



16 DEC, 2023

THE HOT LIST

Weekend Australian, Australia



THE HOT LIST

Looking for inspiration over the festive season?
Let these pages be your guide...

Journeys

By Elizabeth Meryment



Are we there yet? As we lurch towards Christmas the weather warms, the champagne corks pop and it'll soon be time to don a swimsuit. If you're in the mood for adventure it's not too late to book a local stay or use the break to plan your travel schedules for the year ahead. We have a hot list of inspiration within these pages and there's nothing better than embarking on the new year with a calendar studded with journeys near and far. The travel trends emerging for 2024? Sustainable and "slow" travel on foot, in a train carriage or by sea. Luxury adventures abound. And a global high-end hotel boom has produced exceptional new destination properties, the competition yielding a standard of dining and drinking that's higher than ever. The world is your oyster, go enjoy it.



SHORT STAYS

Wintjiri Wiru, Uluru, NT
Wintjiri Wiru means "beautiful view out to the horizon" in the Pitjantjatjara language of the Anangu people – an apt description for this incredible spot. A drone show of more than 1000 lights that plays out across the inky sky over Uluru (pictured) just after sunset, Wintjiri Wiru is one of a slew of exhilarating and immersive sunrise and dusk activities (along with the flight prices) that reward



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an off-season visit to the heart of the nation, even if temperatures demand a nap in the middle of the day. On arrival, guests to the drone show take to an elevated platform overlooking the Rock to sip cocktails, then, as night falls, eat a dinner of hearty snacks with accents of native ingredients – think gin-infused cucumber with green ants and celery salt, and lemon myrtle crocodile curry pie. ayersrockresort.com.au/wintijuri-wiru

Hotel Sorrento, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria

Located on the waterfront in this charming heritage town, Hotel Sorrento is an historic pub with a modern heart. Built in 1872, the pub has been receiving a loving restoration over recent years, culminating in the opening of new accommodation this month. The 13 "sunset suites" are luxe suites that use



stone – travertine, marble and limestone – as well as local timber to bring the outdoors in. The vibe is beach luxe, aided and abetted by the sleek 30m pool. The onsite restaurants, which include the pumping Dining Room and the subterranean modern-Chinese restaurant Shihuishi, are excellent – and excellent fun. The whole experience is a luxe retreat from city life. hotelsorrento.com.au

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



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Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island, SA

It was described as the greatest remote lodge in Australia before the cruel 2019-2020 bushfires tore through this island wilderness off the coast of Adelaide. Flames razed the incredible Southern Ocean Lodge with its unique cliff-hugging architecture and views to eternity. But its owners, the Baillie family – who own other luxe properties including Uluru’s Longitude 131, and Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island – refused to be cowed, undertaking a complete rebuild of the property. On December 6, three years since it burned down, the lodge (pictured above) reopened. To the naked eye, it looks almost as it was before it burned; but there are subtle changes. The rooms that sit like a spine along the ridge facing the ocean have been turned slightly to capture better views, and there’s a new hyper-luxe suite, sleeping eight. Plus, there’s a new hot spa and cold plunge pool in a nod to the new global emphasis on wellness travel. Welcome back, Southern Ocean Lodge, you’ve been reborn.

► southernoceanlodge.com.au

W Sydney

Not only does W Sydney boast the best breakfast buffet we’ve had in a long while, but the city’s newest five-star property brings the kind of urban glamour you expect to find overseas. The star feature of the hotel (which doesn’t feel as vast as it is, with 585 rooms) is the two-storey rooftop bar overlooking Darling Harbour with adjoining infinity pool (pictured below). The mix of DJ, cabanas, cocktails and eclectic decor makes the place feel like a playground.

► marriott.com



Hotel Realm, Barton, Canberra

Is it too early to start planning next year’s mini breaks? No, it’s not. How about a weekend at Canberra’s most spectacular event, the flower and entertainment festival Floriade? Stay at Hotel Realm in Barton, a well-located hotel where a brilliant new French restaurant has opened. Louis Dining, with chef Ben Willis at the pans, does excellent takes on classics such as John Dory with grenobloise and cauliflower cream, and chicken ballotine with mushrooms. The classy dining room (pictured) is as enjoyable as the food. Floriade 2024 is on September 14-October 13, 2024.

► hotelrealm.com.au; floriadeaustralia.com



PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER BENNE

SHORT STAYS



The Ritz-Carlton, Melbourne

Off to Melbourne for the tennis? Take to the skies (and escape the crowds around Federation Square) at the hotel that embodies the city’s post-Covid renaissance. Whizz up 80 floors to the reception and experience views over the Bay and out to the Macedon Ranges that most Melbourne locals have never seen. Have a sundowner at Cameo bar with its selection of “vintage” cocktails, while at swanky Atria restaurant, helmed by chef Michael Greenlaw, there’s local artisanship on display on the menu (and in the cutlery drawer: the steak knives are hand forged in the Dandenongs). The Ritz may be a world-renowned brand, but the Melbourne branch leaves nothing to chance.

► ritzcarlton.com



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DREAM HOTELS

Juvet Landscape Hotel, Valldal, Norway

Extremely remote eco-lodges are a hot global trend, as dedicated travellers do their utmost to escape the hell that is other people on holiday. And they don't come much more remote than this achingly scenic lodge two hours from far-flung Alesund in Norway's northwest. Juvet Landscape Hotel is so off-the-beaten track you might think people wouldn't bother going there. That would be wrong. The lodge, consisting of a series of wood cabins and treehouses scattered around a traditional Norwegian farmhouse and Nordic sauna complex (complete with covered with a grassy roof and mountain views), is a global phenomenon, a celebrity of a hotel in its own right for its low-impact design and cool factor. This year the property garnered a new legion of fans when it made a star turn in the HBO hit drama *Succession*. The adulation is deserved, as the architecture is wild and the scenery even more so. Book well ahead; the rooms are scarce.

▶ juvet.com

Raffles London at The OWO

They're calling the launch of Raffles London at The OWO (Old War Office) the UK capital's hotel opening of the century. It's a big call, sure, but given £1.4billion (\$A2.6 billion) has been poured into repurposing Winston Churchill's war chambers into a tourist attraction of unparalleled luxury, it's probably a fair call. Located 200m from 10 Downing St, Raffles London at The OWO has been seriously considered by its Indian owners, with touches of history found in every transaction, down to the hot towels infused with a fragrance designed for Empress Eugénie in 1853. The property consists of 120 rooms, nine restaurants, three bars, a spa and an underground pool. For WWII buffs it's a must, of course, but the key market is the super-luxury traveller seeking the experience of utter luxury in historic surrounds. With small rooms starting at £1100 (\$A2100) and expansive suites costing £25,000 (\$A47,750) a night, it's fair to say a new level of extravagance has arrived.

▶ raffles.com/london

Six Senses Rome

Located in the heart of Rome in a building with its own trove of Renaissance treasures, including a hand-carved marble staircase dating back to the days of Leonardo da Vinci, Six Senses Rome is an eco-lodge, a wellness centre and luxury escape all rolled into one. The first CBD hotel from the international group known for its sustainability ethos, this new Rome property has been lovingly considered by designer Patricia Urquiola. While the lobby and restaurants exude contemporary style, the attention to detail at every turn – from the all-day open gelato bar for guests to the restoration work the hotel has done on the San Marcello al Corso Church next door – take this property to the next level. Start the day at in-house Roman baths, where a sequence of hot and cold pools, scented showers and saunas revitalise the body and soul, before ending the day on the rooftop with its exhilarating view of the domes of Rome. This is one of the world's great hotels.

▶ sixsenses.com/rome





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Ace Hotel, Kyoto

Kyoto is rightly famed for its wondrous – and ancient – collection of temples, shrines and statues, plus its glorious gardens, its layered culture and excellent food. This year the boutique American hotel group Ace opened in the historic city, bringing with it a slice of cool for those who want to experience the zen of Kyoto while enjoying as many western perks as possible. With its earthy tones and bold textures, the 213-room hotel offers a stimulating sensory experience and a retreat from the masses of quaintness found in abundance outside the door. Australians will be familiar with the brand from the Sydney Ace outpost, and may find the Kyoto version the perfect base for their Japanese adventure. Located close to Kyoto's best shopping and eating (there's a 200-year-old confectioner's shop across the street), Ace is a beautiful launchpad for getting the most of this incredible destination.

▶ acehotel.com/kyoto

Villa Mabrouka, Tangier

Once the home of legendary fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent, Villa Mabrouka is an exquisite property with a storied history. Overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar, the villa was this year reimagined by British designer Jasper Conran, and reopened with 12 boutique rooms surrounding what *Wallpaper* magazine describes as "one of the white city's most enchanting gardens". Each room in this treasure of a hotel is exquisite, and the shared spaces represent quintessential Moroccan style: think checkerboard tiles overlaid with fringed palms in white pots between blue-and-white urns. The pool with its palm-fringed deck, arched pool hall and flowering shubbery is like a scene from a James Bond movie. Explore this exotic city from this luxury pad, or stay in for a laid-back holiday taken in old-fashioned style. Definitely a destination for the keenest style hunters.

▶ villamabrouka.com

Luxe: from left, Juvet Landscape Hotel; Ace Hotel lobby; lounge area at Six Senses Rome; pool at Villa Mabrouka. Below, the staircase at Raffles London; bedroom at The Fifth Avenue Hotel



The Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York

It's being labelled "New York's most anticipated new hotel" – a big claim in the city that never sleeps, but judging by all the hype, entirely justified. The Fifth Avenue Hotel, located across the road from the Flatiron Building at West 23rd St, slides this month into the The Mansion building (est 1907), with 153 rooms painstakingly designed by Martin Brudnizki. The design takes a maximalist approach, which means it is lavish, gorgeous and over-the-top, with a Gilded Age vibe that returns guests to the era when hotels were grand and travelling was grander. The attention to detail is extraordinary, indeed, thrilling. This is a bucket list hotel, with a bucket list address, in a bucket list city.

▶ thefifthavenuehote.com

PHOTOGRAPHY: @THE TRAVELBOOK; YOSHIHIRO MAKINO; ANDREW MONTGOMERY



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Greece
 Like Italy, Greece is booming as a destination for Australian travellers, this year making it onto the top 10 global destinations for Aussies (per visitor numbers, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics). And who doesn't love the combination of sunny skies, ancient relics and the Mediterranean diet? The sense is that the party island of Mykonos and the blue-domed Santorini are saturated with commercial tourism these days and best avoided by those looking for a more "authentic" experience. More adventurous travellers are seeking smaller, quieter, off-the-beaten-track Greek experiences, of which there are still plenty. Island-hop your way through Ithaca (pictured above), Spetses, Astypalea and Kythnos, each with its own remote and secretive charms, while in April the One&Only chain is opening a spectacular destination haven on Kéa Island, the closest island in the Cyclades archipelago to Athens. The island is dotted with scenic seaside towns and ancient ruins including the archaeological site of Ancient Karthea. The resort is spectacularly located on a 65ha beachfront site on the west side of the island with unimpeded views of the Aegean. Heaven.



PLAN AHEAD FOR 2024



Singapore
 There's nothing stopping this little island nation. Bouncing back from Covid with a bang, 2023 has seen the opening or reopening here of a bounty of key destination hotels, including the famed Mandarin Oriental (pictured above). Under the direction of Kuala Lumpur-based DesignWilkes, the Mandarin Oriental, opened in the 1980s, was unwrapped last month after a six-month restoration. The design brief is colourful and tropical, reflecting the property's position just 130km north of the equator, but with plenty of heritage touches. Also unveiled last month was the COMO Metropolitan Singapore, a 156-room property stretching over 11 floors on Singapore's Bideford Road. Part of the international COMO brand, which has properties across the world from Italy to Bali, the hotel is part of a retail, wellness and dining complex called COMO Orchard aimed squarely at the luxury market. New, too, is Edition Singapore, a high-end offshoot from the Marriott hotel group constructed in collaboration with Studio 54 creator Ian Schrager. This one is particularly interesting to Australians due to the onsite restaurant Fysh, operated by Sydney chef Josh Niland. It's said to be pitched as a "pescatarian steakhouse", whatever that means.



Canada
 Nature is calling and Canada is answering. As Australians increasingly turn off holidaying in the US (ABS figures show a 40 per cent decline in Australian travel to the US since 2019), we are looking for other English-speaking destinations. Enter Canada with its amazing scenery, good food, great shopping, safety and nice people. An excellent way to get around is to simply traverse the Fairmont hotel network, bouncing between eye-popping locations. From Fairmont Hotel Vancouver to Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta's magnificent Jasper National Park, to the Fairmont Hotel Banff (pictured above), there's a plethora of fresh-air destinations to delve into. America? Who needs it.
 ► fairmont.com



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Puglia and the Italian south

It might have seemed from your social media feeds that everyone you knew was in sunny, continental Europe in 2023. And you would have been correct, because tourism from Australia to Europe is booming. The Number 1 destination? That's right, Italy. (Greece is the second favourite choice of Australians to Europe, as previously noted). And why wouldn't people want to travel to Italy? With its culture, its beauty, its food, its wine, its people, its beaches, its sheer Instagramability, it is a magnet for Australians who are absolutely in sync with the Italian philosophy of la dolce vita. This year, though, the tourist hordes of Florence and Venice were a turn-off for many Aussies who went further afield in

search of a slice of Italian heaven without the crush of other Anglophones. The pick of the destinations? Puglia, in the country's southeast, with its dramatic white clifftop towns and turquoise Adriatic seascapes. The area is accessed through two airports, Bari and Brindisi, with small but perfectly formed coastal towns such as Monopoli and Polignano a Mare (pictured above) located along the coastline. The historic cream-coloured town of Lecce is a must-visit, while the peculiar beehive shaped houses of Alberobello make it a must-see too. And once you've experienced Puglia, head west for a cluster of other enticing destinations including Naples, Sorrento and Sicily, the latter newly popularised after its starring role in the second series of the cable soapie, *The White Lotus*.

IT'S A SLICE OF ITALIAN HEAVEN, WITHOUT THE CROWDS



Arctic Circle

According to America's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the period between now and early 2025 will be the best time for the next decade to see the magical aurora borealis, or Northern Lights (pictured above). These eerie green streaks across the sky occur in the Arctic Circle as a result of solar storms on the surface of the sun that cause electrically charged particles to reach the north and south poles of Earth. The prediction of a great year for the Northern Lights means aurora hunters are circling for the perfect location to catch the phenomenon. The best towns to book into include Tromsø in Norway, Reykjavik in Iceland, Rovaniemi in Finland and Gjógv in the Faroe Islands. Be prepared to get a little chilly, though.

Paris

There's no question that 2024 will be Paris's year. After warming up with the Rugby World Cup in 2023, the city is ready for the arrival of the world's biggest show, the Olympics, next year. And although the city receives some bad press now and then – riots, strikes, garbage in the streets – Paris is as remarkable as it ever was, filled with beauty and guile at every turn. Looking for a hotel? The Hoxton in the 2nd arrondissement is a chic, fun, well-priced hotel in a happening neighbourhood with an excellent courtyard bistro and bar where you can while away many hours over cocktails and canapés. For something more upmarket and close to the city's tourist haunts including the Champs-Élysées, Hotel Grand Powers is an exquisite small hotel with every luxury, including views from some rooms of the Eiffel Tower. It's a true hidden gem.



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TRAVEL TRENDS 



Taking the waters
 Victorian-era Londoners were onto something when, back in the gloomy 1800s, they escaped the dirty old city to “take the waters” in warm and lovely Mediterranean Europe. *Plus ça change* and all that because wellness, and indeed water therapy, is back – and here we all are installing steam rooms and cold plunge pools in our houses and travelling to Greenland or Antarctica to jump into sub-zero degree oceans or floating in the Dead Sea in the interest of promoting good health and stimulating the nervous system. Locally, travellers are seeking out the temperate waters of Victoria around Daylesford and the Mornington Peninsula, where natural hot springs bubble to the surface at a soothing temperature of about 40C. The reigning queens of wellness in Victoria is Alba Thermal Springs and its neighbour Peninsula Hot Springs (pictured above) near Rosebud, south of Melbourne. At Alba, a \$100m complex has been built around the mineral-rich springs that dot the lush landscape; plunge in to feel great. And truth be told, you can find wellness in almost every self-respecting five-star hotel these days; go for Swedish steamroom therapies and stay for body rubs, scented Arctic mist spray showers and the infra-red sauna experiences.



Walking (& swimming) the world
 If eco-tourism is on the rise, and it is, there are few better ways to engage with the world from the ground up than walking over it. Hence, perhaps, the boom in organised walking tours, in Australia and abroad. A local tour company, Great Walks of Australia, has noticed an increase in interest in its multi-day walks, which traverse some of the nation’s most rugged and remote terrain. From glorious Freycinet in Tasmania to Lord Howe Island and the “Cape to Cape” walk

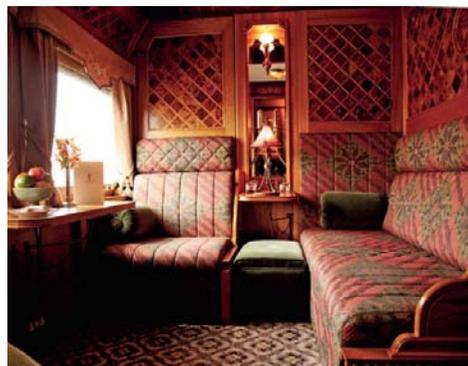
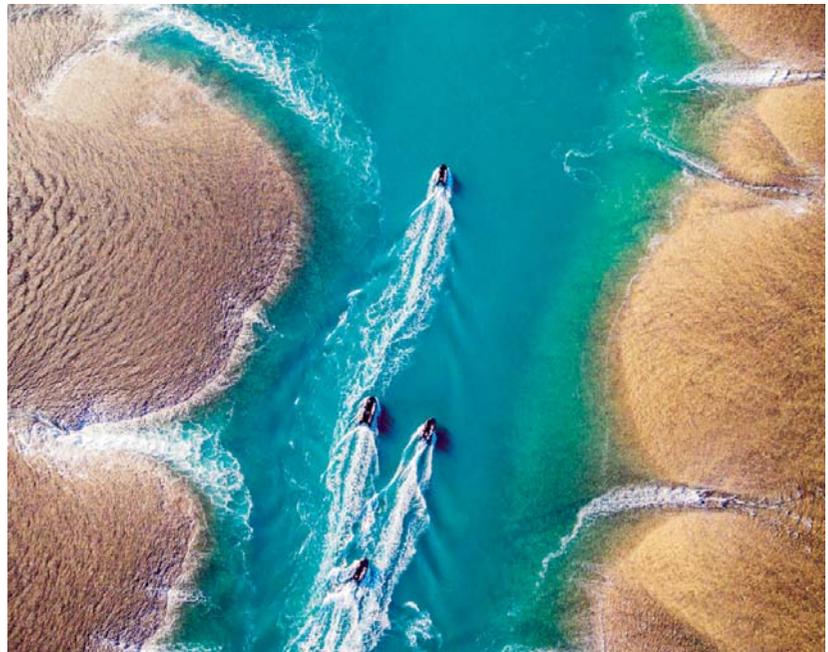
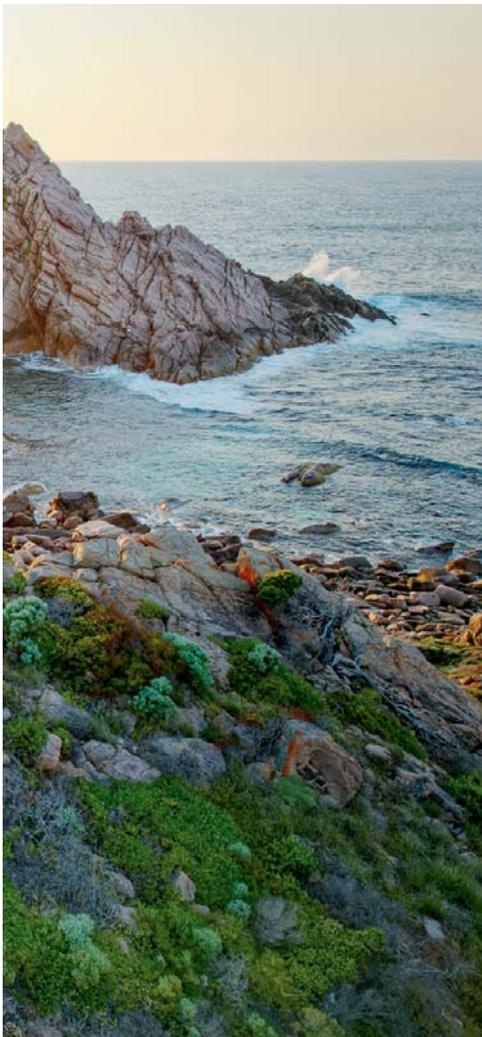
(pictured above) in Western Australia’s Margaret River region, these walks cover some of the nation’s best scenery. Go for three nights, or for six nights; it’s a guided tour to the land. The tours are proving especially popular with women who might not feel equipped or willing to handle the wilderness on their own. And if walking is not your scene, you can alternatively take a swimming tour, another category of action tourism that’s on the rise. Swim through exotic locations from Sardinia to Belize in safe, organised groups. Apparently the tours go swimmingly.



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The slow route

Low-cost airlines have made travelling more democratic than was ever thought possible. But now a counter-culture is arising that turns its back on cheap mass tourism and embraces the glamour of old-school train travel. In February, the Eastern & Oriental Express will relaunch after a four-year hiatus. The train departs Singapore and heads through the cities and jungles of Malaysia on romantic, olde worlde adventures. The carriages (pictured above right) are exquisitely

appointed. In Europe, the Orient-Express will embark on a new journey connecting Paris and Portofino for the first time; meanwhile, high-speed train travel is going full-steam ahead, with new tracks being laid and overnight sleeper services launched. New services include a high-speed route connecting Paris to Berlin from next summer and Paris to Madrid, in late 2024. An Amsterdam to Barcelona overnight sleeper service starts in 2025. Australia has its own glorious train too: the Ghan, which runs Adelaide to Darwin, slowly but surely.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GLAMOUR OF OLD-SCHOOL TRAIN TRAVEL

Cruising (the Top End)

If the cruising industry took a battering during Covid, then it has come back with both turbines firing in the post-lockdown era. New ships, bigger ships, Disney-themed ships, gourmet ships, celebrity ships, Mediterranean ships, you name it, there's a ship for it. And you don't have to fly half a world away to get into the cruising experience, with some of the world's best operators navigating Australian waters to offer seafarers excellent local experiences. Silversea Cruises, for one, is ramping up its cruising around the Top End, with a host of new services to launch in and out of Darwin by 2025. Silversea will run a 10-night Kimberley voyage round trip from Darwin, visiting Broome (take time to explore the reefs off the Kimberley coast in Zodiacs, pictured above); it will also be extending its routes to include Darwin to Bali and Darwin to Fiji. True North, too, is maximising its cruising out of the coastal waters off the Northern Territory and remote Western Australia with its boutique ships that are purpose-built for cruising the Top End. It's a beguiling way to see this incredible part of the country.