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### The Luxe List 2006

*This year, our annual showcase of the region's best new hotels is larger than ever, featuring 33 properties in more than a dozen countries. From a sumptuous tented camp in Thailand's Golden Triangle to the latest in barefoot luxury in the Maldives, read on to discover those places that truly rise above the rest in terms of style, service, and surrounds*

story by **Cynthia Rosenfeld, David Tse, Rob McKeown, Kee Foong, Daven Wu, Andrea Tejokusumo, Kevin Pilley, and Krista Kim Pickard.**

#### Australia

##### Avalon Coastal Retreat, Swansea, Tasmania

The striking Modernist looks of this secluded retreat do nothing to distract from its natural setting. Indeed, the floor-to-ceiling windows encasing the beach house—an airy glass-and-steel structure by local architect Craig Rosevear—only accentuate the remarkable views over Great Oyster Bay and the rugged Freycinet Peninsula. Inspired by driftwood, the sundeck's weathered planks complement the environment, as does the dry-stone perimeter wall, which draws its inspiration from the convict ruins scattered along this stretch of Tasmania's east coast. Three pared-down bedrooms are furnished with oak beds and contemporary art, while heated floors and a fireplace in the lounge keep things warm on cool nights. There's no restaurant, but guests won't feel stranded: the town of Swansea is a short drive away, and the kitchen has a deli-quality mini-bar filled with gourmet goodies from Hobart's Wursthaus Kitchen. No curtains means the place is probably best rented out exclusively or with a group of friends, though children under 12 are not allowed (11922 Tasman Hwy.; 61-1/3003-61136; [www.avaloncoastalretreat.com.au](http://www.avaloncoastalretreat.com.au); from US\$377).

##### Huski, Falls Creek

High in the Australian Alps in northeast Victoria, Melbourne architects Elenberg Fraser have transformed the site of an iconic lodge into a study of urbane coolness. Behind a timber-and-glass facade whose design was inspired by the angular geometry of snowflakes, Huski's 14apartment-style studio rooms and suites come with cowhide rugs, colorful hand-knitted throws, and full-length windows looking across the Kiewa Valley (the larger units have balcony hot tubs that make for a perfect après-ski soak). All feature well-equipped kitchenettes that you can stock with gourmet goodies and wines from the ground-level Produce Store, which doubles as a café. A ski-in day spa caters to slope-weary snow bunnies, but Huski is more than just a winter wonderland—it reopens in summer (mid-December to April) to take advantage of the area's excellent off-season trekking and fly-fishing (3 Sitzmark St.; 61-1300/652-260; [www.huski.com.au](http://www.huski.com.au); doubles from US\$200, with a

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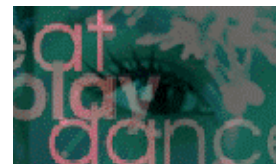
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## BHUTAN

### Zhiwa Ling, Paro

Bhutan's first homegrown luxury hotel gives the famous five-star imports (Amankora, Uma Paro) some serious competition. Built in the classic Bhutanese style of tapered stone walls with fine, hand-painted details, Zhiwa Ling's imposing main building and eight two- and three-story cottages face the sheer cliffs surrounding Tiger's Nest Temple outside the town of Paro. Heated floors warm 45 spacious rooms equipped with Wi-Fi and tastefully appointed with local textiles. In the spa, the Himalayan Singing Bowl massage clears the body's blocked chakra points as well as the more mundane tension of trek-weary muscles. The onsite Buddhist shrine, constructed from centuries-old wood recycled from a remote monastery, adds good karma to evenings spent fireside at the Mad Monk Bar, where the après-ski vibe recalls a Swiss chalet. No one comes to Bhutan for the food, but the restaurant's cooked salads of native red rice and organic vegetables like artichoke hearts are especially delicious (Satsam Chorten; 975-8/271277; [www.zhiwaling.com](http://www.zhiwaling.com); doubles from US\$136).

## CAMBODIA

### The One Hotel Angkor, Siem Reap

Siem Reap's early-morning temple tours and burgeoning bar scene can be a draining combination. Intrepid revelers who appreciate the personal touch can rest up without leaving the party at the One Hotel Angkor. Occupying a renovated French-colonial townhouse across the street from the trendsetting Linga Bar, this one-room sanctum promises serene quiet thanks to double-pane windows—though guests are more than welcome to join the regular patio parties at the adjacent McDermott Gallery. The high-ceilinged bedroom comes with an iBook, iPod, and mobile phone, and the staff, graduates of a local training institute for underprivileged Cambodian youth, are sure to impress even the most demanding travelers. At the hotel's ground-floor bistro, don't miss the crisp tempura lotus root with ginger and a prawn salad made luscious with juicy local pomelo. For dinner, delivery from Siem Reap's best restaurants turns the rooftop terrace—equipped with Jacuzzi, outdoor shower, and expansive day bed—into a romantic gourmet getaway (The Passage, Old Market Area; 855-12/755-311; [www.theonehotelangkor.com](http://www.theonehotelangkor.com); doubles from US\$250).

## CHINA

### Four Seasons, Hong Kong

Start your stay at this five-star marvel with a dip in Hong Kong's finest hotel pool—it comes with an underwater sound system, skyscrapers for a backdrop, and a startling infinity-edge drop-off with panoramic views of Victoria Harbour and Kowloon. The cutting-edge spa is equally as alluring, a gleaming 2,000-square-meter oasis spread over three floors where guests float between ice showers, vitality pools, and champagne footbaths. Have a pre-dinner martini at the lobby-level Blue Bar before heading up to the glamorous Caprice, where the chef, formerly of Paris's Michelin three-starred Le Cinq, delivers outstanding modern French cooking (roast Brittany lobster; sautéed veal with green asparagus and truffle jus). Designed with either Chinese or Western accents, the 399 guest rooms are among the city's largest. They look out onto the Peak or—better still—Victoria Harbour, and come with flat-screen TVs and spacious bathrooms. The marble-clad lobby, vast but clumsily decorated, is a letdown, but that's more than compensated for by a well-appointed club lounge, central location (the hotel has direct access to the IFC Mall next door), and a terrific level of service that makes this year-old hotel feel like a seasoned player (8 Finance St., Central; 852/ 3196-8888; [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com); doubles from US\$490).

### Banyan Tree Ringha, Jian Tang

Five years ago, the Chinese government renamed this mountainous corner of Yunnan province Shangri-la County in order to lure tourists. Only with the opening of Banyan Tree Ringha, however, has there been someplace suitably paradisiacal to spend the night. Set on a landscaped hillside 3,000 meters above sea level, this alpine aerie offers breathtaking valley views from private balconies in each of its 32 suites. Buildings of packed earth and painted timber may recall typical Tibetan dwellings, but here they're given a first-class upgrade with hand-knotted carpets, lacquered furnishings, and elegant stone stoves that guarantee warmth even when the temperature outside drops below freezing. Bathrooms come with barrel tubs and amenities that include a local moisturizer made from snake essence. The Tibetan chef's delicious yak burger provides fuel for guided mountain treks or leisurely pony rides around the property, after which you can bliss out with a traditional gui shi massage that employs hot stones carved with holy mantras (Hong Po Village; 86-887/ 828-8822; [www.banyantree.com](http://www.banyantree.com); doubles from US\$450).

### Hotel LKF, Hong Kong



True Enjoyment!



Could Hong Kong's obsession with big brand names be part of the reason it has taken so long for boutique hotels to enter the crowded accommodation market? Perched above the renowned entertainment precinct of Lan Kwai Fong in Central, Hotel LKF is a welcome addition to the fledgling design scene. Generous, luxuriously spartan rooms decorated in an appealing palette of chocolate-brown or blond-on-fawn and sage green offer soothing respite from the bustle of the streets. All feature sleep-worthy beds, plump pillows, and fluffy duvets, as well as Aeron desk chairs, assorted gadgetry, and espresso machines. Bathrooms—only some of which come with separate showers—are stocked with Bulgari amenities. And while LKF won't have its own dining outlet until the October opening of its slick Azure lounge, there are plenty of restaurants and bars at the hotel's doorstep. Such comfort in an unbeatable location comes at a price: the faint strains of revelers, no pool or health facilities, limited views. But LKF blends form and function successfully, and the staff are delightful (LKF Tower, 33 Wyndham St.; 852/3518-9688, [www.hotel-lkf.com.hk](http://www.hotel-lkf.com.hk); doubles from US\$410).

#### Raffles Beijing Hotel, Beijing

The first Raffles property in China has an exceptional location—it's within walking distance of Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, and the gargantuan Oriental Plaza mall. Like the Singaporean original, it aims to make a difference by bringing elements of the old world to the New China. The building's facade blends Chinese touches with the kind of powerful Western classicism—vaulted arches, carved stone details—normally seen at grand European hotels. Inside, this theme continues in the 171 rooms and suites, where dark wooden floors and plush couches achieve a high level of comfort. The French restaurant Jaan has crystal chandeliers and a wine program focused on the great vintages of Bordeaux. La Vie, the tea lounge, serves Ronnefeldt teas amid a living room-like setting awash in velvet throw pillows and floral prints; its easy sophistication should make it an instant favorite among the local beau monde. Raffles Beijing has also incorporated many of its parent group's most successful concepts here, from the high-tech Amrita spa to the ultramodern business lounge and executive club, Raffles Inc. (33 Dongchang'an Jie, 86-10/6526-3388; [www.beijing.affles.com](http://www.beijing.affles.com); doubles from US\$123).

#### INDIA

##### Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur

The famine that raged across Rajasthan in the 1920s inspired the Maharaja of Jodhpur to build Umaid Bhawan Palace, a 15-year make-work project that employed 3,000 people, including descendants of Taj Mahal craftsmen. Behind the stunning Art Deco facade of yellow sandstone, the palace's new managers, the Taj Group, have reconfigured dark hallways and dreary rooms into 75 sleek suites attended around the clock by efficient butlers. Visitors seeking the lowdown on this landmark's history should tour the in-house museum or the Trophy Bar, where walls are hung with elephant tusks and tiger heads from royal hunting parties. Taj's modern take on the desert safari allows guests to admire herds of spotted deer en route to some of Rajasthan's best carpet weavers, followed by sunset champagne among the sand dunes. Back at the palace, tabla and sitar players provide perfect accompaniment to the tender tandoori chicken and chili naan served on silver platters in the marble dining pavilion, set amid a six-hectare garden where wild peacocks roam (Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur; 91-291/251-0101; [www.tajhotels.com](http://www.tajhotels.com); doubles from US\$410).

#### INDONESIA

##### Kemang Icon by Alila Living, Jakarta

Unabashedly contemporary in a city not known for pushing the style envelope, Kemang Icon is a sleek urban bolthole that offers an excellent alternative to Jakarta's more staid five-star lodgings. Design junkies will appreciate the 12 apartment-style suites, each replete with granite, onyx, glass, and wood, as well as the latest mod-cons; plush goose-down bedding offsets all the clean lines. Perched above some of the city's funkier boutiques, Kemang Icon also has a romantic rooftop restaurant, The Edge, where guests dine poolside on modern bistro fare (1 Jalan Kemang Raya; 62-21/719-7989; [www.alilahotels.com](http://www.alilahotels.com); doubles from US\$180).

##### Kayumanis Private Estate, Bali

Kayumanis, a Bali-based outfit, has opened its third island property near Jimbaran Beach. What the shaded compound of 12 villas lacks in views, it makes up for in privacy and high levels of comfort. Kitted out in either modern-tropical style or with traditional furnishings from Bali and Java, the thatched villas have open-air dining areas and kitchenettes, separate studies that can be converted into an extra bedroom, slate-lined lap pools, and enormous outdoor bathrooms. A host of amenities—espresso machines, Bose sound systems, flat-screen TVs—will tempt guests to stay put, but for those who do venture out, there's a spa and a modest restaurant that looks across a coconut grove (Jalan Yoga Perkant, Jimbaran; 62-361/705-777; [www.kayumanis.com](http://www.kayumanis.com); doubles from US\$699).



## JAPAN

### Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Located high above the streets of Tokyo's Nihonbashi district, the Mandarin Oriental is a sophisticated addition to the city's luxury-hotel roster. The 179 rooms, designed along forest and water themes, may be a tad buttoned-down for some tastes, but at least the decor doesn't try to compete with the views, which at this height (the hotel's lobby is on the 38th floor of a César Pelli–designed office tower) can be dazzling. Picture windows make the most of the panorama, while 45-inch flat-screen TVs and spacious bathrooms ensure supreme comfort. On hand is an impressive lineup of dining options—including a French restaurant and a tiny tapas-style bar serving molecular cuisine—as well as a top-floor spa where the facilities range from ice fountains to amethyst-crystal steam rooms. For a taste of the area's history, stroll through the nearby Imperial Palace East Gardens for a look at the ruins of Edo Castle, once home to Japan's shoguns (2-1-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi, Chuo-ku; 81-3/3270-8800; [www.mandarinoriental.com](http://www.mandarinoriental.com); doubles from US\$544).

### Grandbell Hotel Shibuya, Tokyo

Tucked away in a residential block a five-minute walk from Shibuya station, this 13-story lodging is a rare thing indeed: a boutique hotel in the heart of one of Tokyo's most energetic neighborhoods. Designed by emerging Japanese firms Matt and Groovisions, it has only 55 rooms, ranging from shoebox-sized singles to two split-level suites. The latter are already popular with local celebrities because of their New York loft feel. They also feature a spacious balcony that looks out over Shibuya's urban sprawl. The one big disadvantage here: only a few staff members speak English (15-17 Sakuragaoka-cho, Shibuya-ku; 81-3/5457-2681; [www.granbellhotel.jp](http://www.granbellhotel.jp); doubles from US\$110).

## MALDIVES

### W Retreat & Spa, Fesdu Island

The latest from W Hotels takes the group's hip, urban-chic formula to the beach. Located on the private island in the North Ari Atoll, Asia's second W (after Seoul) calls itself "a luxury playground where style flirts with soul in a white-sand wonderland." Dangerously hubristic, perhaps, but the resort more than lives up to expectations, from its blindingly white beach and limpid lagoon to its 78 pool villas, most of which are perched above the water. The 500-square-meter Ocean Haven offers the ultimate in barefoot luxury, with its own infinity pool, wraparound deck, and glass-floored lounge area. The wave-lapped Fish restaurant is the perfect place to mix sushi and seafood with idyllic Indian Ocean views; there's also an underground lounge and cocktail bar. W's signature "whatever, whenever" service has lost nothing in translation from city to seaside, and is nowhere more attentive than the Away Spa, an over-water sanctuary offering Ayurvedic, Thai, and Swedish therapies (960/666-2222; [www.whotels.com](http://www.whotels.com); doubles from US\$735).

## MALAYSIA

### Hotel Maya, Kuala Lumpur

Kuala Lumpur's lodgings scene has long been dominated by a safe, if bland, slate of chain hotels. One hopes the debut of the Hotel Maya is a sign of things to come. Fresh from a US\$10 million facelift by Singaporean architect Sonny Chan, this self-styled "boutique urban resort" offers just the right blend of stylish design and homey comfort. The public areas sport water features, bamboo paneling, and cast-iron details, while each of the 207 butler-serviced rooms—more than half of which are smartly appointed suites—comes with 250-thread-count sheets and espresso machines. Fast becoming the city's spa of choice, the Anggun serves up organic juices and a treatment menu that includes everything from hydrotherapy sessions to Malaysian urut massage. And for those who tire of the resort feel, the commercial area around the Petronas Twin Towers is steps away, and Zouk, one of the city's hippest clubs, is just across the road (138 Jalan Ampang; 60-3/2711-8866; [www.hotelmaya.com.my](http://www.hotelmaya.com.my); doubles from US\$123).

## NEPAL

### Le Meridien Kathmandu, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu

These days, you won't find any Nepalese royals hunting the 190 forested hectares surrounding this resort. But you will find the elite of Kathmandu, who make the 20-minute drive from town to play on South Asia's only bent grass 18-hole golf course, designed by Gleneagles' David Kidd. Soaring ceilings and exposed brick give the 55 guest rooms a loft-like vibe, particularly the duplex in the 19th-century Rana Lodge. An indoor pool overlooks the dense forest, and guided nature walks provide glimpses of the national park's 45 bird species—nature enthusiasts might also spot monkeys and barking deer. For those who want the broader perspective, private flights around Mount Everest can be arranged. A spa shaded by century-old trees offers organic body scrubs, while the Tibetan momos (dumplings) at the golf club taste surprisingly authentic, as does the risotto al funghi

(Rajnikunj, Gokarna; 977-1/445-1212; [www.kathmandu.lemeridien.com](http://www.kathmandu.lemeridien.com) ; doubles from US\$80).

## OMAN

### Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa, Muscat

The Shangri-La group's second foray into the Arabian Gulf is a massive three-hotels-in-one seafront property that sits on 50 hectares of landscaped gardens. Just 20 minutes from downtown Muscat, the sprawling resort complex comprises the newly opened Al Husn (the trio's most upmarket hotel, designed in Moorish style), Al Bandar (a showpiece of Dofari architecture), and the family-oriented Al Waha. This is not a place to come for seclusion, but for those looking for convenience and variety, it's hard to beat. Between the three hotels, there are 680 sea-facing rooms, 19 food and beverage outlets (including Sharazan, the country's first Moroccan restaurant), a nightclub, and attractions like the Lazy River, which carries guests in mechanized gondolas down a 250-meter flume (Barr Al Jissah; 968/2477-6666; [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com) ; doubles from US\$390).

## SINGAPORE

### New Majestic Hotel, Singapore

Set in a restored 1928 shophouse in Chinatown, the hip brainchild of lawyer-turned-hotelier Peng Loh—the same name behind the nearby Hotel 1929—is an art-filled hotel that set Singapore abuzz when it opened late last year. Design buffs will love the sprawling lobby filled with surprising yet satisfyingly quirky furnishings such as old dentist's chairs, restored Compton fans, and vintage theater seats. But the real talking points are the guest rooms. Commissioned murals by local artists take center stage in many of them, while a pair of claw-foot bathtubs sit in the middle of the split-level Attic Suites. Standard rooms are small, but they're functional and come with private outdoor terraces (31-37 Bukit Pasoh Rd.; 65/6511-4700; [www.newmajestichotel.com](http://www.newmajestichotel.com) ; doubles from US\$115).

## SRI LANKA

### Ceylon Tea Trails, Bogawantalawa Valley

Three hours inland from Colombo at an elevation of 1,200 meters, the lush tea fields of Bogawantalawa Valley provide the setting for an innovative resort by Dilmah, Sri Lanka's leading tea producer. Tea Trails comprises four restored colonial-era planters' bungalows, all linked by walking trails. Each of the villas is unique, with the best being Castlereagh and Summerville for their prime lakeside perches. A onetime planter leads guests through the tea-making process from bud picking to an unexpectedly fascinating tasting. Mountain biking and early-morning hikes up Adam's Peak keep outdoor enthusiasts busy between gourmet meals, which are accompanied by Dilmah's aromatic Wattle teas—sure to convert even diehard coffee drinkers (94-11/230-3888; [www.teatrails.com](http://www.teatrails.com) ; US\$178 per person, all-inclusive).

### Lunuganga, Bentota

Architecture buffs and garden enthusiasts should schedule their Sri Lanka sojourns between December and mid-April to overnight at Lunuganga. For the rest of the year, this bucolic riverside estate—the former home of the late architect Geoffrey Bawa—operates as an artists' retreat, but during this four-and-a-half month window, it offers some of the most intimate accommodation on the island. Bawa's eclectic abode may lack air conditioning, but powerful fans keep things cool and each room embodies his timeless taste, like the monochromatic chic of the white-lacquer Guest Room. Those in search of greater privacy should check into Cinnamon Hill, a romantic waterside cottage with dedicated butler service. There are 10 hectares of Italianate gardens to poke about in, as well as boat rides through the surrounding estuaries, though most guests will be content enjoying the exquisite views from the veranda (Dedduwa Lake; 94-91/438-0275; [www.srilankainstyle.com](http://www.srilankainstyle.com); doubles from US\$190).

## SYRIA

### Four Seasons Hotel, Damascus

The Syrian capital's most prestigious address is an irresistible blend of old-world opulence and contemporary chic. French designer Pierre-Yves Rochon has drawn on Ottoman and Persian influences in his assemblage of objets and locally crafted furniture, like hand-painted ajami doors. The guest rooms—some of the largest in the city—are decorated in shades of celadon and cream and feature vanities and mirrors inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The hotel's crowning glory is its 75-seat Al Halabi restaurant that specializes in the Aleppo cuisine of northern Syria, considered the country's finest food (Shukri al-Quwatli St.; 963-11/339-1000; [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com) ; doubles from US\$265).

## TAIWAN

### **Villa 32, Taipei**

Taiwan's society types are opting out of Bali and Bangkok to spend their downtime at this chic five-suite retreat in the Taipei suburb of Beitou. Made of imported lowa wood and Australian sandstone, the ultramodern complex is nestled among soaring camphor trees on misty Yangming Mountain. It was built as a private home for a Taipei tycoon who filled the wine cellar with rare bottles from his 30,000-plus collection (including a Chateau Lafite 1784) before turning his dream into what could be the island's most decadent lodgings. Plush Western-style duplexes boast hot and cold soaking tubs, while in the two tatami suites, guests keep warm under the same bespoke duvets favored by Japanese royalty. For the real heat, slide into pools filled with mineral-rich water from the mountain's hot springs. In the upstairs spa, therapists trained by a Qigong master bring scientific precision to traditional massages. The views from this perch are straight out of a Chinese scroll painting (32 Zhongshan Rd., Beitou; 886-2/6611-8888; [www.villa32.com](http://www.villa32.com); doubles from US\$487).

## **THAILAND**

### **Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, Chiang Rai**

The mountains of northern Thailand are rich in culture, with a history that encompasses the Opium Wars, Silk Road trade, and influences from China, India, Burma, and Laos in incredible ways. The Four Seasons group aims to take advantage of the area's singular blend of heritage and tourist potential with its first-ever campsite-style hotel. The 15 canvas-covered rooms are furnished along different themes. The Explorers Tent, for example, bundles together wall-hung sabers, books by Joseph Conrad, walking sticks, and antique compasses in the name of discovery. An on-site elephant camp is the classiest version of this yet in Asia; you can watch its six elephants bathe in a curve of the Ruak River or ride them bareback with the help of resident mahouts. The Thai food is below average, but that should improve in time. We just hope the sunset views over the river toward the Burmese border will never change (66-53/652- 191; [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com) ; doubles from US\$500).

### **Aleenta, Phuket**

Since opening in the Thai holiday town of Pranburi, the original Aleenta has been a cult hit among Bangkok weekenders. Its second act, on Phuket's relatively undeveloped northeast coast, promises to go one better. Stylish touches like flowing white robes, sleeping masks filled with scented rice, and house-blended massage oils at the small spa combine the polish of a five-star resort with the personalized feel that one gets at a good European inns. Yoga retreats, yacht cruises, and tailor-made cooking classes are among the impressive program of activities. The Thai-accented menu focuses on simple seafood dishes like sautéed swimmer crab with yellow curry. In keeping with the house philosophy of "Outside Living—In," the resort is replete with soaring glass windows and natural woods, and everything, from the beds to the private plunge pools, has been positioned to make the most of the views of the Andaman Sea (Khao Pilai Beach; 66-2/508-5333; [www.aleenta.com](http://www.aleenta.com) ; doubles from US\$400).

### **Dream, Bangkok**

It took a while, but the made-for-nightlife sois (lanes) off Bangkok's Sukhumvit Road are finally home to a hotel aimed at the young, monied partyers who patronize nearby hot spots like BED Supperclub and Q Bar. A New York City import, Dream Bangkok draws equal inspiration from surrealism, European opulence, and rock-and-roll. The 100 rooms are already filling up with a worldly blend of media and design types. Rich materials feature throughout: Bisazza tiling, black marble, chocolate-toned leather. The chef, David Hamilton (formerly of Trisara and the Watermark in Phuket), is a talented young Australian whose inventive Thai food includes black sticky rice—and-date pudding with a butterscotch sauce made from palm sugar. The signature restaurant and the glass-encased bar share the name Flava, and have already hosted a long list of Thai celebrities. Rooms are small but clean-lined, with wenge wood furniture, platform beds, and soothing blue LED lighting that is meant to enhance slumber (10 Sukhumvit Soi 15; 66-2/ 254-8500; [www.dreambkk.com](http://www.dreambkk.com) ; doubles from US\$129).

### **The Sarojin, Khao Lak**

This elegant low-rise property, whose opening was postponed for some crucial post-tsunami repairs, sits on four hectares of beachfront overlooking the Andaman Sea. Each of the 56 rooms comes with sunlit bathrooms and outdoor salas; pool residences have private plunge pools. Treatment pavilions at the open-air spa look out across the estuary to a deserted coconut grove. Those who tire of Khao Lak's 11-kilometer stretch of sand can jump aboard the hotel's private 26-meter yacht, the Lady Sarojin, for diving and cruising excursions around the nearby Similan Islands (60 Moo 2, Kuk Kak; 66-76/427-900; [www.sarojin.com](http://www.sarojin.com) ; doubles from US\$240).

### **D2 Hotel, Chiang Mai**

Marking the debut of a new generation of design-minded lodgings from Thailand's venerable

Dusit Hotels group, D2 is well located near Chiang Mai's Night Bazaar and the banks of the Ping River. While the 130 rooms are decorated in the most minimalist of senses, a dose of traditional charm lingers in details like handmade carpets and raw-silk cushions. The walled-in outdoor pool area feels claustrophobic, but not so Moxie, a hip and airy restaurant serving Thai-accented international fare and sumptuous desserts (100 Chang Klan Rd.; 66-53/999-999; [www.d2hotels.com](http://www.d2hotels.com) ; doubles from US\$130).

#### **Millennium Hilton, Bangkok**

Set on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, this boldly designed 543-room property boasts the best views of any hotel in Bangkok. Whether from the 32nd-floor Three Sixty lounge or the waterside terrace, the scenery takes in royal temples, palaces, and of course the busy nut-brown river itself. The glamorous Zeta Bar serves adventurous cocktails inspired by Sydney's progressive drinking scene but with an added zing thanks to local ingredients like basil, mint, chili, and pomelo. Tops for taste is Prime, a high-end steakhouse with thick-cut American steaks and one of Bangkok's better wine lists. All rooms bear the contemporary East-West influence of designer Tony Chi, who played a key role in shaping the hotel's sleek look (123 Charoennakorn Rd.; 66-2/442-2000; [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com) ; doubles from US\$170).

#### **Zazen, Koh Samui**

Zazen is a smart and sophisticated version of the family-run beach hotels that first made Samui a watchword among travelers. The meandering garden paths and gurgling fountains are charming, as are the warm tones of peach, red, and amber sponge-painted on arched passageways and guest-room ceilings. All 28 rooms differ slightly in shape and design, but their common theme is Lanna-style furniture, woodcarvings, and Thai silks arranged just sparsely enough to feel modern. Food is a strong point here thanks to Belgian chef Walter Andreni, whose broad-ranging menu includes king-crab keftedes and shrimp tempura with green-tea noodles and sun-dried tomato dip. Decorated with enormous wicker bucket chairs and flickering lanterns that recall Morocco, the bar is a great place to sip mojitos, nibble on tapas, or even play pool. For those who want to step out for a bite, Fisherman's Village, a nearby row of well-preserved Thai-Chinese houses, has a number of good eateries (177 Moo 1, Bophut; 66-77/425-085; [www.samuzazen.com](http://www.samuzazen.com) ; doubles from US\$102).

### **TURKEY**

#### **Sumahan on the Water, Istanbul**

Istanbul's Asian shore may not be as well trodden as its European side, but that hasn't stopped romance-seekers from checking into this waterfront gem in the historic Çengelköy neighborhood. Looking south down the Bosphorus to such monuments as the Hagia Sophia, Sumahan is the brainchild of its Turkish-American owners, architects Mark and Nedret Butler, who transformed the 19th-century building (a onetime distillery) into one of the city's most stylish boutique hotels. The 18 rooms, designed with a contemporary edge by the Butlers' daughter, Yasha, all have spectacular views, as does Kordon, the fabulous seafood restaurant. And for those who want to get closer to the sights, there's the Sumahan I, a wooden launch that takes guests for jaunts across the strait (51 Kuleli Caddesi; 90- 216/422-8000; [www.sumahan.com](http://www.sumahan.com); doubles from US\$220).

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