

Condé Nast Traveler

SPECIAL REPORT
THE WAR FOR
THE SOUL
OF ALASKA

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

MAY 2012

HOT LIST

121
BEST
NEW
HOTELS
IN THE
WORLD

(INCLUDING 49 UNDER \$300!)

PLUS...

**20 SIZZLING
RESTAURANTS**

**35 SYBARITIC
SPAS**



AND...

HIPPEST LONDON

(Edgy Pubs, Clubs, Art, Food)

ULTIMATE NEW ZEALAND

(Dream Lodges, Meals, Adventures)

TANTALIZING TANGIER

(Cool Shops, Souks, Scenes)

A TRUE DESERT BLOOM: The brand-new Saguaro hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona.

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16th Annual

Hot List

2012

The Year's 121 Top New Hotels

Including 49 under \$300 a night*

WE ALL KNOW what makes a good hotel good: impeccable service, excellent food, beautiful grounds (and let's not forget a bed so plush that you dread going home). But for all of us here at *Condé Nast Traveler*, a good hotel is more than just a blissful temporary roost: It's also a bellwether, an important peek at what you, our readers, are *really* looking for in your travels, not to mention in the very destinations you're traveling to.

This year's Hot List, our sixteenth, includes 121 properties in 49 countries, with three countries making their debut: Kuwait (with the

Hotel Missoni), Montenegro (Aman Sveti Stefan), and Serbia (Square Nine). Best represented on the list? The United States leads the pack with 12 entrants, followed by the United Kingdom, China, and Italy (all with 7 apiece). But as revealing as these numbers are, they don't tell the whole story. The *real* stuff we love sharing with you is our 41 reviewers' enthusiasm for these properties, which, although they range wildly in size, price, and style—from the four-tent Sanctuary Zebra Plains camp in Zambia (the smallest hotel on the list) to the \$3,878-a-night all-inclusive Abu Camp in Botswana (the most expensive)—all have one thing in common: We never wanted to leave. We hope you won't either.

PLUS

Hot Spas

35 blissful new places to relax and recharge

P. 129

Hot Tables

5 cities. 21 superstar chefs. 20 dishes you need to try

P. 139

ing hills and lakes. Brazilian architect Isay Weinfeld plays with texture and scale, using acres of brick, bleached wood, and giant slabs of granite and softening angles with tufted headboards and wicker baskets. The lobby—a tableau of mid-century Danish armchairs, abstract wool tapestries, and twin wood-burning stoves—feels more like Gstaad 1962 than Brazil 2012. **The experience:** Surrounded by farmland, Boa Vista may lack the sizzle of Fasano's urban nests, but it has all of the flash. Moneyed Paulistas chopper in (the estate has six helipads) to spend weekends playing rounds on the two 18-hole golf courses, riding horses, and lounging by the gorgeous 164-foot-long pool. There's a petting zoo for the kiddies, many of whom have nannies in tow. A gym and spa are scheduled to open later this month (meanwhile, a lone treadmill sits, curiously, in a hilltop tent). **If only...** the food lived up to the Fasano reputation. **The room to book:** A two-story suite with an outdoor fireplace (55-15-3261-9900; fasano.com.br; doubles from \$690). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

CAMBODIA

UNDER \$300 **The Plantation, Phnom Penh**
 📞 855-0-23-21-51-51; theplantation.asia; doubles from \$60. 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

CANADA

Ritz-Carlton Toronto, Toronto
 📞 **The specs:** A glass tower cantilevered over a plaza on the edge of downtown's business core. Fifteen floors of 267 rooms and suites are topped by 30 stories of luxury condos. **The look:** Dressed-up Canadiana—well-lit spaces in neutral earth tones, plenty of glossy wood, and a trove of Canadian landscape art bring warmth to a building ultimately designed to sell condos. Rooms are done in a subdued gold palate and grass cloth wallpaper; bathrooms are wall-to-wall creamy white marble. **The experience:** The hotel draws weekday suits, younger couples on spa retreats, and weekenders from neighboring cities in for a game (Toronto's three major league teams play within punting distance) or a show (the theater district is a block away). On weekends, the crowd kicks up a fun ruckus at TOCA, a steak-focused locavore restaurant and bar, but the less-trafficked cocktail bar Deq is a better bet; its patio features a fire pit in summer, and the cozy fireplace nook is the nicest spot in the hotel. **If only...** the giant revolving door at the entrance weren't constantly spinning in winter, drawing freezing air into the front half of the beautiful lobby. **The room to book:** A lakeview room on floors 18 to 20—any lower and the water is partially obscured by a wall of condos (416-585-2500; ritzcarlton.com; doubles from \$477). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

Rosewood Hotel Georgia, Vancouver
 📞 604-682-5566; rosewoodhotels.com/en/hotelgeorgia; doubles from \$353. 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

CARIBBEAN

Hotel Chocolat, St. Lucia
 📞 **The specs:** Fourteen sleek cottages on a 140-acre plantation that's been harvesting cocoa since the 1700s. **The look:** The estate is owned by Hotel Chocolat, the U.K. confectioner, and the buildings' dark-wood floors and whitewashed walls are reminiscent of the brand's elegant stores. Instead of colorful Caribbean kitsch there's an understated luxury with a hint of sex appeal. **The experience:** Visitors come here less for a beach holiday than to immerse themselves in a world of chocolate. You can harvest cocoa in the morning, temper it into chocolate in the afternoon, then kick back with a poolside martini infused with the sweet pulp of just-picked pods. The "Full Cacao" spa treatment includes exfoliation with homegrown nibs, and the open-air restaurant infuses the estate's bounty into savory dishes (cacao-marinated snapper; yellow-fin tuna with cacao pesto). Rooms come with eco-friendly REN products (in keeping with the plantation's "engaged ethics" policy), and the open-sky shower bathes you in mountain mist. **If only...** the beach were closer—it's a bit of a trek down the mountain, but the hotel will provide transportation. **The room to book:** Any of the Cocoa Pods Luxe, with private verandas and views of the sea and the Pitons (800-757-7132; thehotelchocolat.com; doubles from \$475). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

Petit St. Vincent, St. Vincent and the Grenadines
 📞 **The specs:** A revamped late-1960s resort with 22 cottages on a 115-acre private island in the Gren-

Hot Hotels

THE HOTTIES

THOSE LITTLE DETAILS THAT ELEVATE OUR FAVORITE NEW HOTELS FROM LIKABLE... TO LOVABLE. ON THESE PAGES, THE 18 HOTTIES OF 2012



1/18 Best monogrammed treat
 The scrumptious cookies (with an A for Armani) that are a welcome gift from the pastry chef at the Armani Hotel Milano.

2/18 Best signature cocktail
 The peach Bellini, invented by Giuseppe Cipriani at Harry's Bar in Venice—back when Ernest and crowd drank there—and made to perfection at the family-owned Mr. C in L.A.

3/18 Most touching tribute to the lost art of letter-writing
 The star-sprinkled black stationery at Portugal's L'And, and the pencil that leaves silvery wisps upon it.

4/18 Best airport transfer
 The Maserati in which the Hotel Missoni Kuwait delivers you to its doorstep—you'll feel like an Italian movie star.

5/18 Best rubber bath toy
 The sea-turtle mascot that, endangered in its native habitat, makes its home in the freestanding tubs of the Jumeirah at Etihad Towers in Abu Dhabi.

adines, 20 minutes by boat from Union Island. **The look:** Robinson Crusoe with deep pockets—local stone (called bluebitch... go figure) and wood, an open-air beach bar with a thatched roof, and a view over the reef that's so breathtaking it could be a screen saver. **The experience:** Every fantasy you've ever had about a desert island—talcum-powder sand, swaying palms, frangipani, hummingbirds, and just the right amount of isolation. If you need room service, raise the yellow flag on the driftwood pole outside your door (and leave your order in the bamboo tube); if you feel like being left alone, raise the red one. Some of your fellow guests will likely be European—Italian recidivists who've been coming here for 30 years, nice bourgeois French families, and a sprinkling of Brits. Last but never least, the food is sensational—try the lobster-and-papaya salad or the creole crab backs at the beach bar. **If only...** the main bar/restaurant weren't overwhelmed by that local stone, which gives it an unfortunate Alcatraz look. **The room to book:** No. 5, for its total isolation and incredible view over the Atlantic side of the island (954-963-7401; petitstvincent.com; doubles from \$1,100). 🍷 🍷 🍷

CHILE

Singular Patagonia, Puerto Bories
 📞 **The specs:** A 57-room hotel fashioned from a 1915 cold-storage plant near Puerto Natales, gateway to Torres del Paine National Park. Estancias once shipped their sheep to the frigorifico, where hundreds of workers prepared the meat, wool, and hide for export to Europe. **The look:** Governed by strict conservation rules, Chilean architect Pedro Kovacic left the brickwork and still-functioning machinery intact and installed a funicular that rises soundlessly from the hotel's en-



BLUE HEAVEN The Beach Villas at Six Senses Laamu come with private access to the sea. PAGE 108



GILDED AGE The gold-accented reception area at the Hotel Missoni in Kuwait. PAGE 106

rants, a piano bar, and a cigar lounge. **The look:** Unobtrusively neutral with accents in cardinal red and occasional nods to tradition (silk embroidery, mother-of-pearl inlay). The diverse artwork is commissioned through a program supporting contemporary Indian artists. At night, the reflecting pool is lit by torches that seem to float upon the water. **The experience:** Located in the wealthy commercial district of Gurgaon and close to both the international and domestic airports, the hotel is an excellent choice for business travelers. Butler service and spa treatments are round the clock, and the 24-hour fitness center has a 55-meter outdoor heated pool. Amaranta serves fresh crab and lobster from Indian waters. **If only...** the service were more consistent. **The room to book:** A fourth-floor Premier room for maximum privacy and an expansive view, or a Premier suite with a cantilevered private pool (91-124-245-1234; obero-hotels.com; doubles from \$640).

Leela Palace, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi
Hot Hot **The specs:** An opulent new 260-room high-rise in New Delhi's diplomatic district. **The look:** Over-the-top fin-de-siècle maharaja luxe—double-height reception rooms hung with massive chandeliers and filled with gilded furniture, the couches plumped with elaborately brocaded pillows, tables laden with vast urns of flowers, and piccolo variations of the same played through the foyers and guest rooms. **The experience:** The Leela cossets you with a practiced hand from the moment you step into the limo sent to meet you at the airport—chilled towels, ice water, a beguiling sitar sound track... of course. Rooms are appointed just so for cocooning comfort, afternoon tea is accompanied by a string trio, and dining options range broadly. Choose among ca-

sual international in glass-walled Qube, classic Indian in a formal setting at Jamavar, Japanese at Megu, and, at a branch of New York's Le Cirque, delicious French and Italian. **If only...** the limo were free across the board—standard-room guests must pay \$87 for the service. **The room to book:** Disregard the usual concerns about room size (all are large) and view (undistinguished from even the highest floors), and opt for one on the club floors for access to all-day luxe hospitality and complimentary airport transfers (91-113-933-1234; theleela.com; doubles from \$300).

INDONESIA

W Retreat & Spa, Seminyak, Bali
Hot Hot **The specs:** A five-story, 237-unit hotel built around a lagoon pool on one of the best stretches of the Seminyak shoreline; 76 rooms in the main wing face the sea. The prime location is within walking distance of many of the island's best new restaurants on booming Jalan Petitenget. **The look:** Futuristic—more South Beach than Balinese village—with an emphasis on natural woods and gray volcanic stone. The spa is an architectural tour de force, with rounded corners, recessed blue lighting, and the aura of an elegant spaceship. **The experience:** The opera begins with a magical overture: The wide, breezy lobby has a wall of hand-blown glass and takes in a panoramic view of the sea and Bali's rugged southern peninsula. Rooms come with Bose surround-sound home cinema, 350-thread-count W signature bedding, and walk-in showers that are big enough for two. Personal trainers are available at the well-equipped gym, and free yoga classes are led daily in the adjoining garden. The haute-Asian cuisine, though pricey, rivals Bali's best. North Americans and young

THE PREDICTORS



ARCHITECTURE

THE EXPERTS Peter Stamberg and Paul Aferiat, architects and interior designers, The Saguaro (see page 122).

SIGNATURE STYLE Brighter is better. With their punchy paint jobs and clever designs, the duo have transformed museums, showrooms, and Park Avenue princesses' pads.

WHAT'S NEXT IN HOTEL ARCHITECTURE

- **Color explosions** "Post-recession, there was an unrelenting tendency toward all things neutral: whites, beiges. But now that we're a little removed from it, it's time for optimism—and color. The standard hotel room has always been neutral, with color added through two pieces of art. Look for those proportions to change over the next year: Think bright rooms with black-and-white art instead."
- **Big bathrooms** "Your hotel room should be sybaritic. Nothing conveys that better than a freestanding tub, walk-in shower, and double sinks—even if the actual room is diminutive by comparison."
- **Lobbies for lounging** "Once, you almost felt like you needed permission to go into a hotel lobby. But the new crop of hotels are becoming so inclusive that they seem to almost welcome loiterers. Look for more long tables, accessible power strips, and indoor-outdoor aesthetics that encourage people to walk right in."

IRELAND

Ballyfin, County Laois

Hot Hot Hot **The specs:** A 15-room country retreat on a Georgian estate in Laois (pronounced *leash*), an hour and a half from Dublin. **The look:** Eighteenth-century elegance: oil paintings of the former lords and ladies of the house, tufted banquettes, glittery chandeliers, elaborate cornices and friezes, and a secret door that leads to a glass conservatory decorated with Greco-Roman statues. **The experience:** Situated on 600 emerald-green acres, Ballyfin embodies every Irish cliché, from a lake surrounded by mystical thickets to a mossy stone tower for climbing. Each guest is met by a crew of courtly butlers lined up on the manor steps, then whisked into a grand, golden dining room, where lunch (Irish salmon baked in a pastry crust, soup made with tomatoes from the garden out back) is served by a snappily dressed garçon. The afternoon might be filled with a long walk (parasol optional), or boating, fishing, or horseback riding on the grounds. And then there's cocktail hour, when fur-clad ladies take prim sips of proscoco in a library stocked with antique and modern tomes. The large rooms are period too, but not obnoxiously so: Their sitting areas might be adorned in 1700s-era lamps, plates, and paintings, with a floral valance above the bed, but there's also a bathroom stocked with Irish-seaweed-derived Voya amenities and a hidden mini-fridge filled with gratis yuppie treats (elderflower soda, anyone?). Fred Cordonnier's fancied country dishes, like phyllo-wrapped local pheasant with chicory and elderberries, are paired with wines from a well-stocked cellar. **If only...** the spa were better. It's just some treatment rooms, and the services are only okay. **The room to book:** The Lady Caroline Coote Room, where the lady of the manor once slept. It's done in beige and powder blue, with a rococo ceiling and sunlight streaming in through big easterly windows (353-5787-55866; ballyfin.com; doubles, \$1,240).

ISRAEL

UNDER \$300 Beresheet Hotel, Negev Desert

Hot Hot **The specs:** A 111-room new-build on the rim of the Ramon

MALDIVES

Anantara Kihavah Villas, Baa Atoll

🔥 The specs: Seventy-eight free-standing beach or overwater villas, each with its own infinity pool, on a private island of soft white sand. Recently named a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the atoll is 35 minutes by seaplane from Male. **The look:** Thatched-roof luxury, with the lagoon at center stage. **The experience:** The pampering begins with a “Welcome to Kihavah” foot massage by your personal butler and continues for the rest of your stay, as you and various sea creatures size up one another from interesting angles. The glass-walled restaurant is built below the ocean’s surface, so you can watch the multitudes of reef fish darting among the coral, and the glass-bottom bathtub in your overwater villa is fun if you don’t mind fish watching you lather up. Beach villas, all with king-size beds, have open-sky bathrooms better described as bathing pavilions—each has a bath and a shower that tumbles over a stone ledge. **If only...** the Maldives weren’t so far from everywhere; such niceties as the adopt-a-section man-made coral reef are no match for the carbon footprint left by your flight. **The room to book:** A Beach Pool Villa for the most privacy (960-660-1020; kihavah-maldives.anantara.com; villas from \$1,350).

Jumeirah Dhevanafushi, Gaafu Alifu Atoll

🔥 The specs: An all-suite resort 30 miles north of the equator, with 22 villas on a speck of an island and 16 overwater villas a half-mile offshore. **The look:** Haute tropical modern—teak-and-glass residences amid lush natural vegetation or above beautiful coral formations; ten-foot-wide beds; gargantuan marble baths with Hermès toiletries that will put customs officials on alert; private (swimmable!) pools. **The experience:** Amid whippers and barbed comments (who would even think of opening a property with overwater bungalows starting at \$7,500 a night in this economic climate?), Jumeirah has created the finest resort in the Maldives and one of the best in the world—for those with deep, deep pockets. The mantra about personalizing guests’ stays is taken seriously here. The phones in your spacious villa (the smallest is 2,200 square feet) have one pre-programmed extension: to your butler, whose job is to understand you better than Freud ever could. Did you enjoy the Sri Lankan ale you had at lunch? It will be in your “maxi bar” that evening. How about a meal, designed by you, under the stars on your own stretch of powdery white sand? He’ll orchestrate it. Ready for a dip? He’ll take you snorkeling around the coral reefs that encircle the island, with some of the best tropical-fish



WALK ON WOOD

A guest room at the New Hotel in Athens. PAGE 98

castellodivona.it; doubles, \$505). 📞 📧 📱 📺 📷 📹

First Hotel, Rome

🔥 39-06-4561-7070; thefirsthotel.com; doubles from \$450. 📞 📧 📱 📺 📷 📹

UNDER \$300 Villa Mosca, Alghero, Sardinia

🔥 39-079-957-7203; villamosca.it; doubles from \$214. 📞 📧 📱 📺 📷 📹

KENYA

Kicheche Valley Camp, Naboisho Conservancy

🔥 254-20-249-3569; kicheche.com; doubles, \$1,020, all-inclusive.

Hogmead, Nairobi

🔥 254-20-211-5453; hogmead.com; doubles from \$600. 📞 📧 📱 📺 📷 📹

KUWAIT

Hotel Missoni Kuwait, Salmiya

🔥 The specs: An oasis of 169 candy-colored rooms within an 18-floor tower overlooking Kuwait Bay. **The look:** Branded, from the towels to the espresso cups; even the bottom of the tiled swimming pool is striped like a Missoni blanket. Higher-grade rooms have furnishings by architectural heavyweights Eero Saarinen and Hans J. Wegner. **The experience:** The airport-hotel transfer by Maserati strokes your ego; tired muscles can get a warm-honey-and-date wrap followed by a massage at the Six Senses Spa. You may think from the gold, pink, and turquoise decor that you’ve checked into an Easter basket, but the Missoni is in fact an efficient business base. The Wi-Fi is free, the Bang & Olufsen TV has an iPad attachment, and the room-service menu lists some fetching Italian comfort foods (*malfatti* with ricotta and Aubergine; mascarpone ice cream). **If only...** the free minibar came with Campari. Alas, alcohol is illegal in Kuwait. **The room to book:** Corner suites ending in 15 have kitchens and a small balcony; request a high floor to escape noise

from the corniche (965-2577-0000; hotelmissoni.com; doubles from \$414). 📞 📧 📱 📺 📷 📹

LUXEMBOURG

UNDER \$300 Le Place d’Armes, Luxembourg City

🔥 The specs: A 28-room hotel with a landmark eighteenth-century house as its linchpin, located on Luxembourg City’s main square. Notable features include black-and-white marble baths with Penhalligon’s amenities, heated towel racks, and tub-and-shower combos at a time when European hotel renovations are pushing the bathtub toward extinction. **The look:** Neo-Baroque furniture and lots of mirrors add shimmer to sturdy bourgeois bones, the latter showing through in the oak banisters, Art Nouveau stained-glass windows, and exposed limed beams in some of the third-floor rooms. Result: a daringly modern renovation that takes a leaf from Philippe Starck’s Royal Monceau Raffles Paris. **The experience:** The diminutive capital of Luxembourg is one of the richest and most sophisticated towns in Europe—and a breeding ground for dull business-oriented chain hotels. With the opening of Le Place d’Armes, the city finally has the hotel it deserves. Staff are multilingual and eager to please, operating with French savoir faire and German efficiency (the housekeeping is immaculate). The inner courtyards and sidewalk terrace are great for drinks in fair weather, and the hotel lives up to Luxembourg’s gastronomic reputation with an excellent modern brasserie (steak tartare with homemade fries to die for) and a beautiful haute-cuisine restaurant with a seriously good French menu. **If only...** the vaulted stone cellars had been turned into a spa, but alas, they are conference rooms instead. **The room to book:** An under-the-eaves third-floor double (352-27-47-37; hotel-leplacardarmes.com; doubles from \$189). 📞 📧 📱 📺 📷 📹

THE PREDICTORS



HOTELS

THE EXPERT Ian Schrager, hotelier and owner of the Public, Chicago (see page 125).

SIGNATURE STYLE Evolving. The godfather of the hot-spot hotel (beginning with The Royalton in New York), Schrager was responsible for kicking off that whole Philippe Starck hotel aesthetic (moody lighting, edgy modern design), but once imitators popped up everywhere, he shifted toward a simpler, minimalist aesthetic.

WHAT’S NEXT IN HOTELS

- **Taste, not gimmicks** “People can’t get away with the generic copycats they’ve pulled off in the past. The new idea will be to try not to overwhelm the customer with ideas and ironic touches; they’ll want something straightforward, personal, authentic, simple, and pared down.”
- **Out with the flourishes** “No more coffee in fine bone china and elaborate room service menus. No more bellmen, either: If you’ve gotten your bag through the airport, you can likely get it up to your room without six guys—and the need to tip each one. Getting rid of the things people don’t care about can really lower the cost of a room.”
- **Functional, not fancy, bathrooms** “Marble fixtures don’t equal luxury anymore. What’s luxurious is at least three square feet on which you can spread out your toiletries.” —EIMEAR LYNCH