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JANUARY 14-15, 2023

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As the worst repercussions of Covid gradually diminish, hotel operators are observing a subtle shift in guests' preferences; a growing desire for cultural immersion and exchange; and for forging connections with locals, even in urban environments. Environmental sustainability has never been more important and demand for wellness retreats has increased. Throw in a craving for elevated, innovative design and you have the six key trends driving hotel operators in 2023.

CLEAN AND GREEN

Eco-awareness is being addressed with greater urgency, right down to small operational details such as replacing little plastic bottles of shampoo with large refillable vessels. Six Senses is pursuing a vigorous plastic-free policy sourcing compostable packaging, and even replacing cling film in the kitchens. The group provides drinking water in reusable vessels, eliminating 1.5 million plastic bottles annually.

In Australia, Crystalbrook Collection has developed a rigorous eco program, with the likes of room keys with chips embedded in recycled timber, coat hangers fashioned from compressed, recycled paper and zero-waste bathrooms – toothbrushes made from sugarcane and corn starch, and packaging lined with an organic additive that speeds up decomposition.

For many hotels and lodges, especially those in remote, environmentally sensitive areas, sustainability is a compelling consideration. Located in a UNESCO biosphere reserve, the new Villa Le Blanc Gran Melia on the Spanish island of Menorca is aiming to become a carbon-neutral prototype. Architect Alvaro Sans has led the renovation of an existing oceanfront resort using simple measures such as reinstating white tiles to reflect heat and installing water-efficient taps to more complex biomass boilers. Geothermal energy is used to power chillers, and grey water, including backwash from swimming pools, is recovered for garden irrigation.

Six Senses Svart, opening next year at the foot of the Svartisen glacier in Norway's Arctic Circle, plans to become a fully self-sufficient, net energy positive operation using solar panels and geothermal wells.

HOLISTIC HAVENS

A focus on health while travelling may have been trending for decades, but Covid has only increased demand for "wellness tourism" and more holistic spas. A simple manicure/pedicure no longer cuts the mustard. Mainstream hotels are joining established health retreats in taking a more medical approach to treatment menus while establishing lavish spa facilities that might include hammams, hot and cold plunge pools, designer relaxation lounges and health food cafes. Personal trainers, yoga gurus and special treatment menus for children are commonplace.

Even established spa experts such as Banyan Tree are diving deeper, last year adding a new-build property in Bali to its portfolio, plus launching a wellness focused sub-brand, Veya, in Phuket with personalised programs led by "certified multidisciplinary wellbeing hosts". A second Veya resort, Banyan Tree Veya Valle de Guadalupe, opens in October in Mexico with 30 pool villas and an onsite winery. (Detox, retox, detox? A virtuous circle.)

In most hotels, local remedies are celebrated. When pioneering Thai spa operator Chiva-Som recently unveiled the sprawling Zula Wellness Resort on Qatar's northern coast, offering a staggering 400 treatment options, the menu highlighted therapies adapted from traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine.

Urban resorts, increasingly popular in Asia, place wellness and fitness at the heart of operations. Four Seasons Hotel at Chao Phraya River in Bangkok has spared no expense on its enormous wellness centre, complete with an old-school barber and Muay Thai boxing ring. There's always something you've never heard of: sound therapy, personalised 3D-printed gummy vitamins, enthusiastic massages using terrifying-looking

THE GUEST LIST



Six accommodation trends sweeping the world

CHRISTINE McCABE



Villa Le Blanc Gran Melia on Menorca, above left; Mexico's Habitas San Miguel, above right; Canfranc Estacion in Spain, below



High in the Spanish Pyrenees an impressive, if somewhat ill-fated, railway station dubbed the 'Titanic of the mountains', will reopen in March as a hotel

bamboo rods. Very sensibly, sleep therapy is trending; Swedish bed manufacturer Hastens has opened a dedicated sleep spa hotel in Coimbra, Portugal.

HOUSE PARTIES

Sole-use villas are the new must-have for upscale retreats, providing a second layer of luxury for discerning clients. These retreats offer complete privacy with the full services of a five-star hotel and are perfect for families or small groups of friends. Robertson Lodges in New Zealand led the trend with its cosy Owner's Cottages. Even remote safari outfits sometimes offer a camp within a camp. Sanctuary Retreats Chief's Camp in Botswana and Olonana Lodge in Kenya both have the stand-alone Geoffrey Kent Suite, with its own chef, waiter, housekeeper, safari vehicle and guide.

At Hotel Esencia on Mexico's Caribbean Coast, owner Hollywood producer-turned-hotelier Kevin Wendle has just added a stand-alone "mansion" complete with three pools, a 20-seat cinema, underground speak-easy and private jungle entrance. Perfect for LA celebs on the lam.

In Australia, InterContinental Hayman Island Resort has hillside residences with the option of a private chef; Lizard Island offers The House set on a secluded peninsula with a separate cottage for the nanny or grandparents. When Southern Ocean Lodge reopens





Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som, Qatar, main; Villa Palladio in Jaipur, India, above; The House at Lizard Island, inset below

ive, if somewhat ill-fated, railway station, dubbed the “Titanic of the mountains”, will reopen in March as a 104-room hotel. Dating from 1928, the beaux-arts palace-style Canfranc International closed 53 years ago before falling into disrepair. A sensitive restoration delivers Canfranc Estacion, a Royal Hideaway Hotel; the old booking hall is now a reception, and historic rail carriages have been transformed into restaurants. Ideal for pilgrims trekking the Santiago de Compostela.

Paris’s grand Louvre Post Office, claiming a brilliant locale, has been reimagined into the elegant Madame Reve Hotel, with guestrooms offering views of the Eiffel Tower and Montmartre. Aman New York recently revitalised one of the city’s most beautiful edifices, the 1921 Crown Building on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street.

In Hobart at The Tasman, three incredible buildings, including the early 19th-century sandstone St Mary’s hospital, have been stitched together in a meticulous restoration. Sydney’s Porter House Hotel – MGallery, meantime, has revived a former tobacco factory and warehouse on Castlereagh Street into one of the city’s smartest new hotels.

Perhaps no upcycling project is more ambitious than the reimagining of London’s Old War Office on Whitehall by the Raffles group, scheduled to open in the northern spring. More than 1000 offices and about 4km of corridors, trodden by Winston Churchill and Ian Fleming, are being redeveloped by

the Hinduja Group at a reputed cost of £1.2bn (\$2.1bn). Not wishing to be outdone, Waldorf Astoria has plans to move into London’s Admiralty Arch in 2025. The iconic curved building at the end of The Mall will house 100 guestrooms. And watch for MANNA, a former sanatorium in Greece’s Peloponnese and British designer Jasper Conran’s Villa Mabrouka, Yves Saint Laurent’s former cliff-top home in Tangier.

MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

Most big-name hotels have created or acquired “neighbourhood” brands constituting smaller hotels designed to provide more immediate and immersive connections with destinations. Examples include IHG’s Hotel Indigo (the Singapore iteration is a prime example), Accor’s 25 Hours and Aman’s little sister brand Janu, set to debut in Tokyo this year, with Montenegro and Saudi Arabia to follow in 2024 and 2025.

However, it’s the smaller and more flexible hotel groups leading the way. Life House was founded six years ago, ostensibly to provide software and management solutions for independent hoteliers, but soon began opening its own affordable properties in the US (Bali is coming soon). “Contextual hotels...locally rooted” is the mantra, encompassing generally vintage buildings with design-savvy interiors, from an early 19th-century inn in Nantucket to a 1920s mansion in Miami’s South Beach. Due in April is Life House Palm Springs, a 1965 motel refashioned to capture the desert city’s retro Hollywood glamour with 66 guestrooms and a groovy pool bar.

The forward-thinking Habitas group pops

up small-scale hotels in stunning locales using a modular construction method that minimises environmental impact. The company’s raison d’être is less about “bricks and mortar” and more to do with experiences and cultural immersion, whether in Namibia, Mexico or Morocco, even an Airstream glamping set-up in Saudi Arabia’s AlUla. Its newest outpost, Habitas San Miguel, 10 minutes from the UNESCO-listed San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, nestles among towering cacti and gnarly trees. (And watch for new hotels in Costa Rica and Bhutan.)

FANTASY LAND

Let’s call it the Wes Anderson factor, because who wouldn’t want to check in to the quirky director’s fictional Grand Budapest Hotel? Following Covid lockdowns and restrictions, travellers seem to be longing for a bit of old-fashioned glamour, for layer upon layer of detail, something Anderson does so brilliantly. Hotel designers are answering the call and one of the most lauded debuts of the past 12 months is as far from a minimalist pod as one can imagine. Passion project for the famous Italian hotelier De Santis family, the lavishly resorted 24-suite Passalacqua, on Lake Como’s western shore, delivered maximum glamour when it opened last June amid miles of marble, sparkling Venetian chandeliers and romantic frescoes.

Acclaimed designer Bill Bensley’s hotel projects nail the whimsical aesthetic brilliantly; Shinta Mani Wild in Cambodia’s South Cardamom wilderness transforms campaign tents, perched on boulders near a waterfall, into luxury suites, the lot overlaid with a Raiders of the Lost Ark sense of adventure.

The sometimes dour Scottish highland aesthetic has been reimagined at The Five Arms in the Cairngorms National Park by international art dealers Iwan and Manuela Wirth. Crammed with more than 12,000 works of art and curios (including a watercolour by Queen Victoria), daubed with hand-printed wall coverings and a mesmerising ceiling fresco by Chinese artist Zhang Enli, the hotel is as compelling as any Anderson film set.

Watch for Martin Brudnizki’s lively floral-ceilinged rooms at La Fantaisie in Paris’ 9th arrondissement, opening in the northern spring. In the village of Melides on Portugal’s Alentejo Coast, shoe designer Christian Louboutin will unveil 13 sumptuous suites at Vermelho. Think colourful tiles, frescoes, antique furniture and splashes of his signature red (vermelho is Portuguese for red).

The vibrant hue is also the motif at the recently opened Villa Palladio. Tucked into the Aravalli Hills 20 minutes by road from Jaipur in Rajasthan, it has just nine guestrooms adorned in chevron and candy stripes and marble floors. Hotel founder Italian-Swiss expat Barbara Miolini is well known for her magical Bar Palladio in Jaipur. Now we just need her to bring Wes Anderson’s Darjeeling Limited film to life for the perfect Indian sojourn.

on Kangaroo Island in November it will feature a new four-bedroom, stand-alone “ultra-premium” suite with a private terrace and pool. Luxury Lodges of Australia chairperson Penny Rafferty says “sole-use villas within lodges is the most significant trend” for the group. Kakadu’s Bamurru Plains will open the Jabiru Retreat in April.

UPCYCLING

Since the early 20th century, cash-strapped aristocrats have sold off stately piles too expensive to heat and run to be transformed into schools, nursing homes and hotels. As the 21st century rolls on, many splendid buildings – department stores, government offices, railway stations – have fallen out of step with modern day life but in step with savvy hotel developers.

There are railway stations and forgotten railway hotels. London’s St Pancras Renaissance, a Victorian architectural masterpiece adjoining the St Pancras terminus, closed in 1935 but was lavishly restored in 2011; the volume of the rooms is incredible, with corridors wide enough for two women in bulky hoop skirts to pass each other. The old ticket hall has become a restaurant.

High in the Spanish Pyrenees, an impress-





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