

A photograph of a modern, minimalist building with dark wood paneling and large glass windows. The building is situated next to a large, steaming blue geothermal pool. In the background, there are snow-capped mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is serene and relaxing.

FEW THINGS CLEAR THE MIND AND SOOTHE THE BODY LIKE  
SOAKING IN A HOT SPRING. SLIP INTO THE GEOTHERMAL  
WATERS OF THESE ANCIENT POOLS AND BOUTIQUE STAYS  
AROUND THE WORLD. BY RACHEL LEES

STILL

YOUR  
SENSES



## ICELAND

- This is the pleasure ground of hot springs and you can't go to Iceland without plunging into the silica-rich **Blue Lagoon** ([hotel.qantas.com.au/retreatatblue-lagoon](https://hotel.qantas.com.au/retreatatblue-lagoon)) at least once. While the 2018 opening of the Retreat – a 62-room luxury hotel with subterranean spa and two restaurants – elevated the experience, the main drawcard hasn't changed: a float in the geothermal seawater lagoon built on a lava field.
- Newcomer **Sky Lagoon** ([skylagoon.com](https://skylagoon.com)), a 15-minute drive from Reykjavik, is a 70-metre oceanfront infinity pool forged into a cliff top overlooking the North Atlantic Sea. Opened in 2021, created with sustainability in mind and drawing on traditional Icelandic turf house design, it blends seamlessly with its natural surroundings and has become a prime spot to watch blazing sunsets and the Northern Lights.
- Off the main motorway and bordered by a forest, Gamla Laugin or the **Secret Lagoon** ([secretlagoon.is](https://secretlagoon.is)) was built in 1891. "The pool has been modified over time but remains in its natural setting next to boiling hot springs and a small geyser," says manager Isabel de Ridder. A wonderfully rustic experience, there are hot showers and a café onsite.



The Retreat at Blue Lagoon (left);  
Secret Lagoon (above)

## UNITED STATES

- Two prospecting brothers struck another type of gold when they opened a hot springs retreat on Alaska's Chena River in the early 1900s. Back then, a dip in the geothermal waters surrounded by tall spruce trees required a lengthy stagecoach ride from Fairbanks. Today, a day trip to **Chena Hot Springs Resort** ([chenahotsprings.com](http://chenahotsprings.com)) is a comfy hour-long shuttle ride from the Alaskan hub. "Locals will tell you the best time to enjoy the hot springs is when it's at least minus 30 degrees outside," says Vicktoria Wilcox, who works there. "If you're lucky, you might catch the aurora borealis."
- In Arizona's Sonoran Desert, luxury resort **Castle Hot Springs** ([castlehotsprings.com](http://castlehotsprings.com)) has a unique edge. "There's no sulphur odour, which is prevalent in many hot springs," says general manager Kevin Maguire. Enveloped by waterfalls, the resort's three pools are accessed via a spectacular canyon walk and are rich in lithium, a feel-good mineral.
- If you don't want to venture into the wild, book into **Dr. Wilkinson's Backyard Resort & Mineral Springs** ([hotel.qantas.com.au/drwilkinsonsresort](http://hotel.qantas.com.au/drwilkinsonsresort)). The playfully reimagined Mid-century Modern motel in Calistoga, California, has three geothermal pools, eight mineral baths and an array of mud-bath treatments and massages.



Castle Hot Springs in Arizona (above)



Alba Thermal Springs & Spa in Victoria (above); QC Terme Grand Hotel Bagni Nuovi in Italy (below)



## AUSTRALIA

- Next month's forecast for Victoria's Mornington Peninsula is looking steamy, as **Alba Thermal Springs & Spa** ([albathermalsprings.com.au](http://albathermalsprings.com.au)) opens. Enveloped by the coastal Moonah woodland, 22 of its 31 pools are modern geothermal springs. Expect special dawn and twilight bathing sessions, along with botanical, cold-plunge, rooftop and rain pools. Plus, a restaurant with an all-day Mediterranean-inspired menu by Melbourne chef Karen Martini.
- Although it requires extra planning to get there, your effort is rewarded at **Zebedee Springs** in the Kimberley, Western Australia. Accessible during the dry season (April to October) within the 28,300-hectare wilderness of El Questro ([elquestro.com.au](http://elquestro.com.au)), the easiest way to visit is on a half-day tour from the luxury homestead. "Located in ancient and arid land, it's such a surprise when this unique hot spring surrounded by palms emerges," says general manager Geoff Trewin.
- Just as remote and special is **Dalhousie Springs** in South Australia's Witjira National Park ([parks.sa.gov.au](http://parks.sa.gov.au)) near the Simpson Desert, about 500 kilometres south of Alice Springs. "They were used by the Lower Southern Arrernte and Wangkangurru peoples for thousands of years as a source of food, shelter and medicine," says National Parks and Wildlife Service district ranger Travis Gotch. "They've been flowing for about two million years and are home to flora and fauna found nowhere else on the planet."

## ITALY

- A waterfall plunges down the side of an old stone mill, tumbling into a series of terraced limestone pools in southern Tuscany... Sigh. Enriched with sulphur and thermal plankton, the waters of **Cascade del Mulino** or Saturnia Hot Springs ([cascade-del-mulino.info](http://cascade-del-mulino.info)) were used by the ancient Romans and are said to treat everything from high blood pressure to skin and respiratory issues.
- Balneotherapy buffs should head further north to **QC Terme Grand Hotel Bagni Nuovi** ([hotel.qantas.com.au/grandhotelbagninuovi](http://hotel.qantas.com.au/grandhotelbagninuovi)) in Lombardy's Bormio. Built in 1836 as a palace for the Queen of Austria, the opulent hotel and spa is now a wellness haven. Its pink Art Nouveau façade is only outshone by the panoramic views of the Alps seen from its outdoor thermal pools, including a stone "bath" once used by shepherds to wash sheep fleece.
- In nearby South Tyrol, day spa **Terme Merano** ([termemerano.it](http://termemerano.it)) is another must-visit. After undergoing an expansion in 2018-2019, the 52,000-square-metre facility has 15 indoor pools housed in a four-storey glass cube, plus 10 outdoor pools surrounded by manicured lawns and rose bushes. "Water is pumped from Monte San Vigilio and its moderate radon content soothes osteoarthritis and allergies," says marketing manager Tanja Pruenster.



Amanemu (above)

## JAPAN

- Once a summer retreat of the Japanese Imperial family, **Gora Kadan** ([gorakadan.com](http://gorakadan.com)) in Hakone near Mount Fuji now welcomes all-comers. The Relais & Chateaux hotel has a public onsen and family bath framed by manicured Japanese gardens, plus select rooms and suites have their own outdoor stone tubs fed by hot springs. The mild alkaline waters are said to soften skin, making spa treatments more effective (so book in for a few).
- Craving the coast? Head to **Amanemu** ([hotel.qantas.com.au/amanemu](http://hotel.qantas.com.au/amanemu)) in the forested hills of Ise-Shima on Japan's east coast. The centrepiece of the Aman group's first hot spring resort is an outdoor onsen pool lined with daybeds, where you can "bask in the healing waters while enjoying the view of serene Ago Bay", according to general manager Takao Kadota. The hideaway also has a 2000-square-metre spa offering thermal-spring therapy and each of the resort's 24 suites and four villas has its own basalt-clad hot spring bath.
- An hour's train ride south of Osaka, **Saki-no-Yu** ([town.shirahama.wakayama.jp](http://town.shirahama.wakayama.jp)) in Shirahama is a *rotenburo* (open-air bath) built into the rocks next to the Pacific Ocean – you'll be close enough to feel the spray from the waves as they hit the shore. ●