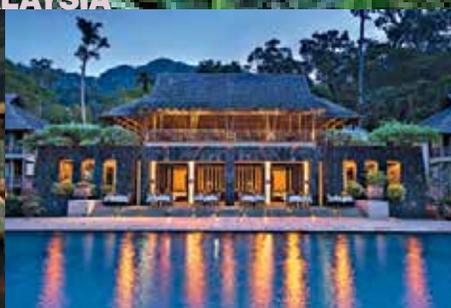


The Datai LANGKAWI, MALAYSIA



A monkey scampers along the balcony and stays a while to nibble on a piece of fruit, before scooting down the side of the open villa and scampering off into the jungle. It's a familiar scene at this iconic resort found on the north-west tip of Langkawi, where the verdant rainforest ebbs to a platinum sand beach and the turquoise waters of the Andaman Sea.

Inside the treehouse villas of this tropical village, design is clean and contemporary, heavy with dark wood that's sourced from the surrounding wilderness. Added luxury comes in the form of sunken baths and walk-in rain showers, while giant beds invite of an evening. The glamorous open-air lobby offers views of the main pool, where rose petal sorbet and chilled face towels scented with frangipani are regularly circulated in the heat of the day. The spa, shaded under a rainforest canopy, is the perfect place to watch flying lemurs and hermit crabs pick their way

across the riverbed below. There are five restaurants, including The Gulai House, which dishes up local specialities such as grouper fish, and a beachside club bar. The Dining Room serves perfectly pitched Malaysian fusion cuisine and The Pavilion is a gloriously authentic, stilted Thai restaurant.

RR. Doubles from £323. 00 60 4 9500 500, thedatai.com

Places

This month, we enjoy pure luxury in Malaysia, New York City's grand dames, serious style in



LaLit Resort & Spa Kerala



With palm forests making an ideal foil to tranquil backwaters teeming with wildlife, it's easy to see why Kerala is known as 'God's Own Country'. The LaLit is in perfect harmony with its surrounds. Set over 10.5ha, each of the 37 suites come with Jacuzzis, outdoor seating areas and views of the water. A penthouse boat, known as *Kettuvallam*, which bobs on the River Nombili is the choice spot. This floating cottage has separate living and dining spaces, with a deck aimed squarely at the setting sun. The Rejuve spa is a serious high point. Try both Ayurvedic and western massage. Nature walks around the herb gardens provide

an introduction to Ayurvedic medicine, while other attractions include canoeing, fishing and two swimming pools. The Nombili restaurant serves quality local cuisine where you can sample regional dishes such as *pollichathu* (fish cooked in banana leaves) and crab baked in a spicy masala. As you would expect, dosas, idlis and masala omelettes are all cooked to order at the live bar. After a long day of rejuvenation, it has a range of detox or retox cocktails that use local ingredients and wines from the Sula Vineyards north of Mumbai. *CN. Doubles from £113. 00 91 467 223 7777, thelalit.com*



DUKES LONDON

Tucked away among the wine merchants and gentlemen's outfitters of St James's, the quintessentially British Dukes appears as part of a more traditional, civilised world. Yet for all its gentility, the hotel is unstuffy, with friendly staff skillfully balancing heritage comforts and mod cons.

There are 90 elegant bedrooms and suites but the public areas are where it's really at. Ian Fleming was a regular visitor to the bar, which is reportedly where he came up with Bond's classic 'shaken, not stirred' line, and the martinis remain noteworthy. Alternatively, take afternoon tea in the Drawing Room or retire to the secluded Cognac and Cigar Garden. Book a Duchess Room if you're after something more feminine. These beautifully designed spaces have more elegant touches and are tailored towards female business or leisure guests. The food here is excellent. Chef Nigel Mendham has built quite the reputation for his modern British menus featuring pristine seasonal ingredients at restaurant Thirty Six. *RR. Doubles from £346. 020 7491 4840, dukeshotel.com*

to stay

a classy Indian resort hiding on a backwater, one of St James's and an equestrian-themed Surrey bolthole

THE MARK NEW YORK

Steps from Central Park and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Upper East Side's The Mark Hotel sits at a perfect juncture of New York institutions. A stately exterior gives way to a modern lobby, all marble and brass, with an informal reception where staff come out to greet guests and introduce you to the hotel. Entry-level rooms are brilliantly kitted out, with some of the best bathrooms we have seen for the price. For real high-rollers, check out the new penthouse, which at 12,000 sq ft is the biggest in the whole of the US with five bedrooms, six bathrooms and a private rooftop terrace. *MS. Doubles from £550. 00 1 212 744 4300, themarkhotel.com*



Gourmet bolthole THE RUNNING HORSES, SURREY



There's been an inn on the site of The Running Horses in Mickleham since the 16th century, welcoming travellers or hosting jockeys en route to Epsom – its name today celebrates the dead-heat derby of 1828.

One half of the downstairs is given over to the sort of country pub people dream about walking into on a wet November day; the other is a restaurant serving elegant comfort dishes along the lines of calves liver, rib-eye steak and cheddar soufflé. We enjoyed confit duck with a rich port sauce, and a brilliantly unfussy lemon sole. Desserts are pure 1970s, in the best way possible – think treacle tarts, cheesecake and crème brûlée. It's the sort of food we all secretly admire.

There are five bedrooms that strive for understated comfort over style. If you had a rich great-aunt, this is what her spare room would look like, and as soon as you sink into the gloriously soft beds you don't care either way. This isn't the sort of place the office trendsetter boasts about but a weekend here will leave you with the sort of good feeling that gets you through to at least Wednesday. A stable condition, if you will. *MS. Doubles from £89. 01372 372 279, therunninghorses.co.uk*

