

Dreamy Suites: 10 Top New Hotels I'm Eager To Revisit When The Time Comes



Ann Abel Senior Contributor

Travel

I know the difference between expensive travel and the truly luxurious



Casa do Acoradouro at Herdade da Malhainha Nova in Portugal JOÃO GUIMARÃES

Normally at this time of year, I write an admittedly self-indulgent look back at my favorite new and new-to-me hotels of my year. (Here's [last year's](#), if you're curious.) This year, I figured I ought to skip it, because, you know.

But then I realized that I still managed to discover some fantastic places this year—places that weren't just indulgences for me but also longtime dreams of passionate entrepreneurs (it's not a coincidence that almost all

of them are independent hotels) and workplaces for thousands of dedicated employees.

I got off to a racing start in January and February. In hindsight, those stays feel all the sweeter. I ventured out to the rest (mostly in my Portuguese backyard) during Europe's timid summer of travel.

Was it the same as before? **No, of course not.** I kept to myself, bundled up to dine outdoors on chilly evenings and missed exchanging smiles with some of the friendliest and genuinely hospitable people around. Sometimes it was lonely. But that made me appreciate their hospitality even more.

Here (in alphabetical order) are my favorite discoveries of a very weird year.



Palmehaven at the Britannia Hotel WIL LEE-WRIGHT / BRITANNIA HOTEL

MORE FOR YOU

Shocking Photos Reveal Full Horror Of Norway Landslide

What You Need To Know About Canada's New COVID-19 Test Requirements For International Travellers

The Most Exciting International Hotel Openings In 2021

Britannia Hotel, Trondheim, Norway

There's nothing like a grand dame hotel, and [this one](#), far north in Norway's third-largest city, was so delightful that I overcame my aversion to the cold and dark. Although the promised northern lights, never materialized, the hotel—built in 1870 and reopened in 2019 after a three-year, \$160 million renovation—kept me cozy and visually satisfied. (Is it any surprise that Norwegians would be really good at lighting, leading to rooms like the Palmehaven dining hall, has a natural-looking golden glow, despite having no exterior windows?) The gastronomic restaurant, Speilsalen (run by chef Christopher Davidsen), rightfully received its first Michelin star a few days after I checked out.



Haritha ANN ABEL

Haritha Villas + Spa, Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka

This [stylish newcomer](#) on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka, near Galle, touts its contemporary design. The sleek and spacious (1,235 square feet, including the outdoor living room and private pool) villas are seductive, with their jungle views and minimalist decor. But I preferred the historical aesthetic of the colonial mansions, with their high ceilings, vintage-style furnishings, romantic mosquito-netted beds and gorgeous shared swimming pool. Either way, peacocks stroll the grounds, much of the food comes from the on-site organic garden and local fish market, and

there's an extensive spa where everyone's wellness program begins with a consultation with the staff Ayurvedic doctor.



A suite at Herdade da Malhadinha Nova JOÃO GUIMARÃES

Herdade da Malhadinha Nova, Alentejo, Portugal

To me, the Alentejo embodies living well—slowly and simply, amid vast, beautiful landscapes and buffeted with satisfying things to eat and drink. The newest hotel to capture the spirit of the region is greatly expanded [Herdade da Malhadinha Nova](#), which opened for three weeks in the winter and then again in July. The new incarnation seems to have been designed with social distancing in mind—long before space, privacy and exclusivity were safety things, they were luxury things. And this hotel has them down. The property spans more than 1,000 acres, and most of that is living fields, vineyards and rugged landscapes. There are five accommodations—ranging from sexy and modern to family-size and traditional—and a sixth a few miles away, which together total only 30 rooms. The food is of special note: Consulting chef Joachim Koerper, holds a Michelin star at his restaurant Eleven in Lisbon, and soon after my stay, the hotel was welcomed into Relais & Châteaux.



A house at Lava Homes COURTESY OF THE HOTEL



Lava Homes COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Lava Homes, Pico Island, the Azores

On the most dramatically rugged island in the volcanic Azores archipelago, [Lava Homes](#) is a surprisingly sophisticated collection of 14 contemporary houses spread out down a steep hill. The project started as the owner's personal vacation home on Pico, along what was initially

meant to be another house or two that she could rent on Airbnb. But the government would only approve the deal if she made a resort. In short order she got ten friends to invest in the project, and Lava Homes was born, but it still has the feel of being welcomed into the home of a friend with very good taste. The houses have a beguiling mix of farmhouse, contemporary and traditional furnishings, not to mention excellent views at every turn.



Loire Valley Lodges COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Loire Valley Lodges, France

For the former ad-exec owner of [this project](#), which opened in July, the things that make life worth living are nature, art, food, wine and “the French ‘art of living.’” So she combined them on this plot of land in the countryside, near her husband’s ancestral home. During the spring lockdown, she saw “the power of nature and isolation” and but even before that, she had set about turning her family’s land into small hotel. Their own residence, a historic farmhouse, became the main building, with reception, a concept store, a bar and a stylish little restaurant. A fragrant garden and swimming pool are just outside. And 18 luxurious, art-filled tree houses went up on the 300 acres of forest that surround it. A collection of large-scale outdoor artworks went up around those.

“People feel what I felt,” she says as she attributes her high level of energy to living in the trees. “Nature is why you slow down and take your time.”



Massimago Wine Tower ANN ABEL

Massimago Wine Tower, Verona, Italy

This one was a happy accident. I landed here after missing a connection in Venice and decided to make the most of it. (Thank you, Alessandro Cavazza de Altamer of [Beyond the Gates](#), for the save.) That meant holing up in a [tower worthy of Rapunzel](#) at this small oasis in nearby Padua. The tower—owned by a family with a centuries-old winery in Valpolicella—dates from the 1300s and is surrounded by a well-established park and

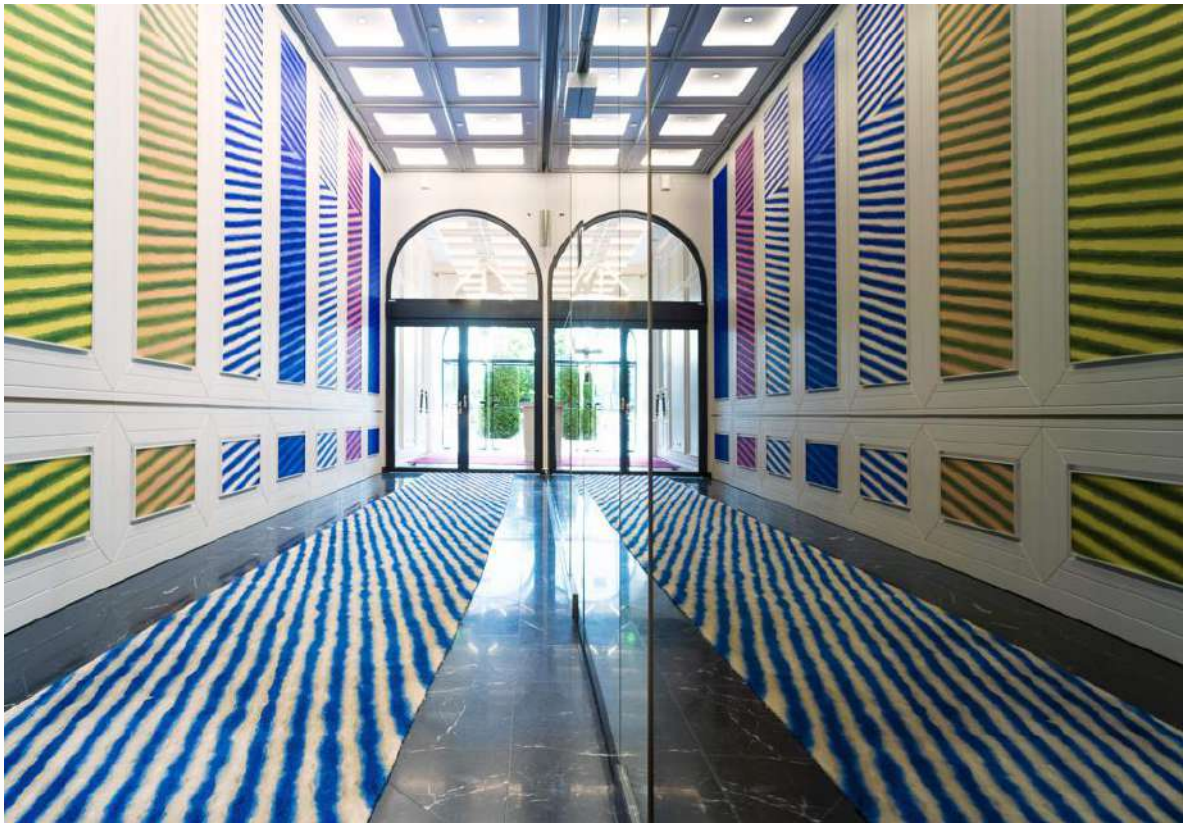
the city's water canals. Over the years, it was called the Rescue Tower or the Cupboard Tower, and then eventually the Devil Tower because of its mysterious story. But there's nothing to fear. Inside, the three rooms are as comfortable and well appointed as can be.



The Nautilus COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

The Nautilus, the Maldives

This yearling private island is the only Relais & Châteaux hotel in the archipelago and, I would argue, the most Maldivesy-ish island in the Maldives. Owned by a local entrepreneur who was an early pioneer of tourism in the islands, [the Nautilus](#) is above and beyond anything else in a country that is above and beyond anyplace else. (I'm serious: The "world of your own making" concept means that there are no clocks—and that if you want breakfast at 4pm or dinner at 3am, they won't bat an eye.) The 26 beach houses and overwater bungalows are dotted around a postcard-gorgeous island with powdered-sugar beaches and surreally blue water. The craftsmanship is outstanding. The place has no corners. Everything is a celebration of nature's geometry, engineering and artistry. The main thing to do is nothing. There is plenty of space for that in the houses, as well as several beaches and, come sunset, at the Naiboli poolside bar, where musicians perform nightly and fairy lights inside the pool come on in the shape of a nautilus.



Raffles Europejski Warsaw | PIOTR GESICKI

Raffles Europejski Warsaw, Poland

Opened 160 years ago, with plenty of stories to tell about all the history in between, [this palace hotel](#) reemerged as a Raffles a year and a half ago. As with the Asian brand's other European outposts (in Paris and Istanbul), art dominates. Curated by the former director of an influential gallery, the collection spans almost 500 works by 120 Polish artists, including avant-garde legend Tadeusz Kantor and contemporary luminaries like Wilhelm Sasnal and Monika Sosnowska. The 106 rooms and suites are classically stylish with blackened oak floors, contemporary Polish art, a corner library and sleek marble-clad bathrooms with Art Deco touches. But the sexiest spot is the Raffles signature Long Bar, where cocktail culture springs forth from a long marble bar beneath an artwork that suggests pink velvet curtains.



São Lourenço do Barrocal NELSON GARRIDO

São Lourenço do Barrocal, Alentejo, Portugal

The eighth-generation owner of this family farm turned [stylish hideaway](#) says that his inspiration is creating a sustainable project that his descendants can cherish eight generations from now. And so, like many savvy hoteliers, he saw that the best way to save his heritage was to re-imagine it as a luxury hotel. He and architect Eduardo Souto de Moura worked with historians to restore the original, 200-year-old structures and fit a luxury hotel inside. The workers' homes are now 24 quietly luxurious rooms and suites. The cowsheds and horse stables are now 16 larger cottages. A restaurant is in the space where the dogs were once kept. There are two swimming pools in a field. The project took 14 years and has an obsessive attention to detail. Nothing came from a catalog. Above all, it's still a farm. Some 150 cows roam freely around the 1,900-acre property. There are horses in a stable. They produce wine, olive oil, fruit and vegetables, and beef.



Ventozelo LUIS FERRAZ / QUINTA VENTOZELO

Ventozelo Hotel & Quinta, Douro Valley, Portugal

Opened at the beginning of this year, and then again in the summer, [Ventozelo](#) has 29 rooms, a restaurant, a wine-tasting setup, a visitor center and plenty of walking trails through the vineyards and into wild nature. It's all polished, but none of it is aggressively slick. Rather, it still feels like a farm where good old-fashioned hospitality is extended to everyone. That's no mistake: "Ventozelo is a hotel and *quinta*, not a hotel and spa," says Jorge Dias, the CEO of the hotel's parent company, Gran Cruz. For him, Ventozelo is not so much a business endeavor—although it's certainly a brand extension of the prestigious, historic port wine house—as a "place where time stops...where you can hear the silence and see the stars."
