

THE CALEDONIAN, EDINBURGH

Why go? Ruggedly beautiful and easily walkable, Edinburgh is one of the UK's finest cities. And perched on the corner of Princes Street in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle, The Caledonian couldn't be better placed for taking in a broad sweep of this historic city. Ancient ramparts, department stores and boutiques are all within a short stroll of the hotel.

The good bits: This century-old former railway hotel has been renovated to bring the original features back to life – grand staircases, arched windows and frescoed walls – meshing them with contemporary artworks and mod-Scot furnishings. New additions include a Guerlain spa and a double helping of glam restaurants from the Michelin-starred Galvin brothers.

But: Wi-fi is sky-high: £14.99 for 24 hours.

Tip: Ask for a room on the fourth floor.

They're the same price as the others but have larger windows, higher ceilings and pretty thistle wallpaper.

Doubles from £180, B&B; 0131 222 8888, thecaledonianedinburgh.com

ST MORITZ, TREBETHERICK, CORNWALL

Why go? Pounding surf, long walks on custard-coloured sands (bring your wellies) and dramatic, wildflower-strewn cliffs – if you're looking for that classic Cornish escape, this stretch of coast ticks all the boxes. Plus, Rick Stein's gourmet empire in Padstow is just a 10-minute ferry-ride away.

The good bits: Enjoy sweeping views across the Camel estuary while lounging by the outdoor pool, unwind with an udderly delicious facial at the hip Cowshed Spa, then slide down huge leather sofas in the bar after sinking a

cocktail or three (try the Black Bellini – vodka, *crème de mure* and Prosecco).

But: If you're after intimate dining you're in the wrong place – the kitchen 'theatre' opens onto the restaurant, making it bright, brash and noisy.

Tip: Upgrade to a king (from £30 extra) and you'll get your own sweet beach hut by the pool thrown in.

Doubles from £105, B&B; 01208 862242, stmoritzhotel.co.uk

STRATTONS HOTEL, SWAFFHAM, NORFOLK

Why go? Swaffham is in the heart of the Brecks, a sleepy wilderness of heaths, woodlands and stately homes, tucked between The Fens and The Broads. Cycle an old Roman road, spot sparrowhawks, and castle-hop – all within minutes of the hotel. The Norfolk coast's half an hour by car, too.

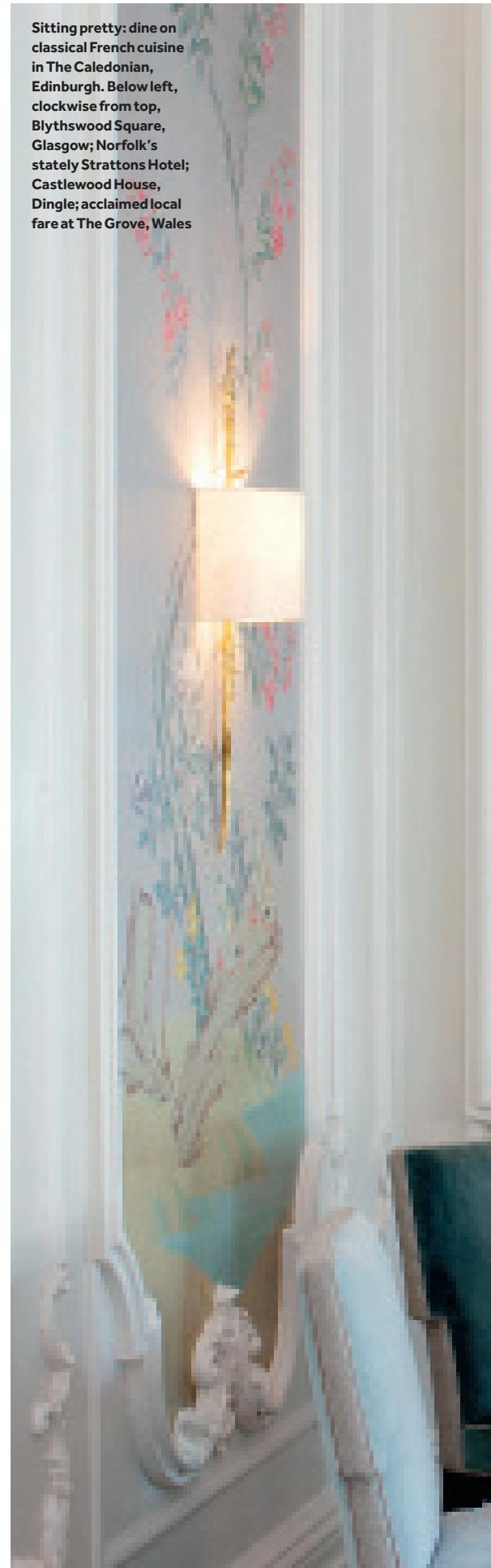
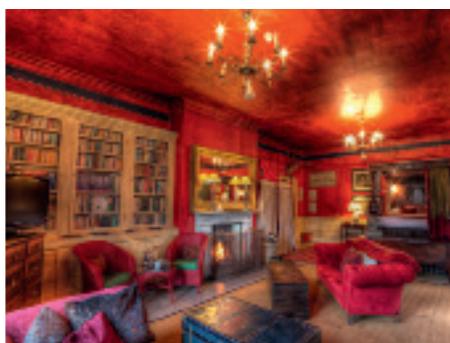
The good bits: Cherubic murals, a painting of bright-yellow trainers, the rainbow-coloured mosaic of a first-class stamp – each of the 14 guestrooms in this Palladian house and adjacent former printworks is utterly audacious. The lobby has a feathered chandelier and wood-burning fireplace and there's a modern British restaurant serving *Masterchef*-style concoctions, such as salt-hake Scotch egg with local salami and sardine ketchup. The hotel has a green streak running through it, too: wool insulation, local grub and water- and energy-saving measures.

But: You can't control the temperature in your room, so on cold days it can get chilly.

Tip: Come at the weekend to see the village of Swaffham at its bustling best. The Saturday market has been going for 800 years.

Doubles from £155, B&B; 01760 723845, strattons-hotel.co.uk >

Sitting pretty: dine on classical French cuisine in The Caledonian, Edinburgh. Below left, clockwise from top, Blythswood Square, Glasgow; Norfolk's stately Strattons Hotel; Castlewood House, Dingle; acclaimed local fare at The Grove, Wales





**BELLE TOUT LIGHTHOUSE,
NEAR EASTBOURNE, EAST SUSSEX**



Why go? Just eight kilometres from Eastbourne is a sun-drenched six-bedroom B&B in a thrillingly elemental setting. A converted lighthouse, atop a windy cliff within the South Downs National Park, it's well placed for bracing coastal walks and gloriously goose-bumpy sea swims.

The good bits: The two warm, cosy lounges are a storm-watcher's dream, with 360° coastal views. The ensuite bedrooms are

simply decorated in white, and bathed in light. It's a sociable place in general, with guests chatting over pints in the garden.

But: You need a car – it only serves breakfast and walking along the cliffs to the nearest restaurants is no picnic after dark.

Tip: Ask to stay in The Keeper's Loft room, with its super-snug gallery bed accessed by the original lighthouse ladder (sadly, this love-nest is off limits to those taller than six foot).

Doubles from £145, B&B; 01323 423185, belletout.co.uk



Cliff-hanger: the dramatic Belle Tout Lighthouse. Opposite, *Apero*, at London's Ampersand; with dishes such as sizzling prawns, the chef at Cornwall's St Moritz holds his own alongside local Michelin-star celeb chefs

WENSLEYDALE HEIFER, WEST WITTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE



Why go? Muddy boots and market towns, wood beams and roaring fires... This cosy country sleep is the bucolic Yorkshire Dales dream.

The good bits: The devil's in the detail here: its themed guestrooms are crammed with clever little touches – be it the free popcorn and hand-painted over-bed Audrey Hepburn in the 'Night at the Movies' room, or books on Venice and love poetry by the rolltop bath in the bright pink 'True Romantics' boudoir. And the seafood in the restaurant is sensational; we recommend the generous servings of fish pie.

But: The plumbing gets noisy when other guests take a morning shower.

Tip: Got a sweet tooth? Book the Chocolate Room, which has a drawer overflowing with complimentary Twix and Snickers.

Doubles from £120, B&B; 01969 622322, wensleydaleheifer.co.uk

CASTLEWOOD HOUSE, DINGLE, IRELAND



Why go? Perched on Ireland's far-westerly peninsula, Dingle is as charming as its name sounds, all arts and crafts and *proper* Irish boozers. The sea and mountain views, in particular, are corkers, and Castlewood has the best of both.

The good bits: You'll be greeted with tea and biscuits, before being shown to a spacious room, decked out in classic-comfy style with heavy curtains and brocade trimmings. Bathrooms are minimalist-modern, with skylights and posh potions. Breakfast in the sunny dining room is a soul-satisfying spread of homemade and local goodies.

But: If you're looking for a chic design-hotel, this ain't the place.

Tip: When you leave, help yourself to fresh takeaway tea and coffee from the porch.

Doubles from £76, B&B; 00 353 66 915 2788, castlewooddingle.com

THE AMPERSAND, LONDON



Why go? South Kensington is where Prince Harry comes to party and Chelsea 4WDs park up for an afternoon of culture (Natural History, Science and V&A museums); shopping (Harrods, Kings Road); and cafe-hopping (Pelham Street, Draycott Avenue). And it's all on The Ampersand's doorstep.

The good bits: Decor in this new hotel is fun and funky, from the winged lights soaring up the stairwell to the music-, botany- and astronomy-themed fabrics and artwork that play on the museum(s) connection. The hotel's restaurant is a welcome addition to South Ken's newly hip food scene: take tea in the salon-style Drawing Rooms, sip inventive cocktails (try the 'Loiseau de feu', made with



lemon vodka, pink grapefruit and Campari) and dine on Med-British tapas in the subterranean Apero restaurant.

But: You can hear a gentle rumble as Tube trains pass below the hotel – soothing to most, but bring earplugs if your sleep is easily disturbed.

Tip: Bag the table in Apero's snug – a sunlit, curtained alcove with peacock-blue banquettes – and order the signature beetroot risotto.

Doubles from £162, room only; 020 7589 5895, ampersandhotel.com

THE GROVE, NARBERTH, WALES



Why go? Pembrokeshire's gorgeous hills and coastal countryside make for hard-to-resist walking territory. The Grove itself, just outside pretty, gallery-filled Narberth, is set in vast swathes of oak and beechwoods and gardens snuggled up by the Preseli Hills.

The good bits: Scenery isn't the only reward for walkers; the 20-room Grove, until recently a derelict 17th-century mansion, now offers luxe country digs – antique tiled fireplaces, four-posters, cast-iron baths, REN goodies, Zoffany fabrics and Welsh art and antiques. Accomplished, acclaimed cooking makes the most of fantastic local ingredients – try the roast Preseli lamb.

But: There's nowhere else to eat within walking distance.

Tip: Ask head gardener David Butt to show you round the kitchen garden, where he grows baby broccoli leaves, Jerusalem-artichoke-like oca and umpteen other ingredients for resident chef Duncan Barham.

Doubles from £150, B&B; 01834 860915, thegrove-narberth.co.uk

BLYTHSWOOD SQUARE HOTEL, GLASGOW



Why go? Facing the only green square left in the city centre and just five blocks from Queen Street station, this elegant Georgian building

epitomises a Glasgow long gone – it was once the headquarters of a gentlemen's club that used to attract the cream of Caledonian commerce.

The good bits: The interiors, designed by Glasgow's trendy Graven Images using Harris Tweed furnishings, are inspired by the pinks and purples of Highland heather. Keeping it stylishly local are the distinguished whiskies on offer in its Salon Bar, such as Glengoyne and the lowland beauty, Auchentoshan.

But: It's perched on the top of a very steep hill, so be prepared for the climb – not one for those with a dodgy knee.

Tip: Try the spa's 'Turus' body wrap, which combines milk-thistle extracts and hand-harvested seaweed from the Outer Hebrides.

Doubles from £160, B&B; 0141 248 8888, blythswoodsquare.com

THE HAMBROUGH, VENTNOR, ISLE OF WIGHT



Why go? Ventnor blossomed as a resort during Victorian times, so the town has a stately feel to it. It's also smack on the Isle of Wight's 112km coastal path and has its own microclimate, which makes it sunnier than elsewhere. And then there's the grub...

The good bits: If an immaculately updated Victorian villa on a clifftop spot isn't enough, chef Robert Thompson is also a magician with local seafood. His 40-cover restaurant has held the island's only Michelin star since 2009, serving up the likes of Wight seafood *bouillabaisse* with a saffron *rouille*.

But: Avoid room 6 if you want a sea view (and you do). It faces the other way – to the St Boniface Downs behind Ventnor.

Tip: Right below the Hambrough is the Ventnor Haven Fishery, the island's best chippy and famed for lobster-and-chips in a tray.

Doubles from £150, B&B; 01983 856333, robert-thompson.com >

OHLA HOTEL, BARCELONA, SPAIN

Why go? You'd be pushed to find another sassy new(ish) design hotel so perfectly positioned: the classic Gothic Quarter on your doorstep, fashionable Eixample five minutes north, suave El Born across the road, and up-for-it Barceloneta beach a 20-minute stroll south.

The good bits: Tapping Barcelona's innate design-humour, the facade of this Neo-Classical hulk is peppered with bizarre glass 'eyeballs' on stalks. (Don't ask.) The rooftop pool-bar majors in giddy Mojitos, sipped as you laze in cabanas, and ooh what a view!

But: The interiors lack inspiration – its boxy-stone-tone-furniture look is a bit *Wallpaper** magazine circa 1999.

Tip: Ohla Boutique Bar is a first-class little watering hole, with a maestro shaker-maker in Giuseppe Santamaria, yet it never gets rammed.

Doubles from £172, B&B; 00 34 933 415050, ohlahotel.com



Best view in the house:
Ohla's rooftop pool



HOTEL DU CHATEAU, CARCASSONNE, FRANCE



Why go? You're right outside the gates of one of France's most-visited tourist sites: Carcassonne's faux-Medieval La Cité.

The good bits: Find some much-needed peace from the hordes as you relax in the pool – a rarity in Carcassonne's hotels. Or gaze at Rapunzel-tower views from the chill-out lounge on the hotel lawn. Inside, you're cocooned in richly coloured rooms with padded leather walls and vaulted ceilings.

But: It's not ideal if you've got pet allergies. Not everyone wants Eliot the basset hound slobbering over their knee at breakfast.

Tip: Three rooms have private terraces beside the swimming pool, and still come in below the £200 mark in low season.

Doubles from £164, room only; 00 33 4 6811 3838, hotelduchateau.net

BOSCOLO BUDAPEST, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY



Why go? You'll find the hotel on

Budapest's Elizabeth Boulevard, a short stroll from the cafes and opera house of Andrassy Street and the achingly hip 'ruin pubs' of the seventh district. In fact, the building itself, with its Italianate, Baroque and *fin-de-siècle* elements, has been a much-photographed city landmark since 1894.

The good bits: Caress the silk wallpaper, dim the lights of the Murano lamps and lie on the velvet cushions for a journey back in time to the doomed opulence of the Austro-Hungarian Belle Époque.

But: You'll feel at ease here if you aspire to a baronetcy, but otherwise over-deferent staff may make you cringe.

Tip: Although it's not regularly used for breakfast, ask to be served in the New York Café, and marvel at the gilded stuccos, twisted Baroque columns and ceiling frescoes; it's the closest you'll come to sipping coffee in your own private Versailles.

Doubles from £96, room only; 00 36 1 886 6111, budapest.boscolohotels.com

GIGLI D'ORO SUITES, ROME, ITALY



Why go? This *palazzo*, on a quiet, cobbled street behind Piazza Navona, is just steps from the action – literally. Wander around the Vatican, take an amble to the Colosseum, and then bob back to your hotel for a cuppa and a quick siesta between sightseeing.

The good bits: You get the intimacy of your own house here: there are just six rooms squeezed into this tight-angled 15th-century *palazzo*. The decor blends homeliness and minimalism, with flouncy gilt mirrors and carved fireplaces alongside a startling white palette and underlit beds. And the open bar is stocked with everything from Prosecco to Campari. >

But: The breakfast room is a tight squeeze (so don't eat too much).

Tip: Leave the laptop at home – each suite comes equipped with its own computer.
Doubles from £137, B&B; 00 39 06 6839 2055, gigidorosuite.com

EMELISSE HOTEL, FISKARDO, KEFALLONIA, GREECE

Why go? The hidden beaches, classy pastel facades and beguiling waterside restaurants of Fiskardo harbour ooze an old-world charm that few Greek-island towns can muster. Set on cliffs just beyond town, Emelisse is a secluded and decadent hideaway.

The good bits: Dive into the hotel showstopper, a two-tiered infinity pool with views across the Ionian Sea – then flop on the maroon loungers (more comfortable than many hotel beds).

When it gets too warm to stay outdoors, pad over cool slate floors in your room to kip on the carved four-poster bed. Still hot? Take a dip in your private pool, then slather on cooling herb-scented Korres toiletries.

But: In summer, the grounds draw wasps, making outdoor dining fraught with swatting.

Tip: Linger by the pool after everyone else has gone, to see the natural ballet of swallows diving low to scoop insects off the surface of the water.

Doubles from £142, B&B; 00 30 26740 41200, arthotel.gr

RIVA LOFTS, FLORENCE, ITALY

Why go? A five-minute tram-ride from Santa Maria Novella church, this riverside residential area lies agreeably upstream from the crowds drinking in the packed *piazas*.

The good bits: The nine lofts, owned by a local architect, combine modern lines, floating staircases and Carrara marble sinks (sculpted for each bathroom) with attractive original features, such as a door covered in carpenters' scribbles, and an antique theatre-trunk that's been turned into a wardrobe.

But: It's far from the action in town and the stylish staircases in most rooms are bannister-free – so the less sure-footed need to take extra care.

Tip: The best room for those on a budget is No. 3, a duplex Standard Studio with a bijou terrace overlooking the Arno.
Doubles from £180, B&B; 00 39 055 713 0272, rivalofts.com

LE BELLECHASSE, PARIS, FRANCE

Why go? With the Musée d'Orsay and the River Seine at the end of the street, as well as Saint Germain a short walk away, this is the Left Bank at its most convenient.

The good bits: The hotel is truly a dedicated follower of fashion: Christian Lacroix designed all 33 rooms – think clashing colours and



flamboyant designs (both geometric and naturalistic) covering the walls and ceilings. Each is wildly different from the next.

But: There's no restaurant, and the lobby-bar is titchy.

Tip: The really 'out there' rooms are some of the smallest, while the ones on the lofty top-floor are larger and brighter, if plainer.

Doubles from £139, room only; 00 33 1 4550 2231, lebelleshasse.com

HOUSE HOTEL NISANTASI, ISTANBUL, TURKEY



Why go? Mingle with Istanbul's glitterati in upmarket Nişantaşı: the hotel sits on a street lined with Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Cavalli shops, and is just a cab away from the city's sophisticated nightlife.

The good bits: Sleek black sideboards, Eames-style chairs, marble bathrooms and an in-room cocktail bar that could have come from Studio 54 in its heyday, this chic hotel seduces with its elegance and has enough design touches to keep its sandy-hued interiors the right side of corporate. A library of glossy coffee-table books is the backdrop to a fresh feast of a breakfast.

But: It's far from the bazaars and tourist sights of the Old Town.

Tip: Ask for a room on one of the top floors to get views of the breezy Bosphorus.
Doubles from £95, B&B; 00 90 212 224 5999, thehousehotel.com/the-house-hotel-nisantasi

CAN GALL, SANT JOAN, IBIZA

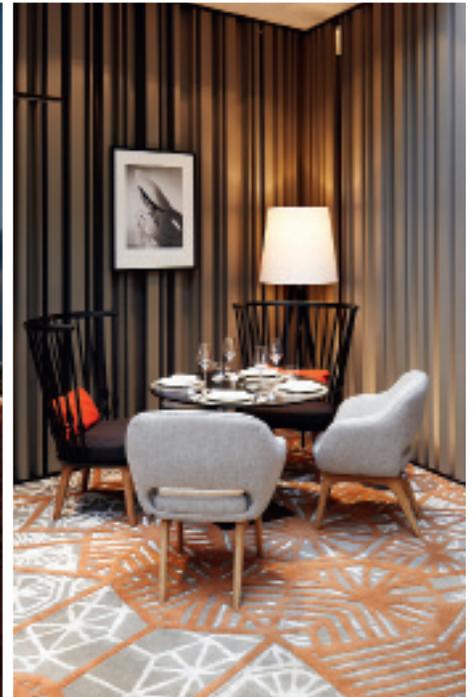
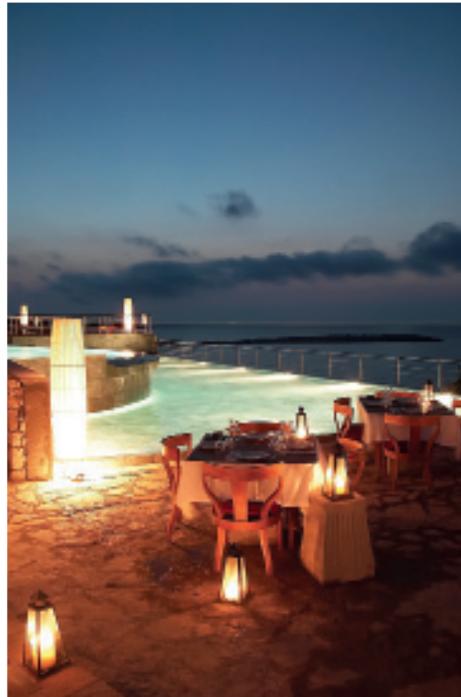


Why go? You're not here for the clubs, that's for certain. You've come to the north of the island for this Balearic's unpolished beauty: jutting cliffs, dirt-track roads and silvery almond groves. Can Gall is just off the C-733, home to countless sophisticated bars and some of Ibiza's best restaurants.

The good bits: Rooms are pretty, but not pretentious, so instead of Balinese carvings, you'll find beams and wrought-iron. And this is bona fide agrotourism, so eggs and juice are fresh from the farm. But it's the owner, Santi, who makes the place, tripping out from the kitchen with cold Cava and warm chorizo.

But: The night-time vibe is chilled rather than chic – you'll have to go out to wear heels.

Tip: Santi's an Ibicenco born-and-bred. If you can't get a table reservation, ask him to sort it.
Doubles from £117, B&B; 00 34 971 337031, agrocangall.com



DAS STUE, BERLIN, GERMANY



Why go? Never mind an olive with your Martini, how about an ostrich? Overlooking the zoo, by lovely Tiergarten park, this revamped '30s embassy is a stroll from Charlottenburg's swanky shops and restaurants.

The good bits: The elegance of the curved grey facade is matched by the minimalist interior – all bedrooms have dark-oak floors and those in the new extension have floor-to-ceiling windows, while the public areas are pimped up with unusual touches such as leather sculptures of African beasts. The two restaurants are headed up by Michelin-starred Spanish chef Paco Pérez, and there's a slick spa, too.

But: Those seeking the pulsating heart of 'alternative' Berlin are advised to book a graffiti'd base in boho Mitte instead.

Tip: Ask for one of the rooms facing the zoo and ogle the ostriches from your bed.

Doubles from £155, room only; 00 49 30 311 7220, das-stue.com

VANDER URBANI RESORT, LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA



Why go? Tucked in the heart of Ljubljana's Old Town, this hotel is just a few cobbles away from

the Ljubljanica River – its willow-strewn banks are lined with the city's most popular cafes, bars and restaurants.

The good bits: Housed in four Medieval buildings vamped up with design-led touches, the new Vander Urbani brings the capital into the boutique-hotel age. Bedrooms owe their style more to neighbouring Italy than ancient Slovenia: mirror-cube headboards, granite wet-rooms, silky Frette bedlinens. And on the roof is a pool – a rarity among the city's hotels – with views of the Old Town spires.

But: Bedrooms are split between 'small' and 'large', some of the former a little too much so.

Tip: Don't miss the twice-weekly yoga sessions, free for guests, in the rooftop studio. *Doubles from £110, B&B; 00 386 1200 9000, vanderhotel.com*

SIR ALBERT, AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS



Why go? Take a hammer to those kitschy Delftware-clog fantasies – De Pijp (meaning 'the pipe') is a smoking-hot, multicultural neighbourhood loved equally by hipsters and immigrants. National dishes flavour the air of the Albert Cuyp Market, aka 'the kitchen of Amsterdam'.

Shelf confidence: clockwise from left, Istanbul's sleek House Hotel Nişantaşı; flamboyant Le Bellechasse in Paris was designed by Christian Lacroix; the terrace yoga studio at Vander Urbani, Slovenia; Michelin-star quality eating at Berlin's Das Stue; the 'showstopping' pool at Emelisse Hotel in Kefallonia

The good bits: Everything about this 89-room former diamond factory is shiny and new, yet the place is anything but virginal. A ceramic installation entitled *JOJO the Sex Buddha* (consisting of hippos or bulbous body parts, depending on the eye of the beholder) flirts for attention in a lobby that's styled as the louche den of the fictional aristocrat Albert, and the 'goodie box' by the beds includes sex toys. There's also great sushi down at Izakaya, the intimate Asian kitchen bar helmed by a chef poached from London's Nobu.

But: This being Amsterdam, some of Sir Albert's immediate neighbours are practising the oldest profession – day and night.

Tip: Sir Albert is affiliated with of-the-moment burger joint The Butcher, just down the street. Ask the concierge and you might just be furnished with the password to the secret burger club.

Doubles from £154, B&B; 00 31 20 305 3020, siralberthotel.com >

At peace: get away from it all at Mauritius's Lakaz Chamarel, tucked away in the mountains on the south of the island; lighting-up time at the atmospheric Chedi in Oman



**SERENA BEACH & SPA,
MOMBASA, KENYA**



Why go? This fits the bill for an easy-peasy post-safari flop and comes with clean sands, transparent seas and an aquarium-worthy marine reserve. It's just 30 minutes from the airport and far enough from the city to feel like a proper retreat.

The good bits: Built in the style of a traditional Swahili village, complete with minaret and Omani-style fortress (which houses the ridiculously lavish spa), Serena's not your typical Indian Ocean clone. Wood-beamed ceilings,

Zanzibari chests, beds romantically swathed in mosquito netting and dusky-hued fabrics evoke the area's Swahili heritage. While away your days with free catamaran-sailing, windsurfing and perhaps a 'try dive' in the pool, then recover in the Persian rug-strewn lounge, downing strong Kenyan coffee from the gleaming gold samovar.

But: There are no private beaches in Kenya, so you'll encounter hawkers as you sunbathe.

Tip: At dinner in the hotel's seafood restaurant, ask for the table on the terrace by the ship's wheel for uninterrupted views out to sea.

Doubles from £119, half board; 00 254 20 284 2333, serenahotels.com/serenabeachhotel

**HAWKSMOOR HOUSE,
STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA**



Why go? World-class wine-tasting draws people from Cape Town, half an hour away, to this quaint village, surrounded by neat vineyards and lofty peaks.

The good bits: Rooms at this restored Cape Dutch homestead are antiques-filled, opening on to a cottage garden with views over endless vines. Look in on the farmhouse kitchen in the afternoon, when the aroma of baked cakes fills the air and hummingbirds hover at the window.

But: If you need to get online, ask for a room in

**UNDER
£100**



THE CHEDI, MUSCAT, OMAN

Why go? The Chedi is a little slice of whisper-quiet Asian minimalism injected into Muscat's modern beach suburb of Ghubra. Hidden down a long seaside avenue, it's pure tranquility in the heart of the city centre.

The good bits: There's no brash bling; you'll float instead through creamy white interiors, offset with polished hardwood, jet-black *objets d'art* and bowls of scented petals; then zone out in fountained courtyards; slide into plunge pools; and dine on oysters and delicious Arabic *mezze* from the open kitchen.

But: While the Indian Ocean is seconds away from your room, the hotel's private beach is a bit too narrow and gravelly to impress.

Tip: The lobby, swathed in burgundy and butterscotch silks, doubles as a lovely place to lounge, cradling a coffee tinged with cardamom.

Doubles from £196, B&B; 00 968 2452 4400, ghmhotels.com

the main house; the wi-fi is patchy in the annex.

Tip: Most guests whizz off to nearby wineries after breakfast, so save your tastings for the afternoon, and you'll have the secluded pool and rambling grounds to yourself all morning. Doubles from £75, B&B; 00 27 21 884 4815, hawksmoor.co.za

BARJEEL HERITAGE GUEST HOUSE, DUBAI



Why go? A short stroll from the attractions and souks, this charming area is old-Dubai, before crass developments devoured the desert.

The good bits: Opened in January 2013, this nine-room bling-free blast-from-the-past channels Marrakech riads (think coral stone walls, shuttered windows, woven palm-frond ceilings). Added to which are a few touches of pure Arabian fantasy: courtyard fountain, Bedouin tent, gold-and-red embroidered cushions and hand-carved furniture.

But: The advertised 'butler' is just a receptionist doubling up on room-service duties.

Tip: The Barjeel Suite is built spectacularly into one of the traditional Persian wind towers that kept Dubai cool before air-con arrived, and costs around £20 more.

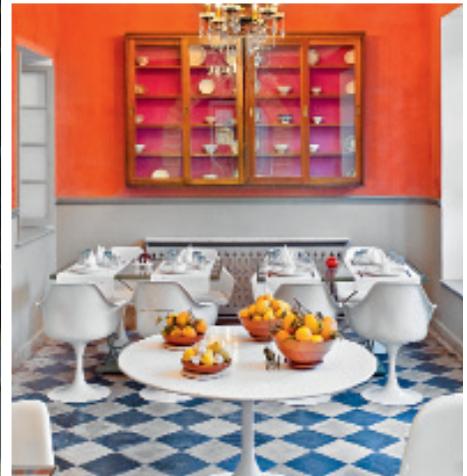
Doubles from £105, B&B; 00 971 4354 4424, barjeelguesthouse.com

DAR NANKA MAISON D'HOTEL, MARRAKECH



Why go? Walkable from the Medina, Dar Nanka feels a world apart from Marrakech's mercantile bustle. Just a quick weekend in town? Stay here, and draw breath.

The good bits: This is the boutique bolthole of your dreams, thanks to a decor that blends French-pomp and old-Maroc – picture rustic woods, wrought-iron four-posters, flowing >



cottons, chandeliers and a palm-hemmed pool. What's more, the service is second-to-none: the chef picks up on your likes and dislikes, and tailors the menu accordingly, while Nancy, the owner-manager, is always at hand, ready to light your log-fire and supply piles of downy blankets.

But: The exterior is rather inauspicious for a city of eye-pleasing architecture.

Tip: For privacy, nab the Pavilion Room (from £170), a stand-alone villa with a private pool and roof terrace.

Doubles from £122, B&B; 00 212 661 918052, darnanka.com

LAKAZ CHAMAREL, MAURITIUS



Why go? Tucked up in the mountains on the south of Mauritius, this place is a lifetime away from the five-star hubris of the north coast. Kestrels, pink pigeons and parrots circle above, thanks to the nearby Black River Gorges National Park, where you can hike through thick muddy forests, pick wild guavas and sample the island as it was before sugar cane.

The good bits: The lava-rock walls, terracotta-tiled floors and wrought-iron beds adorned with Indian trinkets collected by the hotel's owners make for a deeply relaxing ambience.

But: Tree frogs can be noisy at night, so bring your earplugs.

Tip: Wander around the local village of Chamarel. Take a basket and you can bring back fresh eggs, which the chefs will happily scramble for your breakfast.

Doubles from £158, half board; 00 230 483 5240, lakazchamarel.com

L'IGLESIA, EL JADIDA, MOROCCO



Why go? Visit the fortress of Magazan, feast on baked sardines and seafood *bastilla* in the old fortified port of El Jadida, and immerse yourself in the history of this fortified seaside town, 100km from Casablanca. Surfers are particularly well served: this stretch of coastline has some of the best waves in Morocco.

The good bits: A Spanish church and former consulate within the city's ancient ramparts were renovated to create 14 homely guestrooms, liberally sprinkled with mid-20th-century furniture, old radios, antique chandeliers and an impressive collection of mismatching mirrors.

But: In keeping with the building's former asceticism, rooms have no TVs, air-con, iPod docks or mini-fridges.

Tip: At drinks o'clock, nab a spot on the roof terrace next to the belfry. There's a 360° view of the port and ocean.

Doubles from £120, room only; 00 212 5237 3400, liglesia.com

Pathway to heaven: left, the Mchanga Beach Lodge is on the undeveloped side of Pwani Mchangani island in Zanzibar and so tranquil you'll likely have the beach to yourself; above, bedroom in Hawksmoor House, South Africa; eating area in L'Iglesia in Morocco

MCHANGA BEACH LODGE, PWANI MCHANGANI, ZANZIBAR



Why go? This northeastern slice of the romantic spice island, 45km from the capital, Stone Town, is nicely undeveloped. If you're looking for peace, you'll have its stunning, shell-scattered beach pretty much to yourself.

The good bits: Thanks to attentive-but-non-intrusive owners, the 10-room Mchanga Beach Lodge pulls off that tricky simplicity-comfort combo brilliantly. On the one hand, traditional thatched *makuti* roofs, cool whitewashed walls and so much soft sand your shoes won't need to leave your suitcase. On the other, romantically swagged four-posters, fantastic local food and cushioned rope beds by the sea and pool. Thoughtful touches – pre-breakfast tea trays, sarongs on loan, foot-slucing water jug outside your room – seal the deal.

But: The tranquillity could tip over into too-quiet; there's not much to see or do in the immediate vicinity.

Tip: Before your *konyagi*-and- tonic sundowner, borrow the *boules* set for a game in the gardens.

Doubles from £162, B&B; 00 255 773 569821, mchangabeachlodge.com >

