

# SPECIAL STAYS

From exquisite interiors to superb service and pristine pools, these heavenly hotels and luxury tented camps have it all.

Text Suzanne Stappie



Madrid, Spain

## THE MADRID EDITION

With his 21st Edition hotel for Marriott International, hotelier Ian Schrager – cofounder of New York's iconic nightclub Studio 54 and cocreator of the boutique hotel itself – has truly outdone himself.

Through a lavishly decorated 18th-century entrance, you enter an edgy, modern interior complete with a shell-shaped staircase. The 200 rooms are a vision in all-white, shimmering with shades of pearl and porcelain, cotton and coconut. Hotel guest or not, everyone looks to the rooftop restaurant, Oroya, for cocktails and Peruvian tapas. And did we mention the infinity pool? **Don't miss:** Fancy Sunday brunch with a twist? On-site restaurant Jerónimo serves authentic Mexican offerings such as *cochinita pibil* with Iberico pork and *merengue de rompo* with preserved peach.



Franschhoek, South Africa

**STERREKOPJE**

With its 11 private sanctuaries and suites, each a curiosity cabinet of carefully curated furnishings, this self-sustaining farm set in a planter's paradise offers languorous luxury and holistic healing. Prize-winning South African botanist Leon Kluge has turned 50 hectares of farmland into a treasure trove of olive groves and grasses, pot-bellied pigs and natural pools, with a chakra garden hidden in the midst of it all. A stay at Sterrekopje is an all-inclusive, transformative journey that promises regenerative rituals and treatments, and zero-waste, farm-to-table food. **Top tip:** The quarterly Wise Women Retreat is a celebration of femininity and sisterhood; ideal for solo travellers wishing to find their power within.

Ales Vystouzil (right), Anne Timmer (left)



AlUla, Saudi Arabia

**BANYAN TREE ALULA**

Set against a breathtaking backdrop of endless terracotta-coloured sand and robust rocks, the Banyan Tree AlUla sits impeccably camouflaged on the desert floor. Tents stretch out umbrella-style over elegant villas, providing private pools and tranquil terraces with shade and shelter. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer unparalleled views of the Ashar Valley, which can also be taken in from your terrace, where a fire pit provides cosiness and warmth at night. The resort gets a thumbs-up for eco-effort, too: the premises are plastic-free, the outdoor lighting runs on solar power and both restaurants source their products locally. **Top tip:** Attend a concert at the Maraya building in the Ashar Valley, which has hosted the likes of Alicia Keys and John Legend.

Okavango Delta,  
Botswana

### DUKE'S CAMP

Every dry season, when the Okavango Delta floods with crystal-clear highland rainwater, it becomes a playground for hundreds of thousands of large mammals, such as lions, rhinoceroses and elephants. Here, pitched on wooden decks, you'll find the luxury safari tents of Duke's Camp that feature all-Persian rugs, poufs and paisley-printed drapes. With a communal tent for cocktails and cakes, a plunge pool to cool the senses and feathery duvets for the cool African nights, this is the ultimate camping experience for luxury lovers.

**Top tip:** Experience the rare beauty of the Delta's wildlife in a mokoro, a traditional dugout canoe. Safaris don't get more serene than this.



Jaipur, India

**VILLA PALLADIO**

Just 16km outside the northern Indian city of Jaipur, the markets, motorcycles and neon signs make way for the serenity and silence of boutique hotel Villa Palladio. Part grand hotel, part haveli mansion, with plenty of Jaipur colours and Rajasthani architecture thrown in, the hotel is a nine-room oasis complete with a palm-fringed pool, manicured garden and yoga room. Every surface has been hand-painted, stamped or embroidered with elaborate patterns in red, white and pink. Walls and ceilings, sofas, even bed linen are embellished, coming together in unlikely yet perfect, harmony. **Don't miss:** Seasonal produce, gathered each day from the villa's own organic gardens, is transformed into delicious meals and served on the veranda.



Villa Palladio Jaipur (left), Afrym Studio (right)



Tulum, Mexico

**LA VALISE**

White powdery beaches on one side, lush green jungle on the other, and in between, striking thatched-roofed, palapa-style cottages. They belong to La Valise, a heavenly hideaway on the enchanting Caribbean Sea. The spacious suites are adorned with local art and all-natural, custom-made furniture, while the beachfront master suite has a sensational secret: a king-size bed on wheels that can be rolled out onto the terrace for a sleep under the stars. While La Valise radiates luxury, it strives to minimise its impact on Tulum's ecosystem: turtle-friendly night lights grace the beachfront, single-use plastics are banned and the complimentary sunscreen is reef-safe. **Top tip:** In-house organic restaurant Nü has an exclusive menu for hotel guests only.