

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Robb Report

32nd ANNUAL

**BEST
OF THE
BEST**

WINE • MARINE • GEAR • SPIRITS • DESIGN • AUTOS • STYLE • WATCHES • AVIATION • JEWELRY • CIGARS • TRAVEL • ART • DINING

07> US: \$19.95
Can: \$19.95
UK: £7.50

TRAVEL

By Mark Ellwood, Mary Holland, Andrew Sessa, Jemima Sissons and Sandra Ramani



The Big Idea

Hospitality Goes Domestic

ILLUSTRATION BY MATHILDE CRÉTIER

In 2020, travel feels more precious and precarious than ever before. So it's fitting that the boundaries between hotels and homes have become so deliberately blurred, simultaneously giving travelers the familiar comfort of home with the indulgence of a hotel.

Until recently, five-star hotels opted for one of two overarching styles: chintzy palace or minimalist temple, both aimed to offer guests a distinctly different experience from their houses. Now there's no set template. Indeed, many new spots borrow design details from domestic settings, often with the chance to buy everything from the bedding to the lamps, so one of your bedrooms can evoke your favorite hotel anytime. This overlap has birthed the “home-tel,” a new type of luxury lodging that combines the best of both worlds: approachable, residence-style design paired with the glamour and convenience of a classic hotel.

Look at the so-called “dispersed hotels,” where abandoned, usually historic mansions and houses are renovated and repurposed into a network of rentable rooms, such as the Casas del XVI in the Dominican Republic or the General Kyoto in Japan. The newest safari lodges aren't grouped together but rather stand alone as villas set in the veldt, like a high-end homestead among the wild animals, such as Cheetah Plains in South Africa's Sabi Sands Game Reserve.

Oetker Collection has expanded beyond the five-star hotels, such as Le Bristol, for which it's known, and introduced its Masterpiece Estates, hand-selected homes with the cachet of a deluxe resort and the convenience of staying with a friend. The Collection, a new luxury group, straddles both hotel operation and house rental, with accommodations that range from a private villa in St. Barts to a hotel with 11 rooms, suites and apartments in the toniest Parisian district and available for a single guest to use as a private mansion.

Vacation clubs are tweaking their approach, nimbly navigating the divide. Exclusive Resorts now allows its members to use their annual allocation on both homes and hotel rooms, such as Rosewood Little Dix Bay, depending on their mood. And, of course, there's home-sharing. It upended mass-market accommodation in recent years via Airbnb and others, and has now arrived in the upscale niche, too. New firms such as Domio and Veeva feature portfolios of luxury properties, each fully stocked with amenities to order and with staff on call at a moment's notice. That's one thing that hasn't changed: Wherever you stay, you shouldn't want to leave.



Aqua Expeditions

SMALL-SHIP EXCURSION

- The 198-foot long *Aqua Blu* started life as the HMS *Beagle*, an explorer vessel in the British navy, before it was snapped up by a wealthy family and co-opted as a private yacht almost 20 years ago. Last year, it entered its third incarnation: as one of the most luxurious private cruise ships in the world, sailing between various hard-to-reach sites in the Indonesian archipelago under the Aqua Expeditions banner.

The four-deck, 15-suite ship operates three distinct itineraries. It could take you to dive or snorkel around the Raja Ampat Islands, where the warm sea is home to three-quarters of the world's known coral species. Then again, you could opt to see the dinosaur-like dragon lizards of the UNESCO-protected Komodo National Park, or hop among the nutmeg-tree-covered Spice Islands. No matter your destination, there is an embarrassment of staff on board, from marine biologists to dive instructors, who can finesse the experience.

It's the latest ship in the burgeoning fleet of ultra-luxury cruises operated by Italian-American entrepreneur Francesco Galli Zugaro. Next up later this year: the almost completed *Aqua Nera*, a new-build sister ship that's under construction in Vietnam and will be stationed in Peru for wildlife-focused journeys down the Amazon. *Aqua Blu* from \$7,525 per person for a seven-night cruise, *Aqua Nera* prices on request, aquaexpeditions.com