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# HOT LIST 2012

## THE 60 BEST NEW HOTELS IN THE WORLD



### ASIA & AUSTRALASIA Continued from page 94

#### 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

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 Soky 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,



Wildman Wilderness Lodge, Australia

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

