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THE GOLD LIST

## THE BEST HOTELS IN THE WORLD

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# THE GOLD LIST 2012

Our definitive guide to the

# WORLD'S BEST HOTELS

IN THIS, THE EIGHTH OF OUR ANNUAL LISTS, THE HOTELS CHOSEN BY THE MAGAZINE'S TEAM OF EDITORS, WRITERS AND EXPERTS ARE THE BEST FOR SERVICE, LOCATION, FOOD, ROOMS, LEISURE FACILITIES AND AMBIENCE & DESIGN

KEY TO SYMBOLS



CLASSIC

Has appeared in the **GOLD LIST** five or more times



NEW  
ENTRY

New entry this year

## ★ BEST HOTELS FOR ROOMS

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**Hotel Imperial**, Vienna *p154*

► **X-factor** There is more spacious accommodation in the four-suite Owner's Cottage, where the light, Hamptons-style interiors make the most of the fine art collection, including works by some of New Zealand's best artists. The two-suite Alan Pye Cottage is equally stylish, and comes with its own collection of Maori artefacts. *Huka Falls Road, Taupo, North Island, New Zealand* (00 64 7 378 5791; [www.hukalodge.com](http://www.hukalodge.com)). Doubles from NZ\$813 (about £405)

## ★ Saffire Freycinet, Tasmania

**NEW ENTRY** With jaw-dropping views across Great Oyster Bay to the peaks of the Hazards beyond, this luxurious hotel stands on a wooded plateau that, just a few years ago, was a trailer park. Its 20 timber-panelled cabin suites have floor-to-ceiling windows; guests in the Luxury Suites can even enjoy the scenery from the bath. Location-wise, the hotel can't be bettered – a nearby walking trail leads to Wineglass Bay, one of the finest beaches in Australasia – though, thanks to chef Hugh Whitehouse's innovative menus at Palate, no one's going to be in any hurry to go anywhere.

**X-factor** 'The top-of-the-line suites are packed with enough luxuries and comforts to make the weary traveller weep,' says Gold List contributor Jonathan Bastable. 'The well-stocked fridge and bar; the iPod pre-loaded with your favourite music; the night-time flask of hot chocolate; and the deep, deep peace of the soft, soft bed.' *2352 Coles Bay Road, Tasmania, Australia* (00 61 3 6256 7888; [www.saffire-freycinet.com.au](http://www.saffire-freycinet.com.au)). Doubles from A\$1,450 (about £940)

## ★ Southern Ocean Lodge, South Australia

Combining striking modern design and an excellent pedigree (its sister hotel is the fantastic Capella Lodge – see page 40), the 21-suite Southern Ocean Lodge opened in 2008. Local architect Max Pritchard has created a sleek eco-retreat on South Australia's Kangaroo Island which reflects, and focuses on, the pristine landscape. A glass corridor leads to the suites, all with glass-fronted bathrooms to maximise scenery-scanning. Talented chef Tim Bourke provides a daily-changing seasonal menu in the restaurant; there is a spa and stargazing platform on a cliff overlooking the ocean.

**X-factor** 'Each suite has a glass wall facing the ocean,' says Gold List contributor Mike Dolan. 'Inside it's a world of unsurpassed luxury, outside one of unparalleled natural beauty.' *Hanson Bay, Kangaroo Island, South Australia* (00 61 2 9918 4355; [www.southernoceanlodge.com.au](http://www.southernoceanlodge.com.au)). Doubles from A\$1,980 (about £1,285)

## EUROPE

### ★ Four Seasons Hotel Firenze, Italy

This converted Renaissance *palazzo* is set in 11 acres (the largest private garden in the city). There are 116 individually decorated bedrooms and suites divided between the

Palazzo della Gherardesca and a former 16th-century convent. The sensitive, seven-year restoration, completed in 2008, has created an utterly gorgeous hotel: original frescoes and friezes adorn the walls; baroque portraits line the ballroom; and the gardens are splendid. The service is fantastic, as is the restaurant, Il Palagio. There is a large swimming pool and a substantial spa using products from the city's Santa Maria Novella pharmacy.

**X-factor** 'The 11 "speciality suites" with their frescoes, vast chandeliers, silk wall hangings and period furniture are magnificent,' says Gold List contributor Nicky Swallow. The Royal Suite has a vaulted ceiling, stuccos, a 17th-century ceramic floor and original frescoes depicting the life of Medici Pope Leo XI.

*Borgo Pinti 99, Florence, Italy* (00 39 055 26261; [www.fourseasons.com/florence](http://www.fourseasons.com/florence)). Doubles from €605

### ★ Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc, Antibes

**NEW ENTRY** A firm favourite with A-listers during the Cannes Film Festival, Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc recently reopened after a four-year, €45-million restoration. It has retained its elegant, 19th-century ambience, and its 67 rooms, many with Mediterranean views, are now as grand as when the hotel first opened in 1870. Facilities include 22 acres of forested grounds, a heated seawater swimming pool, ultra-private cliff-top cabanas, five tennis courts, a La Prairie spa, and a hair and beauty boutique. Chef Arnaud Poët's exquisite French cuisine is served in Restaurant Eden-Roc.

**X-factor** 'Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc is quite the most idyllic hotel I've ever stayed at,' says Gold List contributor Claire Wrathall. 'You would never know they'd just lavished €45 million on it – but that's a compliment. The rooms are palatial and the service exemplary; it seems to encapsulate the eternal allure of the Côte d'Azur.'

*Boulevard JF Kennedy, Antibes, France* (00 33 4 93 61 39 01; [www.hotel-du-cap-eden-roc.com](http://www.hotel-du-cap-eden-roc.com)). Doubles from €495

### ★ Hotel Imperial, Vienna

Vienna's grandest hotel is a short walk from the Vienna State Opera, the Musikverein concert hall and the city's 12th-century cathedral. An opulent property with an ornate façade and splendid entrance lobby, it was built

in 1863 for the Prince of Württemberg. The 138 rooms and two Royal Suites are decorated in a palatial Viennese style, with chandeliers and heavy drapes, deep-pile carpets and antique parquet floors. Facilities include a fitness and health studio and an Imperial Torte boutique,

should guests wish to stock up on Viennese cake. The Imperial restaurant serves traditional Austrian and international fare; Viennese coffeehouse culture lives on at the Café Imperial.

**X-factor** The two Royal Suites have silk-upholstered walls and seven-metre-high stucco ceilings, as well as antiques dating back to the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. All suites have butler service. *Kärntner Ring 16, Vienna, Austria* (00 43 1 501100; [www.luxurycollection.com/imperial](http://www.luxurycollection.com/imperial)). Doubles from €399

## ★ BEST HOTELS FOR SERVICE

Continued from page 34

### THE AMERICAS & CARIBBEAN

#### ★ Carlisle Bay, Antigua

**CLASSIC** Right on the beach, with a backdrop of rolling hills and rainforest, this sister property to Beirut's Le Gray hotel is an effortlessly stylish bolthole on the south coast of Antigua. There are two restaurants (East for pan-Asian fusion cuisine; Indigo on the Beach for grills and seafood), nine tennis courts, a swimming pool, a children's club, a library and a private screening room. The Blue Spa has six treatment rooms, plunge pools and a sauna, and holds yoga and Pilates classes. The 82 sea-facing suites all have private balconies or terraces.

**X-factor** The staff (who outnumber guests three to one) are thoughtful, attentive, and readily available.

*Old Road, St Mary's, Antigua* (00 1 268 484 0000; [www.carlisle-bay.com](http://www.carlisle-bay.com)). Doubles from US\$920

### AFRICA, MIDDLE EAST & INDIAN OCEAN

#### ★ Frégate Island Private, Seychelles

This exotic, ecologically aware, 300-hectare private-island resort provides the sort of castaway idyll guests grew up dreaming about. Its 16 vast villas have been built in African *chamfuta* teak, and come with four-poster

beds, three showers, a Jacuzzi on the terrace and private pools. Facilities include the tranquil Rock Spa, and as many activities (both sporty and relaxing) as guests can handle. There's gourmet dining in Frégate

House and the historic Plantation House. **X-factor** 'At Frégate,' says Gold List contributor Lucy Hughes-Hallett, 'your meals can be served wherever your fancy dictates: on the beach, by your private pool or – best of all – up a tree. Enthroned among the birds, you can watch your

lunch being winched up into the leafy canopy from a barbecue some 30ft beneath the dining-platform.'

*00 27 21 556 9984; www.fregate.com*. Villas from €2,700

#### ★ The Oberoi, Mauritius

Set in 20 acres of sub-tropical gardens on the island's north-west coast, The Oberoi, Mauritius, has 71 villas and pavilions, all with four-poster beds and marble bathrooms. Each villa has a private garden; some have private pools. The restaurant serves a range of cuisines including European, Asian and Creole; the Lagoon Pool Restaurant is open for light lunches. There's also a spa, tennis courts, a pool and a gym.

**X-factor** Oberoi Hotels & Resorts is well known for its excellent staff, and The Oberoi, Mauritius, is no exception: the service here is easygoing, helpful and charming.

*Turtle Bay, Pointe aux Piments, Mauritius* (00 230 204 3600; [www.oberoi-mauritius.com](http://www.oberoi-mauritius.com)). Doubles from €500

#### ★ Singita Sabi Sand, South Africa

The original Singita (there are now four) comprises three extremely luxurious safari lodges on an 18,000-hectare concession in the Sabi Sand Private Game Reserve: traditional Ebony Lodge, contemporary Afro-chic Boulders Lodge and Castleton Camp, an elegant private house. The first two have 12 air-conditioned suites with plunge pools; Castleton Camp has six and a swimming pool.

Talented chef Tamarin van Zyl specialises in pan-African cuisine, and there is a sommelier on hand to help make sense of the 20,000-plus bottles of wine; he also organises regular wine-tastings.

**X-factor** 'Put simply, the Singita brand sets the service standard for safari lodges in Africa,' says Gold List contributor Peter Browne.

*Sabi Sand Reserve, South Africa* (00 27 21 683 3424; [www.singita.com](http://www.singita.com)). Doubles from R12,250 (about £960)

## ASIA

### ★ The Leela Palace Kempinski Udaipur, India

This opulent hotel lies on the shores of Lake Pichola. The 72 rooms and eight suites have views over the City Palace, Jag Niwas Palace or the lake, and are decorated with local handicrafts and furnishings. Restaurants include Sheesh Mahal for Indian cuisine and The Dining Room for international dishes. An ESPA spa complex, which opened in 2010, has nine tented suites, 14 treatment rooms, a fitness centre and a pool.

**X-factor** 'The service at the Leela Palace Udaipur is as lavish as its rich interiors,' says Gold List contributor Fiona Caulfield. 'There's a dedicated butler for every guest, and they magically appear just when you need them.' *Lake Pichola, Udaipur, India* (00 91 294 670 1234; [www.theleela.com](http://www.theleela.com)). Doubles from Rs18,500 (about £235)

**'At Frégate, meals are served wherever your fancy dictates: on the beach, by the pool, or up a tree'**

Lucy Hughes-Hallett