



Tatler's 101 best hotels

2006

This is the list everyone's been waiting for – the hotels that go that extra mile. Leading the pack is our Hotel of the Year prize-winner, Evason Hideaway in Vietnam...

Evason Hideaway

Hotel of the Year **1ST**

Ana Mandara, Vietnam

Undeveloped Vietnam has got its first cool high-end hotel. It's adventure with an exotic edge and feels utterly fresh, with dazzling beaches and a focused people ambitious for change. Vietnam is an exhilarating place to be – from the colonial heart of Hanoi to the pulsating rush of Ho Chi Minh City, it is leaving behind its war-torn history and moving swiftly into a bright future.

The new Evason Hideaway is blazing the sybaritic trail. Here is where you want to chill after all the excitement. Created by Sonu and Eva Shivdasani, the hoteliers behind Soneva Gili and Soneva Fushi in the Maldives, it is all about laidback castaway living; accessible only by sea, it feels like a private island. The 53 villas are like idealised camps: peaceful, open-sided and dotted around a glorious slick of beach on the remote Ninh Van Bay. The Spa Villas are the most sensational (book No 2) and hang in the jungle like treehouses. There are chilled wine cabinets, pillow menus, iPods and butlers to unpack all the clothes you're never going to wear, but you can also rejoice in the casual simplicity of coat hangers made of bamboo, showers under the stars and gorgeous free-standing wooden baths.

It's extremely private – no one seems to leave their villas – although you might bump into a monkey (huge monkeys – massive monkeys!) playing in the tamarind trees. Have a barbecue on the top of the mountain; explore other deserted beaches by speedboat and the mainland on a scooter. Return to wonderful oriental massages with Vy or just stare out at the South China Sea. The Hideaway is a hotel that is still finding its feet: in Vietnam luxury travel is in its infancy. So if you want WiFi and butlers who speak three languages, forget it. But if you want to feel like you're on the cusp of something far more soulful and special – a happy eco-world where everything is crafted from local woods, butterflies are the size of your fist and hot bowls of pho are delivered by a hand-drawn wooden boat – you'll find it here. **Tel** 00 84 58 829 829. **Fax** 00 84 58 829 629. **Website** sbs-senses.com. **UK reservations** Elegant Resorts (tel: 01244 897518). **Rates** Double, from £290.



Residenza Napoleone III

Rome, Italy

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So many grand people now run B&Bs it's impossible to reach for the minibar without bumping into a marchioness filling it up with martini mixers. This is the empress of them all. Sure, it's been around a while, but if you haven't stayed here yet, do so before the next pope dies.

Imagine a hotel that consists of a single three-room suite, has a princess as its concierge and keeps a strict word-of-mouth policy because the owners don't want too many people wearing down the parquet floors that creak like old violins. Right at the bottom of Via Condotti, in the heart of Rome, the palazzo is still home to members of the Ruspoli family. It is romantic and magnificent, with 16th-century tapestries, massive oil paintings and wine from the family's own vineyard. But it isn't precious: there's air-con, internet access and vast pull-down cinema screens in the bedroom and sitting room. A breakfast of eggs and freshly squeezed juice arrives on Bvlgari silver. Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, you pull back a 15-foot canvas to reveal a Siena-marble bathroom and another to reveal a fully stocked fridge. There's Rome outside, but it won't occur to you to leave. **Tel** 00 39 347 733 7098. **Fax** 00 39 066 880 8083. **Website** residenzananapoleone.com. **UK reservations** Chic Retreats (tel: 020 7978 7164). **Rates** Suite, from £655, including breakfast.

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Lion Sands Ivory Lodge

Sabi Sands, South Africa

An unexpected surprise – and all the lovelier for it. Ivory Lodge is big villa living right out in the bush, deeply sophisticated without losing

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its African heart. The style of the six rooms is bush minimalism, but neither stuffy nor jarring, just incredibly light and pretty. Wake up in your alabaster-white sheets and, without lifting your head, take in clear, open views of the Sabi River, antelopes drinking and baby elephants washing themselves. The rooms are huge, decorated in every permutation of ebony and ivory, with egg-shaped baths and open verandahs with their own swimming-pools. It's so peaceful, so serene that even the hippos keep their harrumphing down. You can have a deep-tissue massage on your deck; hang out by the fireplace in your sitting room; get your morning coffee delivered through a hatch so you don't even have to get out of bed; or slide open all the windows to let in the rustling breeze. You have so much space and it is so private that there's really no need to move, except for the picnic lunches at the riverside or the full-moon walks through the bush after dinner by the campfire. The lodge is run by two brothers, whose family has been here in the famous Sabi Sands Game Reserve for four generations. Sleek, stunning and utterly different from any other lodge in Africa. **Tel** 00 27 13 735 5000. **Fax** 00 27 13 735 5330. **Website** lion-sands.com. **UK reservations** Africa Travel Centre (tel: 0845 450 1533). **Rates** Double, from £1,090 (full board), including safari, meals and drinks. □

