and the LondonHouse Chicago has me smack in the middle of everything. My suite has views of Michigan Avenue and the river. As the sun sets and the temps drop, I am in my robe and snuggled up to my floor-to-ceiling window, dreaming up stories about the world outside my window and the imagining tales about the lives beneath my feet. I stayed in on night one, but then, after a day of checking out the city's must-see sights and the hotel's architecture, venturing farther into the city wasn't necessary. The hotel is a marvel, melding classical architecture that North Michigan Avenue is known for, with the new 22-story glass tower that was added to this icon's by her newest owners.



I tell a different story on day two, however. It was Sunday morning and I was more than ready, and rested, for my Chicago Bears football game. When I say LondonHouse is perfectly situated, I kid you not. We left our room and strolled right down to Soldier Field and watched my friend Prince Amukamara play the game of American football with joy and heart. Capping off the day, after leaving the crowds behind, I remembered the hotel's rooftop where I can see Chicago from a vantage point like never before. These sweeping views of Lake Michigan, the Chicago River, and the Magnificent Mile are unparalleled. The vibe, the views, the people all make this place my new place to do sunsets whenever I am in town. LH on 22 is a must, whether you are a guest at the hotel or not, you owe this to yourself.

I have to get back to ordering dinner now at Ocean Prime, but will write more later. My choices tonight are between filet mignon and lobster. The struggle is more than real looking over this fantastic new menu. Please enjoy the season and when you make it to Chicago, put LondonHouse on your list of places to stay or visit, and be sure to try all the Swanky Retreats recommendations. You'll thank us for them.

All the very best,

**[www.londonhousechicago.com](http://www.londonhousechicago.com)**

# A LETTER FROM *North America*: MONTREAL, CANADA

By Gina Hines



Bonjour...

Everything is turning and changing in this city. I'm not saying that because it's autumn and the weather is no longer warm and the leaves are no longer a vibrant green. I am saying this because Montreal has so many revitalization projects under way that the city is visibly changing before our eyes. These changes are for the better and we are happy that we got to spend a few days exploring Old Montreal.

This part of the city dates back to the 17th century and its cobblestone streets are intrinsic reminders of its age. For those who are not prone to looking down while walking, there are buildings that were once pillars of the community, with their imposing architectural facades, now turned hip café and co-working spaces that go by solo monikers like, Crew. This city is swanky, sexy, hip and cool. We have barely had reason to leave Old Montreal (Vieux Montreal) which is aptly known (In French and In English) as the historic center of the city of Montreal. The antiquity only endears the city more to one's heart. Be not fooled by the terms old or vieux. There is such vibrancy here! We ate at Ikanos on night one where we were invited to discover Mediterranean cuisine, so fresh we felt like we were in Greece, with a distinct twist only found in Montreal. Staff so ready to share their passion about every aspect of the restaurant. From the Josper Oven grill seafood that unmistakably carries the flavor of the embers from the kitchen to the palate. We spent a wonderful evening in this cozy restaurant atop a short flight of stairs inside, yet another, historic building on McGill street.





Tomorrow will be an afternoon exploring even more of Montreal and ending the evening at Aura, in the Notre-Dame Basilica. That's a light extravaganza that is set to music that is said to reveal the riches of the Basilica. We can hardly wait. Take a look at the feature on Montreal, also in this issue, and go a little deeper into our views of the city.

A bientot,

Carin



*A LETTER FROM **NORTH AMERICA:***  
**O'ahu, Hawai'i**

By Gina Hines



Touched down, for the first time, in Hawai'i and it was late, very dark, and a little damp. My flight from the mainland to the islands was scheduled for a night arrival and it could not have worked out any better. I wanted to awake to the majesty of O'ahu and in particular, my view from the Queen Kapi'olani Hotel on Waikiki Beach. My suite was positioned to where my view from bed was the majestic Diamond Head National Monument at the tips of my toes and to my right was the celebrated Waikiki Beach. Opening one eye at a time, making sure the hotel did not disappoint, I was like a kid in a candy shop and (almost) ready to jump on the bed, which was exceptionally comfy, by the way. I soaked in my surroundings while I plotted my day. In order to make the most of my time, I knew I had to do a grab-and-go breakfast at Knots Coffee Roasters. The cheery island coffee shop was in the lobby and made for a speedy, delicious, pre-hike pit stop. As close as Diamond Head appeared, the staff encouraged me to take a taxi and when I arrived for the start of my hike, I was glad that I did.



Objects, in the clear Hawaiian air, appear closer than they actually are. The hike made that eminently clear. Reaching the summit gave such spectacular views. Being able to overlook the Pacific and our Queen Kapi'olani hotel from the top of this iconic hike was an almost religious experience. I already knew I was falling in love with Hawai'i and there was nothing to break my fall. As I gazed from natural wonder to my home at the start of the Waikiki strip, my heart was full. The newly renovated resort put me in the heart of all the best of the strip. I could leave the hotel and get to Hermes, Dior or Forever 21 and everything else in between or I could walk to an on-site surf school, an international culinary sensation's first concept in Hawai'i, and a collection of vintage Hawaiian and local art in the lobby of the hotel. Choices abound here. I opted to immerse myself in dreamy scenes of midcentury Hawaiiana by staying right in the lobby. With quintessential landmarks at my doorstep, it was easy enough for me to embrace the local lifestyle throughout the day. The Queen Kapi'olani offers unique on site activities and supports the local community as well as teenvironment. On days that I wasn't surfing or taking in the Waikiki vibe, I was making leis and taking hula lessons, taught by locals who were entrenched in the community and preserving Hawaiian culture and traditions. My first taste of Hawai'i was delicious and I would not have had it any other way than here. Inspired by its namesake, the hotel strives for excellence as Queen Kapi'olani's motto - whom the hotel is named in honor of - was "Kūlia i ka nu'u," which means "Strive to reach the highest." I loved it here.

A hui hou,

*Cain*

[www.queenkapiolani.com](http://www.queenkapiolani.com)

CROSSROADS

OF AUTHENTICITY

AND LUXURY



Story By  
Jeff Sobel



In a cove carved centuries ago against the peaceful Pacific, Puerto Vallarta sways sweetly between the forests and the beaches, creating a perfect balance for the Casa Velas resort.

It's raining upon my arrival, and it's wonderful. Mountains in the distance shyly hide under misty skies, while raindrops bounce off every green leaf in sight. Often one has to choose between a relaxing rainforest hideaway or the ocean, but the rain only highlights how visitors to Puerto Vallarta don't have to make that trade off.

It's a short trip from the tropical airport to Casa Velas that unlike many all-inclusives this is a luxury, adult-only boutique hotel where every person is treated as if they're the

only guest. They even offer a selection of artisanal purses and designer handbags as part of their complimentary Handbag Bar. My luggage is swiftly replaced with a fruity cocktail, which has 'some' tequila, says the porter with a grin. I take a sip and drink in the hacienda lobby, fusing traditional Spanish style with modern features and the always adored outdoor feeling of indoor ponds and open doors. The manager greets me with a handshake, then places a handmade bracelet on my wrist. I'm escorted to my suite, passing koi ponds leading out to a lagoon-style pool centered amongst all of the greenery. My room follows the hacienda trend with beautifully tiled flooring and wooden beam ceilings. A bottle of El Gran Jurado tequila with chocolate treats sit on the center table under flowers. The sliding glass doors reveal a stunning view and



most importantly a plunge pool on my balcony overlooking the even greener grounds of Marina Vallarta's 18-hole golf course surrounding the property, making my suite hidden in complete privacy adjacent to a thicket of trees.

In the evening I'm given a tour of the property, visiting several different style suites, including the palatial presidential suite consisting of four bedrooms, private terrace, jacuzzi, and its own butler and bartender. While many rooms have a plunge pool like mine, this suite essentially has its own plunge lap pool overlooking the entire resort. I meet with the property manager and we begin the night with a makeshift tequila tasting - one of the many events that the hotel offers nightly. The bartender smokes a glass for me and I try a delicious Sabor

a ti mezcal cocktail. Afterwards we dine at the Four Diamond Emiliano restaurant adjacent to the koi ponds cascading down the hillside like Chinese rice terraces. The restaurant is tiered as well, giving it an acoustic yet cozy feel. A six man mariachi band plays by our table, electrifying the night. Every song, instrument, and voice is so different yet energetic - truly a dinner and a show. Mixing Mexican and international cuisine my fork dances from the beet and peach salad to surf & turf. Midway through our meal the band retires, replaced by a delightful piano player who shifts the mood to a more intimate ambiance. After a final glass of wine and the decadent white chocolate mousse I'm off to the cool comfort of my suite to turn in.



The next day as the sun peaks through the clouds Paco the peacock roams the golf course outside my balcony. At Emiliano I dine outside on the terrace, listening to the koi snap the surface of the water, begging for a bite of my omelet. Meanwhile an iguana creeps by, its bright green blending with the verdant bushes bordering the ponds, eyeing the caviar floating like an island atop my lox bagel.

I say goodbye to my new friends and continue touring the property, from the botanical gardens where a yoga class is underway, to the mountains in the distance reflecting off the surface of the seemingly endless pool. At the edge of the forest lies a stunning gym with two-story high windows that give guests the feeling of actually exercising in nature. And while I should lift some weights after all the food I've eaten, the spa up the steps sounds like a better option to me. Before my massage I undergo a hydrotherapy regimen that begins in the sauna, followed by a cold rain shower, then wet sauna, and finally jacuzzi with yet another stunning vista into the jungle. By the time my guide greets me with a towel my body is rubber, ready for

a lavender-scented massage therapy. With a combination of hot stones and muscle tension relief, any lingering stress from the outside world escapes from my body.

The morning clouds pass and I venture to the pool where I sip on cucumber water, Dos Equis, and taste the famous guacamole. Paco the peacock greets the poolside guests, but once he determines I'm not handing over any chips he struts on. The afternoon heats up so I wade into the bay of a pool, marching to the swim-up tiki bar. Fredy the bartender who's been at Casa Velas for thirty years takes me on a whirlwind tequila tasting of Palomas, Vampiros, and of course, a shot or two served in a champagne flute. He reminds me not to shoot it and certainly not to use a lime, as good tequila is meant to be sipped and thoroughly enjoyed. Of course once a glass does empty, Fredy and the other bartenders magically appear, always at the ready to bring you your next cocktail.

Puerto Vallarta is at a crossroads of luxury and authenticity, and while I've been fully pampered thus far, I seek a taste



of genuine street food downtown. I meet my guide from Vallarta food tours at the foothills of the mountain. We stroll down cobblestone streets past crates of Coca-Cola, buildings under construction, and banyan trees shading outdoor bars. Tacos and tequila of course are on the agenda, but there is so much more than simply that. Our tour begins at Zapata where I'm immediately handed a sombrero and a cocktail served in a ceramic cup. Before too much drinking gets underway we then head to Mariscos el Guero Seafood for delicately fried fish tacos, and while they have every sauce imaginable, for me it's perfect as is. Next we step into a local grocery store where the freshest fruits and vegetables lie on painted wooden shelves like artwork.

Onward we pass two to five story buildings of restaurants, bars, shops, apartments and hotels, all stacked upon one another leading towards the lush green hillside in the distance. Our next stop is Tacos Memo Grill, an outdoor food stand complete with a massive stove-top for cooking tortillas, fryer, chicken grilling right on the street, sauces,



spices, and flavors abound. Makeshift red tables and chairs next to a bright green wall provide a respite with a margarita in one hand and a piping hot fresh taco in the other - it doesn't get any better than this.

It's hard to believe we're only halfway through this wonderful tour, and it's amazing to see all of these different venues. Mariscos Cisneros Seafood sports a gorgeous outdoor courtyard where we're served moonshine tequila from the barrel of a glass gun - bang bang.

The bell tower chimes as we reach the next vendor with a frying vat parked next to the street churning out the best churros I've ever had. Adjacent is simply a large metal table sitting on the sidewalk where the grill cooks not simply pork, but also the options of every part, including the eyes and brain. By now I've had a fair share of tequila, but not quite enough to indulge in these delicacies, so I stick with a delicious pork taco instead.

The bartenders at our next stop sense that we're a bit of a wild group, thus before we can even order, a dozen shot glasses line the bar top, followed by a platter of watermelon slices converted into green Jello shots.

Snaking our way through the side streets of downtown we reach the art-filled boardwalk with a stunning mosaic-tiled wall separating the street from sand. From here we have the perfect view of the entire Puerto Vallarta cove just as the bright orange sun goes down.

The next day the sun is back in full force, and after huevos rancheros and a fresh anti-toxin fruit smoothie I meet with artist León de la Vega poolside for his weekly painting workshop (with margaritas of course). Originally from Mexico City, de la Vega is the founder of Estudio-café, a cultural center promoting local artists, authors and environmental activities. He insists that this is not truly a class, and his best advice for putting paint to canvas is to simply stop thinking, stop planning, and just do. He explains that neurological studies have shown that the loss of our handwriting these days has a negative effect on our bodies. Our reliance on typing with computers and smartphones means we're no longer writing to one another. As technology grows we become more focused on 'left brain' activities while failing to utilize our creative right side of the brain. In addition, people rarely write in

cursive any longer which is the best for our brains to flow.

It's difficult to determine the negative neurological effects of this cognitive loss, but it's certainly easy to see how over-stimulated we've all become. I'm certainly guilty of this, opting never to handwrite whenever possible, and when I have to my writing is barely legible. Sitting here without my phone I pay attention to the breeze blowing the palm trees shooting to the sky. We aren't given an assignment nor told what instruments to use, so I grab some paint colors that spark my interest and a sponge. I swish with the sponge, mix colors and stop thinking. By the time I look up I've created something that I didn't know I had in me. It's not what I imagined, and that's what's best about it. Further, as I look around at everyone else in the group I find that we've all painted such vastly different things - each beautiful in their own way. None of us are artists, but it's amazing what some people can do when they put their phones down and let go.

After finishing another watermelon margarita and wiping the paint off my hands it's time to soak up the endless Mexican sun. The resort has its own Ocean Club on the beach which one can easily walk to, but I opt for one of the resort transports that ferries guests every five minutes or so.



Situated further down the bay from the colossal hotels and crowds, the Ocean Club is a tucked away cove like a mansion on the sea. The covered outdoor courtyard bistro and bar faces the infinity pool straight out to the pacific. Plush lounge chairs and cabanas wrap around the pool, while built-in tiled lounge chairs directly in the pool call my name. As with every staff member I encounter at Casa Velas, one is kinder and more accommodating than the next.

A storm had just been passing through during the last few days, and while the sun returns colossal waves still burst in the near distance. Surfers and nature herself perform yet another show for me. I'm told that these waves are far larger than normal, which is why guests and bartenders alike can't help but fall under the spell of these giants.

I try a refreshing cucumber margarita and soak in the sun. Time rolls on as the tide rolls up, and while I didn't think I could be hungry again I order a fresh and light tuna and shrimp ceviche to wind up an afternoon of relaxation.

Back at the resort it's Casino Night, where blackjack tables have been set up under lamps right out by the koi ponds. With a final Vampiro in hand I chat with a lovely couple from England who tell me that they've been coming

to Casa Velas for years. In fact, this is where they met another couple from California and they became fast friends. Every year the couples return to meet again and can't imagine going anywhere else. What's more, over the years they've befriended so many of the staff members that they're disappointed to hear when their favorite bartender or chef is away on vacation. That sums up the experience here, where the guest return rate is so high, and the staff so beloved. It's truly a relaxing and caring environment where one can disconnect from the world and enjoy all the little pleasures life has to offer.

'SR'





THE  
SPA  
UNCOMMON  
BALI



# BALI

blurs boundaries. The island is famed for its beaches, but above them rise volcanic mountains cloaked in rice terraces and jungle. It's a province of Indonesia, but with a Hindu majority population, there are strong cultural ties with India. The 3.9 million people living here are of Indian, Austronesian, and Melanesian origin, and most of them are bilingual or even trilingual. Their cuisines - one of the highlights of any visit - encompasses not only the spices of the island's plantations, but also the freshest seafood of the Bali Sea and the Madura Strait, the suckling and roasted chicken raised on Balinese farms and sold in the markets, and yet more mouthwatering delicacies grown in the fields, rice terraces, and orchards.

Desa Seni acts like a magnet, drawing people and cultures from across the Indonesian Archipelago and beyond. Every one of the antique wooden houses which makes up this village resort has been transported here, restored, and refurbished, creating a visually appealing melee of Indonesia's many architectural styles. It is the best, most sustainable kind of upcycling: the islands' built heritage has not only been protected from the encroachment of modernisation and globalisation, but the houses have found a productive new use as well. The ghosts of residents past - if indeed they have travelled to Desa Seni with their homes - cannot but be happy: their new location is a slice of heaven on Earth.







The houses nestle in a jade green oasis of trees and tropical plants. Birds twitter amongst the leaves, especially in the first few hours of the day. A short excursion will bring you to carefully crafted rice terraces, spotless beaches, and even an historic temple or two, so there is plenty around to see and do. When hunger strikes, the chefs step up to the plate with aplomb: 80% of the ingredients are grown and produced on site, and they are shaped into a mouthwatering array of fresh Balinese dishes to delight even the most demanding of palates.

But where Desa Seni really comes into its own is as a spa and yoga retreat. The quiet solitude of the natural environment is only enhanced by a programme of activities designed to enhance physical, mental, and spiritual wellness.

Every morning begins with yoga: the school is internationally accredited by The Yoga Alliance, and teachers come here from around the world to learn and teach. Each guest's yoga journey is unique, taking into consideration their individual needs, goals, and objectives. Sun salutations from the Hatha Yoga programme are a fitting way to start the day, especially when accompanied by cleansing lemongrass tea; and throughout your stay you can experiment with Vinyasa Flow Yoga, Yin Yang, Mindfulness, Meditation, and Pranayama Practices. Beginners can have their first taste of yoga in a supportive, relaxed environment, whilst more experienced yoginis can check in for an intensive training programme with 200 hours of classes.





If the yoga is a bow to Bali's Indian connections, Desa Seni's spa experience pays its respects to the island's indigenous plants and traditions. Here, western and eastern medicines become one. The holistic output focuses on healing and health. The spa's name - Merapu Svaasthya - is totally fitting: it means "spiritual forces" and "wellbeing".

Specialists in massage, wraps, and facials combine their expertise to ensure guests realise optimal benefit from their time at Desa Seni. A hot stone massage might be broken up with refreshing dips into a salt water pool, and organic snacks and tea ensure your base desires are amply satisfied. The banana leaf is an indispensable part of daily life in a Balinese village, but in the Desa Seni spa it takes on new functions, wrapping a body coated in coffee scrub and papaya to rehydrate and rejuvenate the skin. The polyphenols in the banana skin are a natural anti oxidant, further increasing the efficacy of the treatment.

Every aspect of your wellbeing can be addressed: the therapists will advise you which treatment to choose.

A salt body scrub and saucha body wrap will rid your system of toxins and improve circulation; an organic facial with aloe vera will remove dead skin cells and leave you with a radiant glow; and if you opt for a hair cream bath with virgin coconut oil, ginger, and aloe vera, not only will your scalp be reinvigorated, but your tresses will shine with health.

At one level, you just want to lie back and luxuriate in a cloud of natural fragrances, and then admire the end result. Should you be interested in the combination of plants, the techniques, and the ancient traditions, however, Desa Seni's therapists are anthropologists, historians, botanists, and storytellers in equal measure. Listening to them speak is an educational experience, one from which you learn and appreciate the level of sophistication which goes into creating every natural product and treatment. Did you know, for example, that a footbath of coconut and warm salt water will reduce stress? Or that a combination of yoghurt, honey, aloe, and cucumber - all ingredients we have in our kitchens - will soothe the burning, redness, and general itchiness of sunburn?





# "HOLISTIC"

is a word which is often overused, and thus has lost much of its impact. But its original meaning - something which is characterised by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole - seems to be a perfect description of Desa Seni. You could, of course, look at the buildings, the natural environment, or the food in isolation. You could try, or talk about, only the food or the spa treatments. But if you did so, you would only ever see and experience part of the story. It only takes a moment or two of reflection to see that these are all pixels in the same picture, interconnected jigsaw pieces in one puzzle. To make the most out of a stay here, you must immerse yourself in every aspect of the resort; not only will you enjoy it far more, but your body, mind, and soul will surely thank you for it.

[www.desaseni.com](http://www.desaseni.com)

'SR'

A scenic view of a golf course. In the foreground, a winding concrete path is bordered by a low, manicured hedge. To the right of the path, there are several large, rounded bushes with green and yellow foliage. In the middle ground, two tall, slender pine trees stand prominently on a grassy slope. A small wooden bench is visible near the base of the trees. The background shows a coastal landscape with cliffs and a body of water under a cloudy sky.

# WINE COUNTRY

UNCHARTED



Raise your hand if you knew this rugged Northern California coast was home to wineries and vineyards that rival some of the state's more talked about wine producing counties. My hand is down. This was a totally uncharted part of the state for me. I frequent San Francisco and actually lived nearby when I was a child, but this was my first experience of this beauty of a county. I was such a newbie that I really kept saying "Mendo-cito," a melding of where I had been in southern California and where I was about to explore. Their site talks about its residents as being fun-loving misfits, mavericks and makers and it encourages visitors to find their happy. I ventured up the coast, after spending time in San Francisco, to see what there was to see. Wending my way up the coast, threading the car through centuries old redwoods and stopping for wine along the way. (Wine-tasting, not drinking.) It would be insane to pass up all the signs along the route and not stop for a taste. In fact, the absurdity of stopping and sipping almost, almost, outweighed the folly of doing the exact opposite. The road is lined with these quaint wineries, beckoning the responsible driver/sipper to enter their grounds.



I had planned on stopping at Maple Creek Winery/Arteveno, based on strong recommendations. I had no idea I would meet the owner and end up having him tell me he was the Art Nouveau designer of some of my very favorite wine labels. For 40 years he designed the Far Niente labels. I arrived earlier than expected, in a heavy downpour of rain and was lucky to catch him in the tasting room. Tom Rodrigues was a delight and a wealth of stories. He also happens to be (ancestrally) from one of my favorite countries, Portugal. The stars aligned on this one. We chatted, I sipped. I actually was more intrigued in the tales, coupled with the wine that I forgot I was only to sip and move on. I was so comfortable that I treated my pours as a glass to enjoy while hearing about Tom's life story. When he was six years old, his teacher saw him drawing and told him the piece he was making was indeed Art Nouveau. He looked over his shoulder looking for a person named Art. The joy in his reflection was infectious. His wines were delicious, making them all the more easy to drink. I had not, however, brought a sleeping bag so, I slowed my roll and leaned in to learn more about his life as a grower, maker, and vintner. There are differences between each and Tom was all things rolled into one. His sincere energy shows through in the wines. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Symphony, Cowboy, Zinfandel, and Nectar were award winning wines and each one had character all its own. I could have sat with Tom all afternoon, but luckily he had a meeting to attend and I had to keep my head about me as I made my way further north.







**T**he rugged cliffs that lead down to a very cold Pacific Ocean were breathtaking. Breaks in the redwoods showcased even more beauty of this glorious part of California. I was bound for the Little River Inn. This Inn has been around for more than 75 years. It sits opposite the ocean and gently climbs up the side of a hill, giving every cottage and room, unobstructed views of the majesty right in front of them. I love that there's a spa at the hotel and more than that, a challenging 9-hole golf course. I am not much of a golfer but I am on par with the very best golf cart drivers and I can find my way around a course like a pro. I took this one in with a new friend from the

front desk. We chatted about life in Mendocino and how simple things seemed up here. Then we got on to the topic of mountain lions, and that's when I made a beeline back to the front of the hotel. I love nature but I know that little me is no match for a mountain lion. We didn't want to part ways on that note, so she asked if I wanted to see the blow hole that was now, centuries later, a punchbowl. The twist here was that we had to walk through a cemetery (respectfully) and make our way to the edge of this 10-story deep pit where the ocean rushed in every 20 seconds. You could never see this just anywhere and it was worth the potential trek through the gravestones and potential haunting, to witness nature's wrath-carved beauty.





The slogan was right. I've met makers, and I'd say a maverick, no misfits yet, but definitely fun-loving folks. The Little River inn was a great place to soak it all in and explore. Dinners were surprisingly diverse and definitely delicious. The Swedish influence at the inn is most evident at breakfast. For me, the first meal of the day started with Swedish hotcakes, hash browns and bacon, and on Sunday, I added champagne. The charm of this region was tangible at the inn. Captivating views spoke for themselves and the staff was always eager to share their knowledge of the area and things to do within walking distance.



Only a few miles up the coast, was Brewery Gulch Inn. Owned and operated by the sincerest inn-keeper I was yet to run into. Guy is a tall, charming host. The inn he runs is a modern cabin in the woods feel. Made out of reclaimed Redwood, milled on site, many years ago, the inn sits on acres of flat land and rimmed by forest. Walking trails lead guests who want to explore the great outdoor spaces beyond the gorgeous, well-appointed, structure that houses all of Brewery Gulch's accommodations. The air was fresh and crisp during most of my visit, making it ideal for nature walks and taking time to smell the flowers and try to spot the fauna. You could tell that Guy was eager to share his piece of California paradise with guests. He told me about a one-of-a-kind vineyard where I was able to see straight down the coastline while sipping

on their wine. A vineyard set on the sea! This was the place for me, yet I couldn't stand to be away from the inn for too long. There was an inviting, homey feel to it. Not in a corny way. The oversized scrabble board, DVD library with thousands of titles, a bookcase begging to be thumbed through and a roaring fireplace smack in the center of it all, were enough for me. When I wanted privacy, I went to my suite, Pine was its name, and sat beside my French doors, toes warmed by my own fireplace, and gazed out at the waves making their way up the dark sands of the cove. One day of my visit, I barely left my room. Feeling more like a novelist than anything else, I sat and wrote and dreamed as some moisture had rolled in. Guy apologized for the weather, as if it were within his control, but I told him how much I loved the rain and was more than delighted to watch it from my leather chair by the fire.



I could see why Guy is happy here and happy to share this special place with those who know how to find this hidden treasure of an inn. Marked only by small signage on the roadway, the inn lies atop a gravelly road. Since they were almost at capacity when I arrived and when I departed, it's not such a secret place, but I think it is safe to say that there are those who know how to travel well and those are the folks who seek out Brewery Gulch Inn and find an unexpected home in the woods with fantastic views of the coastline. Rain or shine, Brewery Gulch Inn ticks all the boxes and made my first uncharted Mendocino experience one that needs repeating. Cheers to you making the trip to experience this part of California's coast.

**[www.brewerygulchinn.com](http://www.brewerygulchinn.com)**

**[www.maplecreekwine.com](http://www.maplecreekwine.com)**

**SR**

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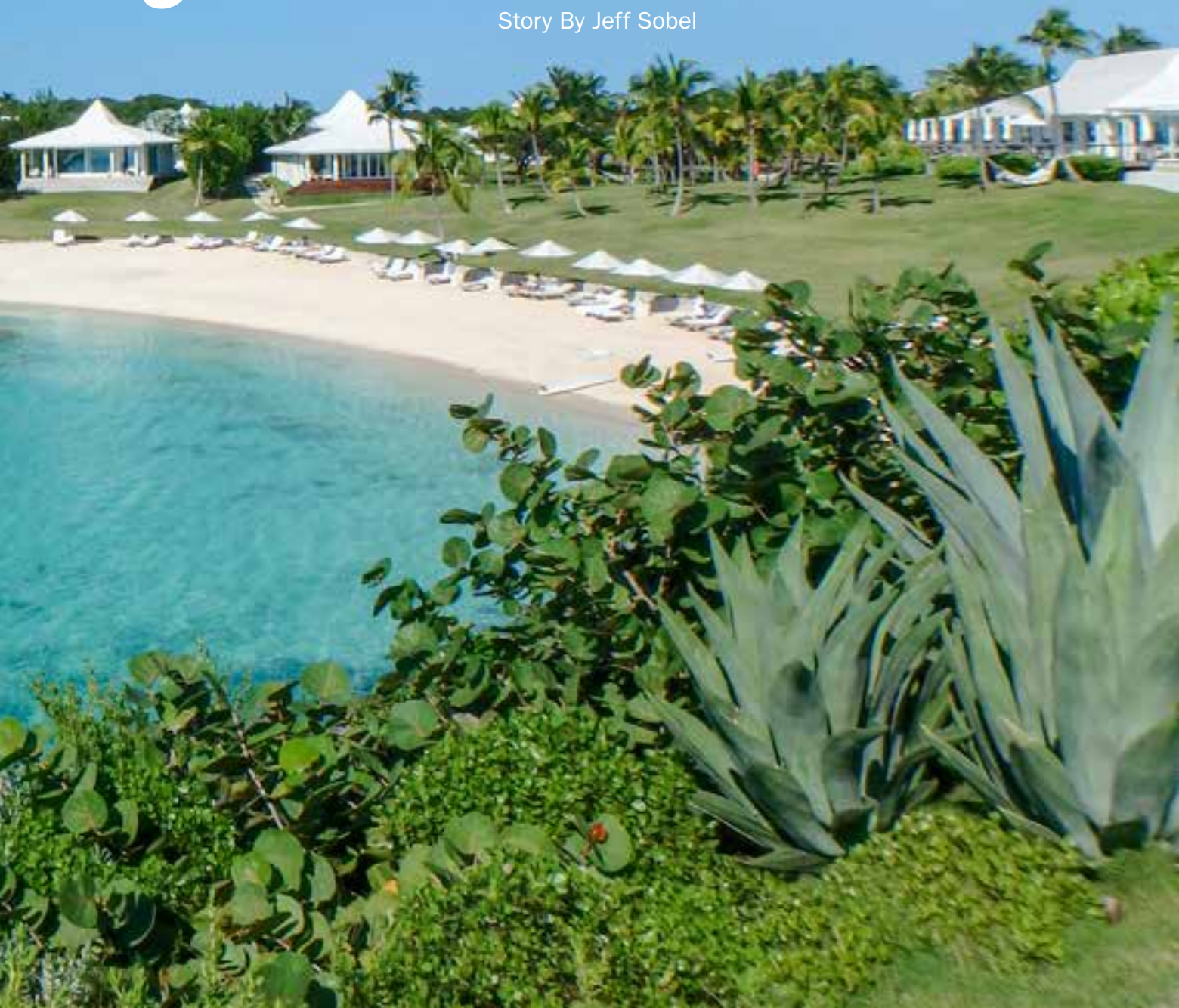


**HOTEL  
EL GANZO**



# Still a Wonderland

Story By Jeff Sobel





While news of blizzards around the globe flash on my phone, I simply shut it off and glance out the plane window to find a beautifully sunny day in Eleuthera. After landing at the single building airport I'm greeted by a friendly taxi driver who takes me on the 'highway' – which is essentially one extra-large lane for traffic in both directions. With only about 12,000 inhabitants the island is still very raw, allowing me views of the wilderness and palm tree forests before crossing over the Glass Window Bridge with the bright aqua Caribbean on my right and the darker Atlantic Ocean on my left.

Soon I arrive at my destination: The Cove, a tucked away little paradise between the forests and the sea. At the gate I'm handed a luggage tag and offered the option of a Bahama Mama or lemon water. Inside the grounds the winding road cuts through the jungle until reaching the stunning hilltop lobby. Unlike the typical hubbub of a regular hotel lobby, the exclusivity of The Cove means personal service above all else. At the top of the quiet hill I breathe in the salt air from the nearby sea and take in the simple beauty of the property.

Next I hop aboard a golf cart that whisks me through the peaceful plantation-like grounds of white cottages and hammocks surrounded by endless green. Further still I arrive at my own private villa right on the sand. The front porch sits mere steps away from the water and while blissfully isolated, the bungalow still has every modern amenity one could ever need.



*"The Cove, a tucked away little paradise between the forests and the sea."*





The sliding glass doors are wide open, allowing the ocean breeze to ripple the white curtains as I enter the villa. Immediately I can feel the aura of a cozy beachfront home with a plush and modern platform bed, vaulted ceilings, bright white décor and an ultra-sleek bathroom with the option of a walk-in shower, egg-shaped bathtub or private outdoor shower – how will I ever choose?

After changing into a bathing suit I roam the grounds, passing by other guests every now and then but for the most part it feels as though I'm on my own private island. With the intimate 57 room utopia, ranging from cozy suites and romantic cottages, to a three bedroom villa with a private lap pool and butler service, this seaside property provides for the ultimate escape.

I walk along the secluded beach hugged by cliffs on each side, creating a beautifully calm bay. Overlooking it all sits the Gregory Town Grill and Freedom Restaurant adjacent to a heated infinity pool. There aren't any rentals here, simply kayaks and paddleboards ready for you to take as you wish. So I simply grab a paddleboard and glide right out into the pristine clear waters of the cove. The water is flat as can be – a perfect day for paddleboarding, and while my feet shake at first I steady myself and soon float across the sea. From out in the bay I take in the sight of the entire property, 40 acres in all, surrounded by forests and a rolling hillside.

Just then a helicopter flies overhead and comes to a rest atop a grassy landing pad on a small cliffside. I later learn that the passengers are a family who flew in from Nassau just to have lunch here. Luckily all I have to do is paddleboard in to try The Cove's renowned cuisine for myself.

My bare feet hop from sand to the softest grass on my way up the hill before drying off on the porch of the Gregory Town Grill. I take a seat and watch the ripples of the calm waters in the cove wave to me, smell the sea air and listen to the breeze. When things are simpler your body and mind both seem to slow down and absorb the details of your senses. In this peaceful break I'm able to reflect and look inward, and relish in not having a phone or even knowing what time it is. I take a deep breath and enjoy the simple pleasure of being present.

While some might not associate sushi with the Caribbean – what better place to blend freshly caught local fish with Japanese cuisine? The Cove is known for their sushi so I order a spicy tuna avocado roll with a panko crunch along with a mojito – the best of both worlds. The seafood lives up to the hype as it's the tastiest roll this side of Japan.


In the afternoon I claim a comfy lounge chair just outside my cottage and read in the sun that hovers over the flat ocean looking almost like a desert mirage. Every now and then a paddleboarder passes in the distance, and aside from the occasional cocktail delivery I'm left entirely alone. Back home and at work I'm surrounded by so many people that it's rare to be alone and truly take in meditative thoughts. However with the magnificent scenery before me, my senses and mind are able to be truly refreshed.

Eventually I return to my villa and choose the outside shower – an amenity so simple and yet so different. Never before have I been able to enjoy the hot water of a shower while peering out a small window to see the ocean. So much of the property takes advantage of its surrounding nature, seamlessly blending indoors and outdoors without sacrificing any modern comforts.









To be a little more formal I slip on my sandals and head to The Point Bar to soak in the sunset with the General Manager, Chorten Wangyel. Originally from Bhutan, Wangyel explains The Cove's philosophy of exclusive personal service that he and his staff have cultivated. What they have created here is not merely a place to get away, but an environment to replenish one's health and soul.

"Everyone is so busy in their everyday lives," Wangyel says, "they want to just get away from the hustle and bustle of life and relax in the serenity and beauty of this place. The energy here helps you do that and gives you a space to discover yourself."

Wangyel goes on to say that while they may expand the property in the future, their mission will always remain to provide the utmost personal service. He also explains the philosophy of providing for not only the expected island relaxation but for his guests' well-being as a whole with yoga retreats, meditation, health-conscious cuisine, calming white décor and blending in with nature.

I sip on the local Kalik beer as we chat and watch the sun sink into the sea. I order a conch salad with a refreshing mix of ceviche conch along with jalapeños for a sweetly kicked blend. Wangyel not only spends time talking with me, but also greets and gets to know all of the other guests as well - a hands on approach that he and all of the staff fully embody. Their effort shines through with the ability to leave guests in privacy yet always be available when needed.

As darkness falls I head inside to the Freedom Restaurant, an elegant beach-style brasserie decorated with sand-sunken candles, sheer white curtains and chic shell chandeliers. After tasting a seaweed-topped crabcake appetizer I shut off my mind and let my senses take over, absorbing the succulent lobster tail entrée with beetroot and spinach risotto in a white creamy sauce with aged parmesan, perfectly complimented with a glass of pinot grigio.

Fully content I stroll along the calm grounds, completely dark underneath the stars and yet still bright by what seems like hundreds of palm trees lit up all around me. The stone and grass pathway guides me back to my villa and the comfy bed where I easily drift asleep.

In the morning I wake to whirling wind, rough seas and a gray cloud-covered sunrise. The storm is a different kind of beauty from yesterday's calm and I appreciate it all the same. It's not raining so I make my way to the Freedom Restaurant for breakfast. With the beautiful grey ocean beyond the turquoise infinity pool I sip on my coffee and wake up to a fresh and light salmon avocado omelet, along

with New Orleans-style beignets that are far lighter and fluffier than the clouds outside the window.

By the time I finish breakfast the weather has calmed down and I'm informed that my conch-diving sea excursion is still a go. Back in my bathing suit, one of the onsite Escalades picks me up and we travel a few miles north into the town of Current. There I meet with Captain James who welcomes me aboard his boat and takes me on a private tour to the nearby Current Island where he was born from a population of about 20. He is definitely the go-to guide for this area and together we dive into the waters off the coast. Even in the 'winter' the water feels fantastic and I float over coral and plenty of colorful fish. I soar atop this underwater world and simply gaze in awe at the wonderful ecosystem. Along the way I spot an eel, a large seaturtle, and even a nurse shark resting soundly just under my feet.

Due to the rougher conditions earlier this morning it's not as easy for me to find a conch, however Captain James doesn't let me down and manages to grab one. Back on the boat we anchor at a sandbar overlooking the array of aqua-green colors that spread out around us, each like a different brushstroke on a painting. I dry off in the hot morning sun while right there on the boat he cuts up the conch, along with an array of apples, tomatoes, peppers, and combines them all for the freshest conch ceviche salad I've ever had! It's a refreshing treat to say the least, and dining on the front of the boat with my legs dangling over the side I think to myself it doesn't get any better than this.



Back at The Cove I pass the hammocks gently blowing in the breeze and return to my villa. With salt still on my skin I grab my Kindle and head out to the cliffs to bask in the sun while waves crash against the rocks below like a water fountain show. While it might be too rough to paddleboard today it's nonetheless a beautiful change in scenery.

After sitting on top of the world in complete open privacy the weather changes once again and the afternoon rainstorms arrive to cool me off. I take nature's hint and return to my villa to rinse off in the outdoor shower, mixing the cool rain with hot water as the storm passes above the trees. With my front doors slightly ajar I let the sounds of the rainstorm cradle me into a nap, and by the time I awake it's clear once again.

In the limbo between lunch and dinner I peruse the in-room menu to find conch fritters and sweet potato fries that are quickly delivered right to my porch-step. I recline on the chaise looking out at the sea and enjoy the show as

I eat. I again take this time to be alone with my thoughts, reflect, and just as Wangyel had described, refresh my mind. There is something to be said about the incalculable effect The Cove has on oneself – not simply being away from it all but also being in an environment as serene as this. You never truly realize just how busy and chaotic life can be until immersing yourself in such tranquility. I think of all the commotion and current events that must be going on back home, but right here there's only the evening breeze and the glow of the lit up palm trees.

In the morning I awake in time for the sunrise and return to the porch to watch the sun paint pink and orange streaks above the calm sea. With the ultimate view before me I decide to have breakfast delivered as well, and soon a server steps over with a wooden tray housing a pot of coffee and Eleutheran coconut-crusted French toast making for a simple yet divine combination, just as expected from The Cove. As my senses engulf the meal a hummingbird floats down to the wooden porch steps beside me and together we watch another spectacular day unfold.



After feeling completely rested I decide that before having to return to reality I better prepare myself by receiving a massage. The spa, similar to the entire property, is an intimate, warm, bright open space designed to help soothe the soul. My masseuse treats me with a mixture of deep tissue massage as well as stretching therapy that completely restores my body.

In a daze from the intensely relaxing massage I make my way to the Gregory Town Grill for one last shrimp po'boy and the drink of the day: a "falling coconut". I sit in the sun and watch the glimmering sea reflecting the sun like the scales of a fish, calm once again and topped with a few paddleboarders. As I enjoy one last bite of paradise the breeze carries a hint of winter, but that's all The Cove will get.

Afterward I say goodbye to the staff whom I've gotten to know even after just a short time together. As I travel back Wangyel's words echo in my mind, we often go on vacations to get away but never really stop to give our

minds the break that we all so desperately need. However this time I'm ready to return, refreshed and with a renewed outlook and energy that only the healing powers of The Cove can provide.

SR



# *Living the dream in Florence is easy at Il Salviatino*

The 15th century villa overlooks the city of Florence from its hillside home in Filsole. I flew into Milan and took a train directly to Florence where I was about to begin my Italian dream trip. The energy that filled the train station quickly morphed into an elevated sense of place as we wended our way through the city streets and approached the ancient stone wall entrance to the villa. My mind created stories as my eyes took in the lush foliage that lined the winding driveway leading up to the villa. I imagined the days when lawn parties were attended by ladies in elegant dresses, while gentlemen attended to matters of the day, clad in dapper attire. The manicured lawns were like a blanket ready for a picnic, under fir trees that appeared to scrape against the blue Tuscan sky, creating a scene befitting a painting by one of the masters







*As my car door  
was opened*

and the staff of Il Salviatino welcomed me to my home for the next few days, the portrait continued to unfold. The crunch of the gravel driveway beneath my eager feet, snapped me back into the present moment and I was able to soak in the grandeur of the villa's entrance. This was not going to be an ordinary stay. The rich history of this space was immediately obvious. The thick patinated walls and cloistered ceilings took my breath away. Then the staff took me away, to my suite overlooking the city of Florence. I flung open my windows and took in a deep breath, as though I were taking in the tiled roofs, and pastel painted buildings that lay before me, only blocks away from the villa. I was truly living in a dream. As attentive as the staff was, they were well aware of the impact their special piece of Italy held. Every one of them was from the area and knew that their home had this touch of magic on all those who came to visit. Walking me up to my third floor accommodations, past artwork and furnishings that all had their own story to tell, could have taken an entire day, but we had things to attend to like truffle hunting.





## *You heard that correctly; truffle hunting.*

Our truffle hunting guide and his trusty truffle sniffing dogs came to Il Salviatino and gave a lesson on truffles found in the Tuscan region, their pungency and variations, the dogs and how our lunch dish was about to be prepared with our haul. He felt very certain that we were about to embark upon a fortuitous truffle hunt and who was I to think any differently. With the villa as our backdrop, we strolled down the property's hillside and within minutes, our youngest dog hit on the scent of an almost ripe truffle. Although not ready for the lunch table, it was an exciting find. The way it worked was the dogs would hit on a scent, we would walk up with our truffle spade and unearth the underground fungus that resemble a stunted rough-skinned potato. If you've never had a truffle, that may

sound a bit off-putting, but trust me they are gastronomic gold. By the time our hunt was through, we had nabbed over seven gorgeous truffles from just along the hillside. What a thrilling experience! The villa was full of those though. I even tried my hand at gardening alongside the resident horticulturist whom I helped plant aubergine one morning. I think he was just being kind when he said, "Thanks for the help." because when I looked back at his beds of edible flowers and vegetables, everything was blooming, and in an orderly row. Mine seems a bit out of line. Nonetheless, I am sure they will grow to be just as tasty. His terroir was that perfect blend of moist clay and rich dry rocky soil that must turn everyone's thumb green (at least with envy).



The days were warm and my body craved a few hours of bathing under the Tuscan sun. The pool was calling my name. Conveniently located between the villa and the garden, tucked on the side of the hill, was the pool. Flanked by the same soft grass that captivated my attention upon arrival, I lay there for hours, soaking in the elements. There was so much more for me to explore within the villa's walls, but for these few hours, I let my imagination lead the way. The bits of history throughout the place were really all I needed to string together my own storyline. I knew that after the pool, I would head back up to my suite and reach into the minibar that curiously read Ritz, in gold lettering, atop its high-gloss burl wood finish. I already asked the question as to its origin and the answer

was every daydreamer's fantasy. The very Parisian hotel that lady Di had visited the night of her untimely demise, The Ritz, was the former home of this piece of history. The mind wanders. Was this from her suite? Was this piece of history something more than meets the eye? I could go on, but that's only one fascinating bit out of hundreds at Il Salviatino.



## How about the sarcophagus bathtub?

Yes, it exists and it is amazing! You can even have them draw you a champagne bath in this very tub. I suggest booking this room as a couple and taking the plunge into this special “bubble bath” together. Can you imagine the stories you’ll have to tell after that? Now my imagination is running wild again. Come make your own memories here. Il Salviatino is one of the most interesting spots to stay in Florence. When I say you will be spoiled, pampered and intrigued, I am telling you the truth. Go see for yourself.

[www.salviatino.com](http://www.salviatino.com)

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# FLORENCE:

DOLCE FAR NIENTE, SORT OF

Story By Amy Sedeno





Although my brain was surely enjoying "il dolce far niente," the sweetness of doing nothing, I was doing plenty, plenty of eating, plenty of drinking, and plenty of sightseeing. My trip started in Florence, or Firenze if you want to brag about your Duolingo Italian. Florence, aside from being a mandatory stop in Italy due to its rich history and culture, is also an excellent gateway for day trips to charming towns like Siena, San Gimignano, Cinque Terre, as well as exploring the Tuscan countryside. Yes, you must see the Duomo (how can you miss it), the David, and Ponte Vecchio, but to truly take in Florence, grab a seat in a piazza, drink a negroni al fresco, get lost finding the best gelato, and stop in your tracks when you hear a street performer singing "O Sole Mio." For artisan shops, outstanding cuisine, and that classic postcard photo from Piazzale Michelangelo, cross the river and venture out to the neighborhood of Oltrarno.



**MY FAVORITE SPOT:** Piazza Della Signoria and Loggia dei Lanzi (outdoor sculpture gallery). Interesting bit: the imposing Fountain of Neptune by Bartolomeo Ammannati, depicting the mythological character surrounded by rearing seahorses and frolicking bronze satyrs, was not always well received by Florentines and has even been vandalized on numerous occasions. When it was unveiled in 1574, spectators said it was a "waste of marble."

**WHY GO:** Architecture, History, Art, Chianti Classico

**WHERE TO FIND LOCAL TIPS?** @girlinflorence

**SHOPPING:** San Lorenzo Market, Scuola del Cuoio (monastery), Sara Amrhein jewelry



**TIPS:** Take a free walking tour in the morning and pinpoint the places where you want to spend more time during your trip. Pre-book your tickets to museums. Yes, you can find some good quality leather items in Piazza San Lorenzo, but beware of fakes. Before dinner, Italians go for an aperitivo, try an Aperol Spritz. Most restaurants charge a cover or coperto for table seating; this is typically €1-2 per person. Pace yourself and beware of Stendhal Syndrome (yes, this is real). What is it? A range of symptoms that include anxiety, panic attacks, hallucinations and even psychotic episodes—all after seeing renowned artwork.

**EATING:** Typical dishes include: Bistecca Alla Fiorentina, Pappardelle al Cinghiale (wild boar), Schiacciata, and Trippa & Lampredotto (some really dig it, some really don't). If you venture out to Cinque Terre, do yourself a favor and order focaccia with pesto. The region of Liguria is famed for its pesto alla Genovese. If San Gimignano is part of your itinerary, swing by the Gelateria Dondoli, dubbed "the world's best gelato."

**WHERE TO EAT?** Mercato Centrale, Todo Modo Bookstore (coffee, wine, and light bites), La Vecchia Bettola, Trattoria 4 Leoni, Osteria Santo Spirito, Caffè Rivoire (serves great negroni), Antico Noe (must try the rosé sauce), Gelateria Della Passera, and Gelateria Vivoli.

**A HIDDEN GEM:** Rent a car and drive to Montespertoli (approximately 30 minutes) where you'll find the family-owned Ristorante Dolce e Forte. I'll just leave you with their tripadvisor reviews.

**THE BASICS:** the Duomo, Giotto's Campanile, Ponte Vecchio, the Baptistery, Uffizi, Piazza della Signoria, Galleria dell' Accademia, Piazza del Duomo, Piazza della Repubblica.



**WHAT NOT TO DO:** Do not eat in restaurants with menus translated into multiple languages. Do not wear shorts or mini skirts when visiting a church (even if the heat is real). Don't order a cappuccino after noon, or order a latte (you'll just get a glass of milk). Don't expect a big breakfast, no eggs in the morning here. Don't overpack, leave room to take home some treasures. Most importantly, do not rush, La Toscana is to be savored slowly.

**TIP:** Always look for the symbol of the rooster when buying a traditional Chianti.

**GET IN THE MOOD:** Can't get to Florence but want to savor it from home? Here's what's in my cellar.

*Tenuta Il Corno Chianti DOCG*

*Fattoria Montecchio*

*Poggio Amorelli Chianti Classico*

*Carpineto Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*

*Terre di Levante: Cinque Terre- wines of Liguria*

**CIAO!**

‘SR’

FEELING  
**REVITALIZED**  
IN DRESDEN







**L**ying in my deluxe room's bed, I have things narrowed between Pure relaxation, a vitalizing whole-body peeling, a Bubbly Moment, the Milk and Honey Signature Treatment, a back massage and facial, or the Oriental Indulgence's hot towel warm up ritual and Ayurvedic full body massage with massage bars. I settle on Milk and Honey, thanking my subconscious for using the marvelous depth of the space, looking up at the timelessness of the flat white plaster ceiling 16.5 feet away. In anticipation of today's spa treatment, contemplating what one comes to expect of shall I say standard luxuries, if you'll pardon the apparent contradiction of those words, associated with 5-star hotels: the heated floor and towel rack in the bathroom, overnight laundry, twice daily housekeeping, a pillow menu, in

room computer hookup, 24 hour reception and room service, the in-house jeweler and boutiques, on-request limo and transfer service, a variety of on-site restaurants, complete with in house patisserie and tea sommelier, I understand why occupancy is consistently high at Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski, Dresden.

With a couple hours to go before my signature massage and treatment, I pop upstairs in robe, slippers and trunks, although the spa area's changing room has the expected lockers, towels, robes and slippers, I bring the ones from my room, minimizing changing time, maximizing spa time. Upstairs, from the selection of infused waters, teas and juices, I decide on a glass of apple juice at the wellness bar before slipping into the pool and begin my water work with a few laps of low energy breast stroke.





The 4,100 sq ft. wellness area underwent a 6 month revitalization, reopening in November, 2018. And while guest membership is available for those who are not staying in the hotel to either lie motionless in the redesigned spa treatment rooms and sauna areas, or move to their heart's content on the high tech exercise equipment, all the while appreciating the blend of high tech workout in the midst of baroque architectural design elements that mirror the city of Dresden itself: modern yet historic.

Through contemplating contrast and compatibility, I decide to finish pool time floating face up, drinking the view of the modern, blue ceiling that mirrors the pool's water, their color, sandwiching the area's brown deck stonework. That brown is a hint of what's next for me, the tone rests on the other end of the color and temperature spectrum but is similar in hue to the brown wood and triple digit temperature of the spa's two Finnish Saunas.



Out of the pool, into robe and slippers then over to one sauna, the copper kettle aromatic infusion is an option I exercise, lounging I adjust to the temperature change and relax into the situation as my skin puts out perspiration, the nostrils inhale an invigorating unseen atmosphere. Now and then I glance at the ceiling's C.H. Wolf/ Glashütte-designed oversized clock, because as much relaxing fun as there is here on the wood, the table beckons and punctuality is a virtue, while Wolf is now well known for watches, they began making clocks in the late 1800s in the nearby Saxon town of Glashutte. The miniaturized version of the "Fürstenzug" which translates to "Procession of the Princes" a depiction of a procession of Saxon rulers completed in 1876, is seen near the ceiling of the Finnish Sauna. In 1907 after 3 years of work placing porcelain tile over the original, to weather proof the stone, that labor made the 334 ft mural the largest piece of porcelain artwork on Earth. And this miniature is enough for me to make a mental note, head across the square and walk the original artwork's 110 yards of history. This miniaturized replica of "Fürstenzug" is a preview of the Zwinger Palace, considered by many as one of the great examples of Baroque Architecture, to explore the square on which the Kempinski and the Zwinger both rest is something I plan to do this afternoon, right now I revel in the relaxation of this relaxing heat.





After a quick shower and a spell in the relaxation area, I head toward one of three treatment rooms, one of which is equipped for couples massage, pedicures, manicures and other treatments, a steam bath and infrared cabins are available for those who want an ideal means of warmth and relaxation. The sauna area is available for guests free of charge. While external guests may purchase either a spa membership or a day spa admission, I'm on the inside and loving it.

Today's Milk and Honey Signature Treatment is designed to be 90 minutes of head to toe, face to back relaxation and detoxification, expertly administered by the spa manager Sabrina, the very embodiment of this hotel group's commitment to go beyond the buildings themselves, and ensure the employees are an equally important part of the Kempinski hotels' allure, the staff's blend of professionalism and superb hospitality is consistent across the range of their exclusive yet individually distinctive properties. We begin the treatment with a 30 minute application of a milk compress, whose active ingredient is made possible by the donation of Dresden's state, Saxony, cattle before proceeding to an even more local mixture for the next hour, of Dresden bee honey and oil, a combination premiered in January, 2019 when the spa reopened.

This blend, applied here and now, mirrors the ensemble of art, architecture and history outside, the hotel, a building which was once a supplement to a palace built by a monarch for his favorite mistress.

The second half of my massage hour is face up with a mask of royal jelly on the face and the smooth warm firm application of technique made possible by the blend of the honey's stickiness and massage oil's desire to flow, I revel in the cooperation between nature's beings, cows, bees and humans. The mask is a liquid version of the Porcelain invented by Saxon Elector Friedrich August I, or August "The Strong" who built the structure which is now Hotel Taschenbergpalais Kempinski Dresden, for his favorite mistress Countess Anna Constantia von Cosel. After the building's complete destruction near the end of World War II a total rehabilitation began in 1992, when completed in 1995 it made this Kempinski the first 5 Star Hotel in Saxony.

I finish the massage and mask experience with a digestive of Dresdner Engel sparkling Wine from nearby town of Radebeul, sipping deliberately I think it's best to have only one glass because this afternoon I plan to head out for an afternoon in the city's Old Town.



Showered, refreshed and feeling revitalized, I step outside the Taschenbergpalais' lobby doors, the current exterior looks as though the building appeared in 1767, making today's hotel the result of that three year, \$142 million rehabilitation. Reconfiguration of some of the interior spaces made for rooms of adequate size and the practicalities of modern living, en suite bathrooms, indoor plumbing, elevators, and electricity are among the obvious, practical considerations. In addition three restaurants and a bar with a formidable selection of whiskies are on the ground floor below their 213 elegantly appointed guest rooms, 31 of which are suites, many of which offer views of the Theaterplatz, across which the Old Town's internationally renowned opera house, Semperoper, is seen, and on the right is August The Strong's Castle. Look left for the Zwinger museum and its porcelain collection and displays of scientific instruments that are as impressive as its gardens. August The Strong, patron of art and architecture, is credited with making Dresden a cultural and artistic magnet drawing artists from around the continent to his court.

At present, in the heart of Dresden's historic Old Town, I feel not merely surrounded but embraced by The Elbe, the opera house and the palace, my historical triangle is a hint to why this city's art and architecture has been called "Florence on the Elbe" for centuries. Since its creation in 1897, through its commitment to service and luxury Kempinski Hotels has grown the brand to 76 5-Star hotels and residences sprinkled across 34 countries with more on the way in the Americas, Europe, the MidEast and Africa to become Europe's oldest luxury hotel group.

This wonderful example of Kempinski's commitment to "Historic Landmark Properties" which in addition to urban lifestyle hotels and resorts each remaining true to each area's cultural traditions. And if you need additional validation, please ask President Obama for his opinion of the hotel, he stayed here on one of his trips to Germany.

SR

full page

**u see me**

half page

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