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THE HOT LIST 2012

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# HOT LIST 2012

This year's Hot List covers 29 countries from Argentina to Vietnam. The 60 hotels in our final selection were chosen from hundreds of suggestions from our correspondents worldwide. Despite the economic climate there were many strong contenders; and the best vary from futuristic towers to ocean-edge villas and revamped *grandes dames*. Plus, in this Olympic year, we offer a preview of the hotels about to open in London



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# HOT LIST 2012

## THE 60 BEST NEW HOTELS IN THE WORLD



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#### AUSTRALIA THE DARLING

**Sydney**  
The Darling carries the unmistakable stamp of a metropolitan art gallery: suspended above the entrance is a giant sculpture of a gliding swallow; behind the reception desk is an installation of bronze leaves on a vivid red panel; two enormous Akira Isogawa rugs create intimate spaces within the cathedral-sized lobby. Housed in a 16-storey glass tower, The Darling is attached to The Star casino, a glitzy complex recently renovated at a cost of £590 million. Views from its 171 rooms are of the historic port and city-centre skyline with the famous Harbour Bridge in the middle distance; they are best enjoyed from the Adored, Jewel and Stellar suites on the upper floors. Entry-level



Wildman Wilderness Lodge, Australia

Darling rooms are decorated in masculine shades of flax, latte and grey with plum accents on the handmade Venetian glasses, bathrobes, towels, bed linen and cushions; the pillow menu has no fewer than 12 options; there are Delonghi Nespresso machines and iPod docking stations. The spa – Sydney's largest – has 16 treatment rooms and two hammams in a labyrinthine complex of subtly lit corridors adorned with candlelit black granite bowls and heavy bronze sculptures. The hotel's Sotyo restaurant serves A-grade Japanese cuisine from a Nobu-trained chef, and there are also 20 new restaurants, bars and cafés in the casino complex.

**WHEN TO GO** January for summer and the Sydney Festival; May and June for cooler, drier weather.

**ROOM TO BOOK** Splash out on a Jewel or Adored suite on the harbour side. 00 61 2 9777 9888; [www.thedarling.com.au](http://www.thedarling.com.au). Doubles from A\$399 (about £270)

#### WILDMAN WILDERNESS LODGE Mary River Wetlands, Northern Territory

A comfortable two-hour drive from Darwin, Wildman Wilderness Lodge is a gateway to the raw, compelling beauty of Australia's tropical north at a reasonable, half-board

price. Its mission is to give travellers an insight into the cultures, communities and environment of this ecologically sensitive region, just 12 miles from the World Heritage Site of Kakadu National Park. There is plenty of wildlife (crocodiles, water buffalo, wallabies, monitor lizards, dingoes, flying foxes and prolific birdlife) and the lodge is in a prime spot from which to enjoy the spectacular Mary River wetlands ecosystem. Activities include Aboriginal cultural tours, cruises across the flood plain in air-boats (wet season) or four-wheel-drives (dry season), day tours to Kakadu, scenic helicopter flights and top-of-the-line barramundi fishing. The homestead and cabins may give some visitors a sense of déjà vu after the recent closure of Wrotham Park Station, its lodge infrastructure was transported 2,800km from the Cairns hinterland to Mary River. The 10 air-conditioned cabins salvaged from Wrotham offer the most luxurious accommodation; there are also 10 double safari tents and five family tents sleeping up to four. All the tents have ceiling fans and en-suite bathrooms. Three-course dinners and full breakfasts are included in the price and are served at the very stylish homestead. **WHEN TO GO** Wildman is open from 1 March to 30 November. The dry season between May–September is most comfortable,

but the wet season is when the flood plains are at their most scenically beautiful.

**ROOM TO BOOK** One of the air-conditioned cabins. 00 61 8 8978 8955; [www.wildmanwildernesslodge.com.au](http://www.wildmanwildernesslodge.com.au). Cabins (sleeping two) from A\$630 (about £425); tents (sleeping two) from £330. Prices include breakfast and dinner

#### CAMBODIA SONG SAA PRIVATE ISLAND

Occupying two diminutive isles off the Cambodian coast, Song Saa Private Island enjoys splendid isolation. Your neighbours in the archipelago are a few fishing villages, and the animals of the rainforest. We visited before the official opening (floods in Thailand had delayed construction by three months), but despite initial mishaps, Song Saa looks set to seduce. Its 27 thatched villas are scattered variously over a forest-covered hill, along the water's edge, and above the water on stilts; they all have secluded terraces and private pools. Original artworks and individual design details add a distinctive touch (such as a glass floor in the lounge area of one villa, with an aquarium view of fish in the sea below). Meals are served at the over-water restaurant, beside the infinity pool (or even in it), in your villa, on the beach – and chef Neil Wager's cuisine is superb. There's a spa, and activities include snorkelling, kayaking, and boat trips to villages on neighbouring islands. This really is getting away from it all, and to add to Song Saa's honeymoon appeal, a tiny temple on a nearby island can be used for civil wedding ceremonies or Buddhist blessings. There's a serious environmental remit, too: a marine reserve extends 200 metres from the outer edge of the coral reefs that fringe both islands, and a highly qualified conservation team can fill you in on projects through which Song Saa is blazing a trail for responsible development in the archipelago.

**WHEN TO GO** The cool part of the dry season: November to February.

**ROOM TO BOOK** Villa 22 offers not only a private pool, but its own little stretch of sandy beach-terrace. 00 855 236 860360; [www.songsaa.com](http://www.songsaa.com). From US\$1,902 per villa per night, including transfers from mainland, meals, drinks (house wines, spirits, beers and soft drinks), laundry and use of kayaks, snorkelling gear and other resort equipment

#### CHINA BANYAN TREE MACAU

There's an old primary-school teachers' trick: if children get rowdy, don't raise your voice – lower it. The kids will instinctively quiet down to listen. The same goes for luxury. It doesn't have to shout, it should whisper. Amid the gaudy lights and round-the-clock madness of the vast new Galaxy Resort in Macau, casino



capital of the world, the Banyan Tree is an oasis of serenity. It's the little touches that make it special: the notepaper in your room is not just headed, it's personalised with your name. You're given use of a mobile phone, with a host on 24-hour call. The staff are attentive without being intrusive. But the Banyan Tree can do big-picture, too. Each of the 246 rooms is a suite. Each suite has its own relaxation pool. The design is Zen minimal, right down to the big black Tibetan wooden tub in the bathroom, but also hi-tech: push-button blinds, state-of-the-art TV, a toilet whose heated seat thoughtfully lifts up as you approach. I would have said they'd do everything except wash your backside for you, but there's a button for that, too. Add in a huge spa and a superb top-floor restaurant, the Belon, eccentrically designed to an aquatic theme, and this is – whisper it – probably the finest new hotel in a city full of brasher contenders.

**WHEN TO GO** Macau's Portuguese heritage makes Christmas a special time, as is Chinese New Year.

**ROOM TO BOOK** Even the smaller suites offer 100 square metres for just over £200, but the Sky Villa at 160 square metres for £505 gives you that high-roller cachet. 00 853 8883 8813; [www.banyanree.com/en/macau](http://www.banyanree.com/en/macau). Doubles from £220

### THE RITZ-CARLTON, HONG KONG

To ride the lift up The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong is to switch between Lemuel Gulliver's Brobdnag and Lilliput. One moment you're dwarfed by the city's skyscrapers; swallow a couple of times to equalise the pressure, and 490 metres later, the buildings are looking positively puny. Just as the biggest buffet in the world wouldn't necessarily serve the best food, so the highest hotel in Asia might not be the ideal place to stay. Suffice to say, and skipping obvious puns such as 'scaling the heights', the Ritz-Carlton has aced it. The design theme – a not unsurprising 'East meets West' – is rendered with a fair amount of subtlety, and spiced with elements such as blue palissandro marble, which is used throughout. The 312 rooms and suites are all one might expect from this hotel group, but it would be a very dull guest who found the iPod/Blu-ray DVD player/whatever more intriguing than pressing his or her nose against the window pane and goggling awhile. Naturally, competition for window seats at the Italian and Chinese restaurants on the 102nd floor is intense; strolling through the illuminated wine cellar between the two is incredibly inspiring. The obvious conclusion is OZONE, a winning combination of nightclub, bar and restaurant which would ensure its popularity even if it were not at the top of the highest hotel in Asia.

**WHEN TO GO** The clearest days – when city, harbour and beyond are at

their most panoramic – usually fall between September and November.

**ROOM TO BOOK** One of the mid-tier suites, either Carlton or Premier Executive, on the 116th floor. 00 852 2263 2263; [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com). Doubles from HK\$2480 (about £615)

### XIXUAN SPA HOTEL, HANGZHOU

Proudly modernistic in its architecture and minimalist in detailing, this 68-room spa hotel overlooking the Xixi National Wetland Park showcases China's emerging resort aesthetic. The property is part of the Westbrook Resort, a kind of bucolic mega-retreat (it also houses Sheraton, Banyan Tree and Angsana hotels) beloved of Chinese developers. The boxy glass and marble exterior evokes a contemporary art museum; the tiled lobby is redolent of a merchant bank; within, the hotel's charm quotient begins to reveal itself. The cream-and-white bedrooms and suites are sparingly styled with wood panelling and floor-to-ceiling glass windows and are equipped with iPod docks and locally sourced Ba Yan Ka La bath products. There is an organic gourmet Chinese restaurant and wine bar and a three-level, 6,000-book library with black-leather banquettes. These elements are mere leasers, however, for the remarkable MetaSpa. Designed by Ho + Hou Studio Architects, this palatial, split-level

spa is a movie-set in waiting, with 16 treatment rooms providing sophisticated beauty and spa therapies, using products including Cosmelan, TMT and (exclusively in China) AQS from Switzerland. Framed by dark granite, marble and hardwoods, the stepped private steam pool and Jacuzzi is a 21st-century update of a Central European bathhouse enriched by mod-oriental ambience. Only a 20-minute cab ride from downtown Hangzhou, one of China's most affluent cities, Xixuan Spa Hotel is a refined retreat from the big city – Chinese style.

**WHEN TO GO** Spring (Apr–May) and autumn (Sept–Nov) for the best chance of clear skies.

**ROOM TO BOOK** A Spa suite with mini in-room greenhouse garden. 00 86 571 8500 2888; [www.xixuanspahotel.com](http://www.xixuanspahotel.com). Doubles from 1188 yuan (about £120)

### INDIA ALILA BANGALORE HOTEL AND RESIDENCE

South India's first urban resort is in the hi-tech hub of Whitefield, 20km from Bangalore's city centre and home to world-class technology parks, impressive corporate campuses and exclusive residential enclaves to house the multinational workforce. With its South-East Asian design and stylish traditional Indian touches, such as teak planters' chairs on the airy terraces, the new 120-bedroom Alila is a

relaxing haven from all the hyperactive commercial bustle of the area. There are distinctive bronze figurines by local sculptor Dimpy Menon outside the doors of the spacious bedrooms and suites; the public spaces make the most of Bangalore's mild climate with shaded courtyards and soothing water features. The Tiffin room has an extensive menu with regional Indian cuisines as well as Asian and European dishes. There's a sun-soaked pool deck on the fifth floor with a 20-metre infinity pool and pretty views over local farms and Varthur Lake in the distance. Spa Alila uses superb organic products from Bali; morning yoga classes are held on the pool deck.

**WHEN TO GO** Bangalore is at its best in the Indian winter months, November to February, when the daytime temperature is in the mid-20 °Cs.

**ROOM TO BOOK** The four suites at the rear of the property have soothing views over the fields and across to the lake. 00 91 80 2854 4446; [www.alilahotels.com](http://www.alilahotels.com). Doubles from Rs8,200 (about £105)

### GRAND HYATT GOA

Goa's largest luxury resort can accommodate 2,500 wedding guests and grand processions complete with richly caparisoned elephants. The hotel has already hosted Goa's most prestigious events, including the India Resort Fashion Week and the Goa ThinkFest; together with the superb facilities and service standards, these have established this hotel as one of the best in India. Just 15 minutes' drive from Panjim, Goa's capital, the hotel is set in 28 acres of tropical gardens overlooking Bambolim Bay. All 298 rooms and 16 suites have large terraces; many have splendid views. The buildings were inspired by 17th-century Portuguese architecture but the contemporary interiors have introduced elements of local crafts and sandstone into the design. The main 'palace' houses the reception, restaurants and bars: the Verandah, an elegant seafood restaurant; the Dining Room for multicultural buffets; Chulha for regional Indian cooking (executive chef Mark Hagan handpicked his team from dhabas – road-side eateries – across India to ensure authenticity); Confeitaria serves excellent espressos. The large outdoor pool is surrounded by 200-year-old banyan trees and there is a 25-metre indoor pool in the luxurious Shamana Spa along with 19 treatment suites, an impressive fitness centre and a yoga studio.

**WHEN TO GO** Goa is increasingly a year-round destination, popular even in the June–August monsoon period.

**ROOM TO BOOK** The Bay View rooms in Block 7 have wonderful views across a palm grove and the ruins of a 16th-century chapel to the bay beyond. Room 7116 has uninterrupted views. 00 91 832 301 1504; [www.goa.grand.hyatt.com](http://www.goa.grand.hyatt.com). Doubles from Rs10,200 (about £130)



The top-floor private dining room at The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong