



THIS IS THE GOLD LIST ISSUE 2017

Everything in this special double-trouble publication is gold, gold, gold. Not as in Spandau Ballet's 'always believe in your soul'. Nor really, I hope, gold as in brash. Nor, necessarily, tap nor tooth, nor indeed ticket. Nor handshake, nor rush, nor shower, nor mine. But gold as in 'exceptional' and 'classic'. Gold as in classy (though obviously it's the opposite of classy to say classy).

I'm asked all the time – and not just by hairdressers – what my favourite places are, my best hotels. So here is my list, designed to be as helpful as possible. I can't give you my favourite moments, the ones that take place in the places in between the actual places, because those are what you can't prescribe. The best parts of travelling are often the results of happy accidents. But if you are going to try and make those happy accidents happen as much as is humanly possible, I would at least consider the following:

Brown and Hudson, a tour operator that goes to extraordinary degrees to arrange entirely bespoke trips, layered with top-notch experiences. It will cost you, but you get the feeling it costs the boss Philippe more; he will not sleep until everything is the best best best. Esencia in Mexico is the perfect beach hotel. It is low-key and fabulous, its design is beautiful but not overcooked, and it's on the most wonderful stretch of coastline. North Island in the Seychelles is also a beach breaker of hearts, like a shipwrecked love letter written by Gandalf. Plus, while we're still cleaving to coast, there's always Soneva Fushi. There is a reason everyone wants to go to Soneva Fushi and it's not just the rabbits. The Maldives in general. Take the mickey out of them all you like, the clash of sea and beach is mesmerising. It will gouge out your eyes with happiness. Lying on a yellow lilo at Soneva Fushi sucking up the blues below me and above me was like floating in actual heaven; when I cannot sleep this is what I think of. Luang Prabang. The famous town between two rivers in Laos; full of monks and teak houses and coffee shops and hippies. Delicious. But then so is Bali, despite the astonishing amount of development in the last 30 years. Always Indonesia, and yet also Paris. Crunch the gravel of the Tuileries Garden and marvel at empire. *Pacific Yellowfin*, a boat that mainly operates out of British Columbia; a more special crew of people, skill sets and raw wildness would be hard to find. Except, of course, in the Kalahari Desert; chase the setting sun on the fastest motorbike you can lay your hands on, and then turn 180 degrees and hunt down the rising moon.

And yet, if all this is too much, then do not underestimate the potency of a staycation: go to a hotel in another part of town from where you live. It is curiously brilliant being a tourist on home turf; not just to discover different parts of the city, but also to observe your fellow countrymen anew. Once you are out of your own neighbourhood you tend to look at people in a more respectful way, you are both close to them and yet distanced from them, and these fresh eyes bring fresh glories. It turns out, in the right light, even British humans can seem exotic, bordering on amazing.

This is the Gold List issue of *Condé Nast Traveller*. Gold as in brilliant. Gold as in you'd do it all again tomorrow.

MELINDA STEVENS

EDITOR



IN THIS ISSUE WE ASKED CONDÉ NAST STAFF TO RECALL THEIR MOST INCREDIBLE TRAVEL HITS. LOOK OUT FOR THEIR ANSWERS IN THE LITTLE GOLDEN BANDS AT THE BOTTOM OF THESE PAGES

JONATHAN NEWHOUSE, CONDÉ NAST INTERNATIONAL CHAIRMAN SITTING, JUST LIKE THOMAS MANN I USED TO, IN THE READING ROOM AT THE WALDHAUS HOTEL IN THE ALPS

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