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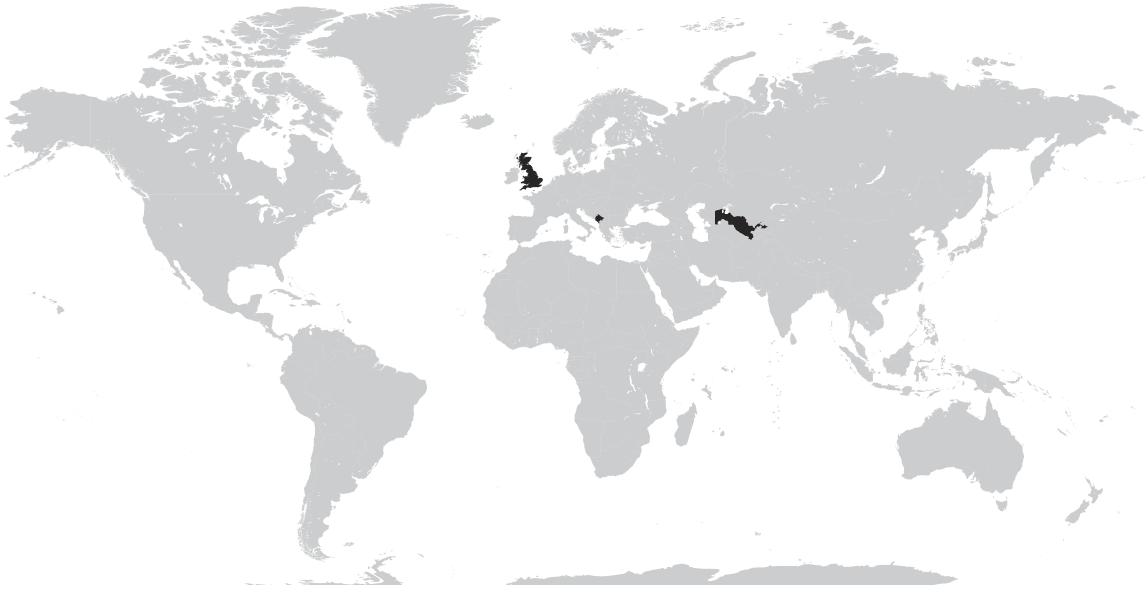
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# THE SWANK TEAM



**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.



**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.



# SWELLEGANT STAYS

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



## **Hotel Farovon**

Khiva, Uzbekistan

For more than 1,500 years, travelers have made their way to Khiva. This Silk Road city in the western part of what is now Uzbekistan remains one of the jewels of Central Asia. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site famed for its historic walled city, the Ichan Qala. Medieval visitors would have slept with their animals and goods in caravanserais, or perhaps if they were wealthy and influential enough, found a welcome at the court of the Khan. Today, there are plenty of mid range hotels and even a few boutique properties in heritage buildings, but it was not until late in 2021 that the doors of Khiva's first 5\* hotel opened, ushering in a new era of luxury.



Hotel Farovon is remarkable not least because of the speed in which it was constructed: it took just seven months from breaking ground to hosting the very first guest. Her impending arrival certainly piled on the pressure, for this VIP guest was none other than Audrey Azoulay, Director General of UNESCO.

The 106-room hotel is in a convenient location around five minutes' drive from the Ichan Qala. Inside the palatial exterior, which has architectural influences from Khiva's madrassas and other historic monuments, is a meticulously designed hotel where everything has been finished with a careful eye for detail. There is

a strong sense of place, from the Islamic design of the courtyard garden, to the geometric motifs of the metalwork, and the Middle Eastern-style light fittings in many of the public areas and suites.



There are four restaurants and bars at Farovon, reflecting the multicultural influences which spread along the Silk Road. Whilst Khiva, the hotel's main restaurant, introduces guests to Uzbekistan's natural cuisine, they can also have a taste of the Mediterranean in Milan, or feast on pan-Asian dishes in Tokyo. The Istanbul lobby bar serves strong Turkish coffee and pastries, the perfect treat after a day filled with inspiring sightseeing amongst the mosques, madrassas, minarets, and palaces of the Ichan Qala.

**[www.farovonkhiva.uz](http://www.farovonkhiva.uz)**





## Vanbrugh House Hotel Oxford, England

Year after year, the University of Oxford is ranked as the world's best university. This venerable institution has certainly had plenty of time to perfect its education: Oxford was already teaching students in 1096, and as such it is the oldest university in the English-speaking world. Famous alumni include historic figures such as the philosophers John Lock and Thomas Hobbes, the economist Adam Smith, and authors Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll, and JRR Tolkien. More recently, Bill Clinton, Hugh Grant, Stephen Hawking, and Tony Blair all took their degrees from Oxford.



Most visitors to Oxford will never be part of the tight-knit communities of the university colleges, but the next best thing is to stay in the heart of what is aptly known as the “City of Dreaming Spires”, and to tour the historic buildings with a student. The historic Vanbrugh House Hotel was styled by the architect Sir John Vanbrugh, who was also responsible for nearby Blenheim Palace. It sits opposite the (in)famous Oxford Union, the Oxford University’s debating society.



The hotel's buildings date from the 17th and 18th century, and retain many historic features, including wood paneling, painted alcoves, and Delft tiling. The 22 guest rooms combine English traditions with contemporary design and luxuries. Many of them have grand fireplaces with stone mantelpieces, plus huge sash windows overlooking the courtyard garden. Smart TVs, Dyson fan heaters, Nespresso coffee machines, and powerful rain showers bring things bang up to date.

It is the experiences which Vanbrugh offers which set it apart from the competition, however. How would you like to take a personalized walking tour through the university, led by Oxford graduate Iain Stephenson and his fellow students? In the summer months it is also possible to have a picnic breakfast whilst exploring Oxford's iconic sites from the water. Vanbrugh's chauffeured punt tour is not only romantic but also enables you to enjoy one of Oxford's quirkiest activities, without the risk of falling in!

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



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# HARTWELL HOUSE

## HOTEL & SPA

Story By Sophie Ibbotson



Entering the 90 acres of private parkland at Hartwell House in rural Buckinghamshire, an hour outside London, it feels like the setting for a Jane Austen novel. The impressive stately home combines Jacobean and Georgian features; the garden was designed in the style of famed 18th century landscape architect Capability Brown; and follies such as a gothic tower, a stone temple, and a rustic arch are dotted around the grounds. Statues of Hercules, Jupiter and Juno, and Frederick, Prince of Wales stand guard. Half close your eyes and you will be able to imagine Mr Darcy or a similarly handsome romantic hero riding at full speed along the mile-long Lime Avenue, wondering if he has an urgent rendezvous at the estate's St. Mary's Church, or is simply late for dinner.

Hartwell House is a property with incomparable history. Almost a thousand years ago it was recorded in the Domesday Book as the home of William Peveral, son

of William the Conqueror. Hartwell was the seat of John, King of England (1166-1216), and of the Lee family, the English ancestors of the Confederate General Robert E Lee. Sir William Young, the future Governor of Tobago, lived here, and so too did Ernest Cook, the heir of the Victorian travel tycoon Thomas Cook. But perhaps the most surprising resident of all was King Louis XVIII of France, who lived at Hartwell whilst in exile from 1809-1814. He was accompanied by a hundred courtiers and plenty of other displaced European aristocrats, including the Duchess D'Angouleme, the daughter of Marie Antoinette; Gustavus IV, the exiled King of Sweden; and Comte d'Artois, the future King Charles X of France. During their stay they turned the house's sun trap of a roof terrace into a miniature farm, rearing rabbits and birds and planting pots of vegetables and herbs.



Between 1987 and 1992, Hartwell House was conserved and converted by Historic House Hotels. Work was slow but painstakingly done. The National Trust, a national institution as beloved as the BBC, accepted a protective covenant over the house, and was then given it along with Historic House Hotels' two other properties, Bodysgallen in North Wales and Middlethorpe Hall in York, in 2008. It was the biggest single gift to the National Trust since World War 2. Hartwell House is therefore now run as a not-for-profit business, and the revenue generated by the hotel, restaurant, and spa is reinvested in the preservation of the house and the National Trust's other charitable activities. It is a perfect example of restorative tourism, of tourism doing good.

I arrived at Hartwell House in the late afternoon and was greeted at the door by House Manager Adam Treloar. I got the sense that it was not unlike the reception I would have received by the house's butler when this was a private home. The main entrance is into the Great Hall, where a fire was roaring in the grate and a family group sat taking tea in front of the fireplace. I have been a National Trust member for as long as I can remember, and often toured their houses wishing I could stay. Now that dream was coming true.

Normally I would have checked in and lazed a while in my room, but today Hartwell's spa was calling. Situated about 100 yards to the side of the main house, the spa is in a complex of new and old buildings which includes the 18th century coach house, The Old Dairy, and an orangery designed in the style of Sir John Soane.



The heart of the spa is the swimming pool, which reminds me very much of a Roman bath. The high ceiling, deep red walls, archways, and statuary create a dramatic environment in which to swim. The spa is open to hotel residents and spa members only, so there were only a couple of people in the pool. I watched them with admiration as I sunk neck-deep into the vigorously bubbling jacuzzi. I have to be honest: I was here to relax, not exercise.

I might have dozed off in the jacuzzi, or the steam room next door, but therapist Christine summoned me from my stupor and led me upstairs to the treatment rooms. She suggested a Swedish back, neck, and shoulder massage, and after a long week hunched over my desk, it was sublime. Lying on the heated blanket, in semi darkness and with soft music playing, I drifted in and out of consciousness. Christine worked her hands firmly and methodically across my body, noting almost before I could feel it where the knots and other sensitive points were. The Aromatherapy Associates products she used included lavender oil and other natural plant extracts, a subtle nod to the abundance of flowers and fruits grown at Hartwell by Head Gardener Richard Jones and his team.





The Hartwell Spa has its own cafe and bar in the gallery overlooking the pool, but as it was by now early evening, I returned to the main house. Guests typically assemble in one of the exquisitely decorated public rooms before dinner. The Morning Room and the Library are decorated in the Rococo style, and the library's priceless antique books are protected with some of the finest surviving gilt-brass wirework in the country. A magnificent portrait of Lady Elizabeth Harcourt by Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the Academy of Arts, hangs in pride of place above the mantelpiece. I toasted my good fortune in being here with a glass of English sparkling wine from Dinton Wines in the nearby Chilterns.

Dinner was served in Hartwell's Soane Dining Room, an elegant space which was inspired by a room at 11 Downing Street, the official residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Head Chef Daniel Richardson has received numerous accolades for his cooking, including three Rosettes, the award given by the AA to recognise outstanding restaurants. I chose three courses which showcases local ingredients and traditional British cooking: pig's head croquette with bacon jam, onion and cumin puree, pickled onion, and black pudding; roasted sirloin of Oxfordshire beef with horseradish dauphinoise potatoes, a beef cheek and oyster croquette, kale, onion puree, and port jus; and, lastly, a decadent salted caramel tart with yuzu sorbet. If King Louis XVIII dined half as well as I did during his stay at Hartwell, he was a very fortunate man indeed.

[www.hartwell-house.com](http://www.hartwell-house.com)

SR



**GASTRONOMIC GALLIVANTS:**  
**ESPLANADE,**  
**ZAGREB**

Story By Rhiannon Eley



For nearly 100 years, The Esplanade Hotel has opened its doors to the most glamorous society figures. Built in 1925 to accommodate wealthy passengers traveling between Paris, Venice, and Istanbul on the Orient Express, it is an architectural masterpiece of the Belle Epoque and one of the grandest hotels not only in the Balkans but in all of Europe.

The Esplanade's history remains central to its identity today, and rightly so. In the 1920s, the hotel was groundbreaking, with all the latest mod cons: hot and cold running water, more than 100 bathrooms, and a telephone in every room! The magnificent ballroom with its columns and sculptures dazzled guests, many of whom came to Zagreb to attend the hotel's extravagant balls and schmooze with fashionable friends. Silent movie stars checked in, their fans besieging the hotel; the royal families of Spain, Nepal, and Egypt holidayed here; and socialites and writers earned the property a certain notoriety: an Italian count oversaw what is thought to be Croatia's very first striptease! The Esplanade's guest book reads like a Who's Who of the 20th century. A swift glance reveals the names of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, Vivien Leigh and Lawrence Oliver, Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, Queen Elizabeth II, Pierce Brosnan, Paulo Coelho... the list goes on and on.



I checked into The Esplanade on a cold February day, and am thrilled to say that the hotel retains every ounce of its original glory and sophistication. Its location in the center of Zagreb, Croatia's capital, ensures the hotel remains the heart of the city's social scene. Recent renovations under the guidance of London-based architectural design company MKV Design have balanced the building's Art Deco and Neoclassical features with the demands of 21st century guests; the modern elements are in keeping, delivered with a luxurious flair which epitomizes the hotel's mission to create a space for "Indulgent and inspirational living".

Any stay at The Esplanade should begin with a drink (or maybe several) at The Esplanade 1925, the hotel's stylish lounge and cocktail bar. You will notice in the Art Deco interior that there is a subtle nod to the east, the styling of the Orient Express, and the famous cities along its route. The bar is run by Croatia's top mixologists: competition is rife, so the mixing is always a spectacle and the bartenders are constantly experimenting with creating and refining their recipes. I sat at the bar transfixed, but on a warm summer's evening I can imagine starting here and then spilling out onto the terrace.





All the international favorites you would expect appear on The Esplanade 1925's cocktail menu, but I wanted something unique. On the Orient Express Cocktails list, every drink takes its name and inspiration from a stop on the railway line. I started local with the Zagreb, which is flavored with brandy, honey liqueur, and orange; then moved onto Athens, which was made with pastis, triple sec, and grapefruit. Much as I'd have loved to have a cocktail for every station, I don't have that kind of capacity for alcohol anymore, so I finished my drinkable journey with London, a refreshing combination of gin, peach liquor, orange, and, surprisingly, Sprite.

Executive Chef Ana Grgic will prepare you snacks to enjoy in the bar, but in my mind that would do a disservice to her cooking. A fine artist, she deserves the full attention of all your senses, not least your palate.

Ana joined The Esplanade in 2012, the first woman in the hotel's history to take on the role of Executive Chef. She honed her skills in Michelin-starred restaurants in Brussels and Berlin, and has cooked for the likes of Prince Albert of Monaco, Joe Biden and Hilary Clinton, and Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall. Ana was a jury member on Croatia's Celebrity MasterChef TV show, and is an ambassador for the World Wildlife Fund's Fish Forward project.

Ana's showroom for her talents is The Esplanade's Zinfandel's Restaurant, widely regarded to be the best restaurant in Zagreb. Zinfandel's takes its name from the grape variety, which was exported from Croatia's Dalmatia region to the USA in the early 19th century, and has since become a staple of any wine cellar. The wine list is a celebration of the very best Croatian wines, plus a few famous names from further afield, but my recommendation to you is to drink what's local. If you are dining with friends, treat yourself to a bottle of the affordably priced Amfora Brut Nature (€81) whilst you browse the food menu, and then ask the sommelier for the perfect wine pairings. There are some excellent options by the glass, most of which are priced between €6-7.





The elegant, contemporary dining space that is Zinfandel's overlooks the Oleander Terrace, and beyond that the impressive Austro-Hungarian architecture of downtown Zagreb. You will want to dress up to fit in, but it is by no means ostentatious. Ana's carefully curated menu exemplifies the variety and quality of Croatian cuisine, which whilst not well-known in the USA deserves to be recognized as one of Europe's best kept culinary secrets.

In a natural reflection of Croatia's geography, the extensive coastline and fertile inland areas both influence what's served on your plate. The first of our mouthwatering starters was noodles with truffle, goat butter, and goats cheese, and it tasted so fresh and wholesome that I wondered if the in question had gambled straight from the field into the hotel's kitchen to be milked. The seafood options – Adriatic scampi and roasted scallops amongst them – could only have been caught a few hours before; they must have come straight here from the boat.

For the main courses we opted for two contrasting dishes, each of which was divine. The American striploin steak might sound like an odd choice to make so far from home, but I assure you that you have never tasted one like this. Seared to perfection, it was served with an accompaniment of salted beetroot, pine nuts and pine oil, and pungent black garlic. The combination of flavors was a revelation.

My slightly lighter option was wild sea bass served with sea bass veloute, black quinoa, and kale. Sea bass is plentiful in the Adriatic Sea, off the coast of Croatia, and it is regarded as the specialty of the Dalmatia region. The kale had just the right hint of bitterness, and at the sommelier's suggestion I paired the dish with a glass of Malvazija white wine.







There were four desserts on the menu, and honestly I could have chosen blind: I have no doubt that any one of them would have been superb. It was the mille-feuille which pipped the others to the post, though, because it intrigued me. This popular French patisserie (it's often called the Napoleon) is usually made with flaky layers of pastry and custard. I had a feeling that Ana and her colleagues would give the recipe a twist, however, and certainly they did.

Firstly, the pastry was made with buckwheat, which gave it a slightly nuttier taste. Instead of custard there was peanut cream, and above that a tonka bean foam. It was topped with caramelized quinces, which had a slightly citrusy tang. I am hard-pressed to remember when I last enjoyed a meal so much.

I sat for a while after my meal, chatting and soaking up the atmosphere in Zinfandel's. Glancing around, I felt like an extra on a Hollywood film set, perhaps making one of those golden movies of the 1940s or '50s. That sense stayed with me as I left the restaurant, walked through the public areas of the hotel, and rode the elevator up to my room. In every space, the decor was elegant, glamorous, but somehow always on the right side of good taste, never too over the top. I slept incredibly well that night, lying back on the goose down pillows and dreaming of all those historic figures I might have met here during The Espanade's Golden Age.

[www.esplanade.hr](http://www.esplanade.hr)

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