

World's most amazing hotels: The 20 hotels that could change your life

Traveller



Hotel de Paris, Monaco

Have you noticed? A hotel is no longer content to be just a place to lay your hat. Whether a basic business property or a ritzy five star, it seems most hotels now promise to be the experience, rather than just a necessary adjunct to an overall travel experience. They promise to be "authentic", "bespoke", "local", "curated" and all manner of other buzz-word-type things designed to push our emotional buttons as they clamour for the lucrative millennial traveller dollar.

But as the old adage goes, you've either got it or you haven't. You can throw as much quirky artwork and mid-century furniture at a place as you like, but if it doesn't have its own character, we won't connect to it.

That's why, with this list from Traveller's most hospitality-savvy writers, we celebrate the hotel that moves us. It could be a luxury place of uninterrupted tradition; a property where history has happened; a small inn that has real meaning to a local community or a sparkling modern edifice of outstanding architecture.



Hotel Amankora, Bhutan. *Photo: Supplied*

A stay at such a place is indeed, an experience, one that can enliven, enlighten and inspire. These places have genuine personality – soul, even – and in ways big and small they can change our lives.

1. THE CONNAUGHT, LONDON

For most of us, real life very seldom matches five-star hotel life. That's what makes a stay at a really fine hostelry so therapeutic. It reminds us of the sheer pleasure to be found in the finer things. The curving confection on Mayfair's Carlos Place may have undergone renovation since the time when Cary Grant stayed regularly, but its calling cards of opulence, tradition and service remain. It's also remarkably egalitarian – within parameters. Gwyneth may be in the room next door, but if you can afford yours, the doorman, butler and barman will be just as attentive to you. See the-

2. HOTEL DE PARIS, MONTE CARLO, MONACO

Few hotels provide quite the sense of place or the level of historical influence as this grande dame of Monaco hotels. That makes it not just a hotel, but a destination in its own right. Opened in 1864 and intimately connected with Monte Carlo's casino, the Hotel de Paris helped create affluent, modern-day, glamorous Monaco out of an impoverished, inconsequential corner of the Mediterranean. It remains unrepentantly luxurious, draped in marble, gilded stucco and crystal chandeliers, with one of the world's best spas (Thermes Marins) and one of the world's best restaurants (Le Louis XV under fabled chef Alain Ducasse).

3. ANTICO BORGIO, TABIANO CASTELLO, ITALY

When a hotel isn't just a concrete box but an entire medieval village, it provides much more inspiration than most. Whether you're perched in a tower or taking up an entire converted farmhouse here in the gorgeous north Italian countryside 40 kilometres west of Parma, you're surrounded by a thousand years of history in the shadow of a hilltop castle.

4. CHEONG FATT TZE MANSION, PENANG, MALAYSIA

A hotel inspires when it feels very much part of its surrounding culture. Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion is an impressive, blue-painted Chinese-style courtyard mansion, once the home of a prominent 19th-century tycoon. Guests can delve into the building's history, architecture and former occupants through daily in-house tours, and staying here contributes to the conservation of this fabulous building. S



Hotel Metropol, Moscow. *Photo: Shutterstock*

5. WICKANINNISH INN, TOFINO, CANADA

When a hotel offers a novel idea, magic can happen. This fine Relais & Châteaux property sits on a wild corner of Vancouver Island, and encourages guests to visit in winter's depths, when the coast is lashed by gale-force winds. It has made storm watching the reason beachgoers here hope for bad weather, with spectacular and invigorating results.

6. FAIRMONT BANFF SPRINGS, CANADA



Hotel Antico Borgo, Italy. *Photo: Supplied*

Lost the Christmas spirit? Get thee here, stat. This opulent 1888 Scottish baronial castle-style sprawling hotel high in the Canadian Rockies takes Christmas next level, starting on your arrival in the cavernous lobby with an enormous sparkly tree and carol singers. Once you've had a sleigh ride in the

vast, snowy grounds where wildlife roam, helped build a gingerbread house and drunk your bodyweight in eggnog while admiring the prettiest of white Christmas views, your inner Grinch will be banished for good. Guaranteed.

7. TAJ LAKE PALACE, UDAIPUR, INDIA

Where else in the world can you sleep in a floating palace? From the opulent suites and the pool pavilion with its mirror-mosaic walls, to the floating Jiva Spa boat moored off the jetty and nightly performances by Rajasthani musicians and dancers in the courtyard, the Palace is the perfect spot in which to stoke your maharaja fantasies.



Raffles Hotel, Singapore.

8. CHINZOMBO SAFARI CAMP, ZAMBIA

Chinzombo might be Africa's most sophisticated safari experience. Spread over 60 acres on the banks of the Luangwa River, it offers six impeccably styled canvas-walled villas with freestanding tubs, private pools and outdoor lounge areas from where you can watch hippos lumber by. But their outstanding guides, who can track down the most elusive wildlife, including wild dogs and leopards, are the real clincher.



Wickaninnish Inn sits on a wild corner of

Vancouver Island and is the place to be for storm watching. *Photo: Supplied*

Ningaloo reef out front, wild bush out back and 16 eco-luxe tents scattered between, Sal Salis is the ultimate glamping experience and the only camp set inside UNESCO-protected Cape Range National Park. It's about the activities – from hikes through red-walled gorges to swimming with whale sharks – but also the private beach, the decadent three-course feasts, the vigilant sustainability approach and the fact that it's completely off-grid. \$750 a night all-inclusive.

10. RAFFLES SINGAPORE

This was the first really posh hotel I ever stayed in, back in the 1980s, and once implanted, the taste for grand colonial hotels is hard to shake. In its latest mutation the birthday-cake hotel conveys a sense of aristocratic privilege, underlined when legendary Sikh doorman Narajan Singh opens the front door. History is everywhere. Conrad, Kipling and Coward all stayed and Singapore's last tiger was shot under the bar. How many hotels can beat that?

11. UXUA, TRANCOSO, BRAZIL

A remote Brazilian fishing village transformed into a jet-set hideaway, Trancoso is not your average destination, so it is fitting that the hotel that put Trancoso on the map is not your average hotel. The brainchild of the former creative director of the Diesel fashion label, this remarkable property consists of luxuriously refurbished village houses that invite you to become part of the community.

12. THE SIAM, BANGKOK

Most of Bangkok's hotels soar sky-high; The Siam, however, offers a different perspective on the city. This low-slung boutique property, set by the river in the historic Dusit area, lets you explore a very different side of the city, where shopping malls are replaced by shophouses, and neighbourhood cafes take the place of buzzing bars.

13. HOTEL MONASTERIO, CUSCO, PERU

Perched high in the Andes, the Peruvian city of Cusco – Inca capital turned conquistador stronghold – is a place rich in history. Guests at Hotel Monasterio, a 16th century seminary built on the site of an Incan palace, can breathe in the history as they sleep – along with the extra oxygen pumped in to counteract the effects of altitude. From its atmospheric bar to the centuries-old frescoes, this hotel is packed full of treasures.

14. AMANKORA BHUTAN

Take one Buddhist kingdom, add one of the world's most luxurious hotel groups, and you have an experience that marries authenticity with pure indulgence. Guests at this Aman property work their way around a circuit of luxury lodges. After a day spent exploring Bhutan's temples, villages and valleys, they head home to enjoy treats such as a candlelit dinner in a farm shed, or a fortune-telling session with a Buddhist monk.

15. COMO SHAMBHALA, BALI, INDONESIA

If you want your body and mind transformed with wholesomeness and biodynamic goodness, re-engineered by Ayurvedic doctors, yoga sessions, massages, meditation, pranayamic breathing and aqua therapy, it doesn't get any better than this silky, sublime wellness retreat. Mother nature comes to the party with a setting beyond words, the pavilions and guest villas set among lawns and lotus ponds on the cusp of the jungly Ayung River Valley outside Ubud.

16. AYERS ROCK RESORT, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA

More than just a chance to explore one of Australia's most memorable landscapes, a stay at this resort – which offers accommodation for every budget – gives guests a crash course in all things Indigenous. The in-depth program of daily activities, featuring everything from dance performances to bush tucker tours, dot painting workshops and astronomical sessions, is astonishing. Best of all, most of the activities don't cost a thing.

17. VANA MALSI ESTATE, INDIA

Buried in sal forest in the foothills of India's Himalayas, Vana Malsi is a five-star ashram with you as the object of veneration. Vana's multi-disciplinary approach to wellness combines Ayurvedic treatments, traditional Chinese and Tibetan therapies and chronobiotics, regulating diet and activity to the natural body clock. It's a chance to remake your life with therapies as old as the Bhagavad Gita, with expert tuition to light your way and a silky cocoon as your cell.

18. RAFFLES GRAND HOTEL D'ANGKOR, SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

Cambodia's recent history reads like a searing nightmare, and while it was at times front and centre of the action, the Grand Hotel d'Angkor provides an antidote, a phoenix risen from the shadowlands. Opened in 1932, the art deco hotel was the only place to stay for Europeans curious to see the rediscovered treasures of Angkor. During the Pol Pot period the Grand was occupied by Khmer Rouge who used it as a prison. It was later used by the invading Vietnamese army. Today, lavishly recast by the Raffles group, the hotel has real style – overhead fans, dark timber floors, expensive bathroom fittings and minimalist decor.

19. TREEHOTEL, LULEA, SWEDEN

Located in northern Sweden, the Treehotel is an example of what you can achieve with a little imagination. Originally just a small B&B run by Kent and Britta Lindvall, a chance meeting with some of

the country's top architects saw the empty land at the back of the couple's property transformed into a series of spectacular treehouse villas. It's now world famous.

20. MASHPI LODGE, ECUADOR

Deep in Ecuador's cloud forest, down a muddy, bumpy, single-lane road, is a hotel that feels more like a modern art gallery. Mostly built in the capital, Quito, and then transported to the forest piece by piece, Mashpi Lodge makes the jungle accessible to those who don't want to give up creature comforts. You can explore the surrounding forest, waterfalls and diverse wildlife knowing you'll have a comfortable bed and fine dining meal waiting for you at day's end.

FIVE HOTELS THAT CHANGED HISTORY

WHERE Mira Hotel, Hong Kong, China

WHAT One of the biggest intelligence leaks in history

TELL ME MORE In 2013, former NSA contractor Edward Snowden spent three weeks holed up in this designer hotel after releasing classified information about the US government's surveillance programs. His next accommodations were decidedly less glamorous: he spent several weeks hiding in Hong Kong's slums. See themirahotel.com

WHERE Watergate, Washington DC, US

WHAT The break-in that led to the resignation of a president

TELL ME MORE When five men working for Richard Nixon's re-election committee were caught red-handed bugging the Democratic HQ – located in the office section of this hotel-office complex – the investigation led to a series of revelations that ultimately led to the President stepping down. See thewatergatehotel.com

WHERE Hotel Metropol, Moscow, Russia

WHAT A revolutionary government takes charge

TELL ME MORE After the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks moved the government from St Petersburg to Moscow, and this luxury hotel was requisitioned to act as the new government's headquarters. Today's guests sleep under the same roof where Lenin once gave speeches urging his comrades on in their revolutionary endeavours. See metropol-moscow.ru/en

WHERE Hotel Kurrajong, Canberra, Australia

WHAT The home of a prime minister

TELL ME MORE Prime Minister Ben Chifley's living quarters, 1940-51. One of the oldest buildings in Canberra, Hotel Kurrajong originally served as living quarters for parliamentarians and public servants. Labor luminary Ben Chifley lived here for 11 years, including during his four years as Prime Minister (1945-49). His favourite armchair is still on display. See hotelkurrajong.com.au

WHERE Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong, China

WHAT The humiliation of an empire

TELL ME MORE Japanese troops conquered what was then the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. They chose the venue for the signing of the surrender documents carefully: the grand Peninsula Hotel, which had until then been a symbol of British pride. See hongkong.peninsula.com

FIVE HOTELS THAT CHANGED THE RULES

CLUB BALI HAI, MOOREA

French Polynesia has more five-star resorts than you could poke a stick at, and most of them boast rows of overwater bungalows, considered the creme de la creme of luxury retreats. Every trend has to begin somewhere, of course, and this Moorea property was the first to come up with the idea in 1967. clubbalihai.com

MORGANS HOTEL, NEW YORK

When nightclub impresario Ian Schrager brought his high-design ethos to the hotel world in 1984, he gave the hotel industry a much-needed injection of cool. Celebrities flocked to the property, launching a new wave of glammed-up boutique hotels. See morganshotelgroup.com

BURJ AL-ARAB, DUBAI, UATravel

When it launched in 1999, everything about the Burj al-Arab was different: its billowing silhouette, its over-the-top luxury (including full-size sets of Hermes toiletries in the bathroom), even its location in a then little-known destination called Dubai. jumeirah.com/en/hotels-resorts/dubai/burj-al-arab

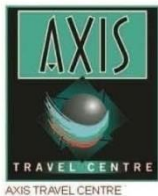
POD 51, NEW YORK

The micro-hotel went mainstream with the launch of this stylish hotel which cut prices by offering tiny rooms; and we do mean tiny, starting at just seven square metres. (In many cases, bathrooms are shared.) Thanks to the inviting public areas – and did we mention the low prices? – the concept took with guests, and now has imitators right around the world. See thepodhotel.com/pod-51

EMIRATES ONE & ONLY WOLGAN VALLEY, NSW

When it launched in 2009, this resort – set in a 2800-hectare wildlife reserve – was the first in the world to achieve internationally accredited carbon-neutral certification. In addition to its conservation program, the resort boasts solar panels, heat exchange technology and rainwater collection. See oneandonlyresorts.com

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