

SPECIAL REPORT: LIFE-CHANGING TRIPS THAT HELP THE WORLD

Condé Nast Traveler

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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

MAY 2008

INTRODUCING

QUICK TRIPS

3 PERFECT DAYS
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2008 HOT LIST WORLD'S TOP NEW 136 hotels*

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the summer, when central Spain is at its hottest. **Which room to book:** Those on the first floor of the main house have the most character, but for more space and lovely views of the surrounding farmland, try one of the Nos. 31–43 garden rooms (34-925-457-534; valdepalacios.es; doubles, \$470–\$622). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

SRI LANKA

Casa Colombo, Colombo

🔥 Museum-quality restoration of both the ornate wedding-cake exterior and the interior Italian floral floor mosaics has resurrected this crumbling 200-year-old Moorish mansion off Sri Lanka's main coastal Galle Road. Embellishments include touches like a salmon-hued swimming pool and a high-wattage bar. Each guest is attended to by a personal assistant (known as a Casa Domo), who will arrange airport pickup by vintage Austin, unpack bags, or schedule an in-room massage at a moment's notice. The 12 spacious polished-concrete suites are fitted with oversized pillow-top beds with sexy silver-and-black linens, cutting-edge Nakamichi televisions, innovative yet user-friendly lighting, and built-for-two copper bathtubs. The 1,000-square-foot Royal Suite upgrades the luxuries to a Jacuzzi and a romantic balcony. T Republic, the laid-back outdoor tea lounge, serves unexpected ice cream flavors like jaggery and scalded-milk tea, plus an elaborate tea service. An imposing mural of bejeweled swamis inside HVN, the main dining room, is outdone only by the funky fusion menu created by American chef Alex Stanich (see "Hot Tables"). **When to go:** Lawn parties continue nonstop through the drier months of November through March. **Which room to book:** Standard suites offer eye-popping style, but business travelers will appreciate the Corporate Suites' tech amenities (94-114-520130; casacolombo.com; doubles, \$311–\$466). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

SWITZERLAND

Le Richemond, Geneva

🔥 It takes a lot to stand out from the crowd of old-world luxury hotels on the shores of Lake Geneva. Following a complete renovation, Le Richemond has got the goods, with its superb location, beautifully decorated rooms, excellent spa, and

terrific Italian restaurant. What really makes this handsome 1863 hotel so appealing, however, is that designers Olga Polizzi and John Stefanidis have given the old gal a new visual identity without compromising her inherently genteel nineteenth-century personality, like a Park Avenue granny discovering the fun of a little flash: gold mosaic tiles in the elevators, and in the guest rooms, crystalsconces, chrome floor lamps, and curvy fifties-style chairs mixed with more traditional furnishings. Bathrooms are bliss, with oversized showerheads as well as piles of thick towels. Italian linen sheets and classy mixes of prints and patterns make all 109 rooms here a treat to nest in, too. Though some details rankle—\$30 is steep for Internet access, and the service still needs some polishing—Le Richemond not only spins circles around other recent local renovations but gives the Four Seasons Hotel des Bergues ("Hot List," May 2006) a run for its money. **When to go:** Mid-September to mid-October is perfect for discovering the city on foot. **Which room to book:** Nos. 405 and 406 have gorgeous views of Lake Geneva (41-22-715-7000; lerichemond.com; doubles, \$455–\$650). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

THAILAND

Seven, Bangkok

🔥 The Thai capital is awash in hotels of all shapes and sizes, but tucked into a cul-de-sac off Sukhumvit Road, this town house turned B&B will satisfy hotel-design fans, with original Asian-themed wall graffiti in each of the six guest rooms and polished salvaged-wood floors. Guests cross over a ruby-red-bottom koi pond on weathered planks to take refuge from Bangkok's heat-soaked days inside the lobby lounge. The indefatigable staff are ever on hand to help with luggage, arrange around-the-clock wake-up calls, and suggest the neighborhood's best dining options. All guest rooms have flat-screen TVs with DVD players, iPod docks, AC, soft cotton robes, high-thread-count bed linens, and offer great value: Room rates include local calls and the complimentary use of a mobile phone. Every guest can access the panoramic rooftop as well as a mezzanine patio strewn with puffy cushions. **When to go:** Cool mornings give way to bearable swelter from November through April. **Which room to book:** The Green Room is a leafy haven with twin beds and a private garden. Pink and Purple have king-size beds; the lat-

ter room is optimally placed to enjoy evening birdsong rarely heard amid Bangkok's urban drone (66-8-1616-2636; sleepatseven.com; doubles, \$157–\$236). 🍷

Alila Cha-Am, Cha-Am

🔥 Thai architect Duangrit Bunnasecures his reputation as the latest Thai design wunderkind with striking minimalist work at this 79-room beach resort on the Gulf of Thailand.

UNDER \$250

Guest rooms are set within si wood-and-glass buildings with pocked raw-concrete walls on the inside but the rooms don't feel austere, thanks to beds that closely approximate sleeping clouds, chocolate-brown cushioned chairs, furry rugs, 12-foot-high rain showers, Apple TVs that work like iPods, an bijou balconies overlooking dense palm fronds. Chef Joel Wilkinson brings his health-conscious talents—honed at Artigua's Jumby Bay—to dishes that range from vegetarian pizzas to spicy Thai. Th always attentive staff replenish cold water for guests lounging on shaded beachfront daybeds, and can arrange tours to the nearby royal palace or the night market. But most guests will be content to walk along the unbroken shore or lounge by the two pools, one surrounded by hibiscus dotted hedges, the other for adults on a relaxing spa. **When to go:** The most pleasant, rain-free days fall between November and April. **Which room to book:** The seven deluxe pool villas feel like private beach houses (66-32-709-555; alilahote.com; doubles, \$230–\$434). 🍷 🍷 🍷 🍷

At Niman Conceptual Home, Chiang Mai

🔥 This intimate eight-room urban retreat from owner-designer Rachen Intwong on a residential street in downtown Chiang Mai—he also designed the nearby Mandarin Oriental Dhara Dhevi ("Hot List," May 2005)—flaunts design elements inspired by Himalayan culture, from the Indian carved arched doors to the Nepalese-Tibetan hanging lamps and singing bowls plus a scattering of antiques from Burma. The rooms, themed after goddesses, come with elegant touches including small balconies and platform or four-poster beds and the highly commendable staff beyond their duties to make guests feel at home, learning names quickly at bringing Thai coconut-covered treats

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KEY TO SYMBOLS

🍷 = Bar/lounge 🏖️ = Beach 📶 = Free Wi-Fi 🏊 = Gym 🛀 = Pool 🧖 = Spa 🌡️ = Hot Spa 2008 🛎️ = 24-hour room service 🔥 = Hot 🔥🔥 = Hotter 🔥🔥🔥 = Hott