



FORBES > LIFESTYLE > TRAVEL

11 Favorite Luxury And Design Hotels From 2023

Ann Abel Senior Contributor

I know the difference between expensive travel and the truly luxurious

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Borgo Santo Pietro COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Most Decembers, I take an admittedly self-indulgent [look back](#) at my favorite new and new-to-me hotels. As travelers continued to make up for lost time (even as staffing remained a challenge and the world became an ever more confusing place), hotels continued to dazzle. My hat is off to the places that opened. And my heart is filled with love for those places that have held strong, raised the bar and innovated.

My favorite hotels (here in alphabetical order) are not only pleasant enclaves for their guests—though they are that, for sure—but also passion projects for their creators and good workplaces for their teams. They’re places where history unfolded, where sustainability counts and where dreams take flight.

Borgo Santo Pietro, Tuscany



Borgo Santo Pietro COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

The intimate [Borgo Santo Pietro](#) is the passion project of Jeanette Thottrup, a former fashion designer, and her husband, Claus, who made his name in real estate. When they bought it, in 2001, it was in ruins. Since then, they’ve put their hands on every inch of it, turning it into a place where each detail is fully realized, from the furnishings in then 22 rooms, villas and suites, to the 13 acres of manicured gardens, to the “fermentation corner” on the breakfast buffet that’s laden with superfoods and the sustainably sourced caviar service that can be added to the tasting menu at the Michelin-star restaurant. Thottrup found her passion for botanicals while working at Neil’s Yard in London, and here she has partnered with cosmetic chemist Anna Buonocore to create a luxurious, [plant-based and science-powered skincare line](#).

The Datai, Langkawi, Malaysia



The Datai COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Thirty years ago, at the dawn of Asia's super-luxury resorts, it was all about the beach—waterfront bungalows and ocean views were prime amenities. The developers and designers of [the Datai](#) thought differently. While there's a perfectly lovely sliver of beach, the 121-room hotel is integrated thoroughly into one of the world's oldest rain forests; its freestanding villas are surrounded by towering trees and soundtracked by crickets and birds. Three decades, countless awards and a recent renovation later, it's still an intimate connection with nature that drives the Datai. In some ways, it's an old-school resort, with a weekly printed newsletter and activities calendar. In others, it's quite forward-thinking, particularly where genuine sustainability is concerned—seriously trained scientists are on staff as naturalists and advisers, and nothing from the resort ends up in a landfill.

Hotel de Len, Dolomites, Italy



Hotel de Len HELENIO BARBETTA

The most Italian-feeling of the cities and towns of the Dolomites, Cortina d'Ampezzo has its share of big-name development underway in advance of the 2026 Winter Olympics. But it's still home to independent, soulful projects like [Hotel de Len](#). (It's managed by San Domenico Hotels, the brand behind the beloved Borgo Egnazio and several *masseria* in Puglia.) *Len* means “wood” in one of the local Ladin languages, and it describes the decoration well. There's heavy use of old fir and Swiss pine—almost all recovered from other buildings—and most of it is unpainted and unvarnished. The 22 rooms are redolent with the scent of the forest. The design marries Alpine tradition with contemporary simplicity, plus jaw-dropping views (especially from the top-floor spa) of one of the world's most gorgeous mountain ranges.

Kimpton Maa-Lai Bangkok



The rooftop bar at Kimpton Maa-Lai Bangkok COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

To be honest, I didn't expect to like the [Kimpton Maa-Lai Bangkok](#)—too big, maybe, or too branded or too bling. I was wrong. The 362-room, skyscraping hotel was easy to fall in love with, starting with the floor-to-ceiling windows in my room that gave me an excellent view over Langsuan Road and Lumpini Park. The “urban resort” branding holds true, thanks to five distinct restaurants and bars—one of which being home to the largest croissant I have ever seen—that range from a swanky cocktail and cicchetti bar on the ground floor to a 40th-floor tiki lounge that serves snacks from the grill and was named the best rooftop bar in Bangkok.

Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus, Istanbul



Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Istanbul has its share of grand, gorgeous palace hotels. So it was refreshing to find that the new-ish [Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus](#) is not one of them. Rather, it has a more understated Ottoman opulence, one that was inspired by the traditional yali houses that line the city's waterfront. That makes sense because the new hotel has a prime setting on the Bosphorus with views of the city's two famous bridges. Its private pier makes it easy to get downstream to the historic city center, upstream to the fashionable Bebek neighborhood and across to the bohemian Asian side. While it has a footprint big enough for 300 rooms, it has only 77 rooms and 23 suites, most of which have balconies or terraces. Beyond the pleasing visuals and comfortable flourishes, the hotel ticks all the Mandarin Oriental boxes—an enormous spa with natural light, snap-to-it concierge service, multiple waterfront swimming pools and destination restaurants, including the first Turkish outpost of the trendy London-born, Michelin-starred Hakkasan.

Milka, Julian Alps, Slovenia



Milka CAPN ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

One of Europe's last relative secrets, Slovenia may be taking off, but it's still generally small-scale, low-key and refreshingly free from ostentation. A good example is [Milka](#), a new six-suite hideaway on the shore of Lake Jasna. It was built as a guest house in the 1960s by a Yugoslav partisan and recently revitalized by a group of young entrepreneurs who care not only about hospitality and design but also about the preservation of the landscape and the Slovenian way of life. The restaurant earned its first Michelin star for its “quintessentially Slovenian” dining experience within two months of the hotel's opening last year.

Nordandlet, Bornholm, Denmark



Nordandlet COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

I'm a sucker for wild coastlines and understated interiors.

[Nordandlet](#), on the forested Baltic Sea island of Bornholm, hits those buttons. While it's more of a restaurant with rooms, those rooms are a delight, with weathered wood floors, clean-lined Scandi furnishings and terraces overlooking the sea. A handful of larger apartments accommodate longer stays, with kitchens, workspaces and living areas with couches. The restaurant is the sort of place that lists the farmers' names on the menu, with a concise, seasonal menu that features dishes like steamed cod, oyster emulsion, fried kale, pickled gooseberries and kohlrabi, and gnocchi with Danish squid, pumpkin, browned butter and sage.

Pädaste Manor, Muhu Island, Estonia



Pädaste Manor COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

Hotelier Martin Breuer has been a lover of slow travel since long before that became a thing. He proved that with his purchase and restoration of [Pädaste Manor](#) in 1995, shortly after Estonia achieved independence from the Soviet Union. He remembers the 16th-century manor house as “inspiring,” even though he first saw it as “total ruins.” He had the then-unheard-of idea of prioritizing quality over quantity and set about restoring the 24 rooms in the main house and a few outbuildings, creating a small luxury hotel from the get-go. While some early guests complained that there was nothing to do, that’s precisely the point: Muhu Island seduces with its nothingness—rippling grain fields, the slanted light of northern latitudes and vivid moss that has slowly taken over rocks. The architecture takes in the entire history of the property, with remnants of faded wallpaper, leather armchairs, Oriental rugs and claw-foot bathtubs. There’s a fine-dining restaurant in a winter garden, but perhaps the best feature is the saltwater hot tub at the edge of the Baltic Sea.

Pa.te.os, Melides, Portugal



Pa.te.os FRANCISCO NOGUEIRA

Even the periods in the name [Pa.te.os](#) (“patios”) are meant to convey the idea of slowness, says co-owner Miguel Charters, of the collection of four villas that he and his wife, Sofia, acquired 15 years ago, intending to build a small compound where they could host family and friends. As these projects so often do, it became a formal tourism endeavor that welcomes guests from around the world. They enjoy the silence, the beauty, the nature and the calm of the increasingly fashionable enclave of Melides, just about one hour away from Lisbon. The design, by esteemed architect Manuel Aires Mateus, emphasizes the concept of patios (or courtyards), a carryover from southern Portugal’s years of Arab influence. The houses share a heated swimming pool, and yoga teachers, massage therapists and private chefs can be arranged.

Portrait Milano



Portrait Milano COURTESY OF THE HOTEL

It's not the Duomo, but the Archiepiscopal Seminary, the oldest seminary in Europe, is one of Milan's most important monuments. Yet the building, which dates from 1564, had been closed for decades and had fallen into disrepair—until a luxury hotel owned by a fashion brand brought it back to life at the beginning of this year. The Lungarno Collection— the hotel brand owned by Italy's Ferragamo family—opened [Portrait Milano](#) as its new flagship, one that returned a slice of Milan to the Milanese, as the central plaza is open to the public, as well as the restaurants and bars. In the 73 rooms and suites, the interiors were done by Michele Bönan, who worked on the Lungarno Collection's other hotels in Rome and Florence, as well as the owners' private residence, with a style of “feeling at home” in a palette of crimson and forest green. The outdoor living rooms on the loggia overlooking the plaza are a particularly nifty touch.

Puente Romano Beach Resort, Marbella



Puente Romano Beach Resort JACK HARDY

I've never been a resort person, but I loved this one. [Puente Romano](#) got its start in 1979, and its Sea Grill (along with the Marbella Club) quickly became one of the epicenters of Marbella chic. In 2023, many traces of that era remain, in the village-style blocks of accommodations—each one named for a city or village in the surrounding Andalusia region—the blue doors and vintage pottery that adorn some of the walls, and the impossibly lush, fully grown, impeccably manicured gardens that surround the weaving pathways. There's no senseless bling or mass-market-ness; only old-school elegance, impeccable service and a growing collection of name-brand restaurants from Nobu to Cipriani to the award-winning steak house Leña, by Andalusian three-star chef Dani García. There are tennis and padel courts galore, a low-lit gym and the first spa in continental Spain from holistic wellness pioneer Six Senses.

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Ann Abel

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