

101
best hotels

ALL GUNS BLAZING

Serious players who pull out all the stops



DELAIRE GRAFF

Stellenbosch, South Africa

This part of South Africa is like a vast magnet drawing in a mass of metal-filing moneymen. It is gorgeous, a sort of South African Cotswolds, all antiques and vineyards and award-winning restaurants, a kind of prehistoric landscape now perpetually pickled in apricot coulis. The newest number irresistibly pulled towards it is Brit Laurence Graff, one of the biggest diamond dealers in the world. And he's raked in David Collins, hotel default wonderman, to produce a sideline puff project of considerable beauty. The villas are a modern split from the usual in this area, with walls covered in grass cloth and lots of polished plaster. The art here alone is worth the journey: lots to gawk at, including pieces by local artists William Kentridge and Sydney Kumalo, who Saatchi has his eye on. The problem is how close it is to the road – however lovely it is to be offered hen or duck or goose eggs at breakfast, you can still hear it. Book the two-bedroom Owner's Villa – it's terrifically handsome and, most importantly, it's totally tucked away from the broom-broom. [Website deiaire.co.za](http://Website.deiaire.co.za) **Book it** Africa Travel (tel: 0845 450 0453) offers three nights from £1,650, including flights, transfers and breakfast.

WOLGAN VALLEY

New South Wales, Australia

Hot and busy with wildlife in the summer, icy and silent during winter, this place is an £80 million conservation-based foray into the Australian bush. The story goes that HH Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, chairman of Emirates Airlines, flew over the area, said, 'I'll have that,' then flew straight back to Dubai without stopping. Save it till last on your trip; it's only a morning's drive from Sydney along a winding, dipping, slightly nerve-racking road cut through thick eucalyptus forests. Emirates likes to do things with a certain flourish; you feel the frisson from the start, when you get delivered by luxury 4WD from the gatehouse up to Wolgan Valley's grand entrance, a kind of vast wooden-doored Jurassic Park. Then there's this: a big, futuristic wonderland in a wild and woolly hidden valley, both utterly fastidious and unashamedly full-throttle. There are 40 entirely comfortable rooms, each with double-trouble fireplaces, seven-metre lap pools and private courtyards; there's a very smooth spa and sunny service delivered by 76 immaculate staff and stylish managers with flair and know-how. Walk, ride horses, trek round the grounds. Then feast on poached Williams pear with vanilla essence and honeycomb shards: ridiculous. [Website emirateshotelsresorts.com](http://Website.emirateshotelsresorts.com) **Book it** Carrier (tel: 0161 492 1355) offers three nights as part of a 10-day trip from £4,110, full board, including flights and car hire.



LOOK OUT FOR: Maria Luisa Gagliardi, who makes all the difference to a trip to Naples. She's an

SAFFIRE FREYCINET Tasmania, Australia

It's dark and brooding, Tasmania – a Heathcliff of an island. There are lots of little places to stay here, colonial spots where you can ferret about for possums. But now an almighty alien spacecraft has landed. It's the amazing ceilings that first grab your attention – the sleek timber lines of a Viking longship arching and curving and framing the crisp, cold primitiveness of Coles Bay and the Hazards. The 20 souped-up, modern rooms (Dove is the best) are a short walk from the main lodge, split-level and a clever mix of architectural clout and comfort. There are 17 types of water here and fluffy hot-water bottles to warm your toes, bathrooms with divine multi-head showers and free minibars. Saffire is forward-thinking in granite-tough untouchedness. Hiking, boat trips for spotting seals, wineries for tastings – you can do all this, but you might also find yourself ruminating on nothing more than a barbaric ache of a sky. **Website** saffire-freycinet.com.au **Tel** 00 613 6256 7888 **Book it** Double, from £780, half board. For more details, visit australia.com



FINCA CORTESIN Andalusia, Spain

A new hotel, a big hotel, a deeply expensive hotel, but somehow not showy or grand or snooty or sterile. A huge gig for Spain, which certainly has fantastic boltholes if you know where to find them but somehow falls short of a flagship that is top-notch. Roll up here outside the whitewashed façade, the dusty rolling views framed by elegant arches, and know that you have arrived at just such a place – somewhere grown-up and smart but cool and comfortable. Rooms are big and full of sparkling Mediterranean light, bathrooms are vast as well, with marble floors, whale-sized tubs and French doors that open out onto sprawling, terracotta-tiled terraces – book a sea view and drink in the glassy ocean with a chilled sherry. By day, the action is at one of the three pools; at night, feast at the crazy and wonderful Schilo, with its vanilla lobster. Take advantage of the tasting menu – it's completely worth it. The spa is incredibly glossy, with interesting little twists such as snow caves, and the velvety 18-hole golf course is one of the best in the world. Hooray for a return to glamour with its edges sanded down – for this is still somewhere you can pitch up with the kids. Finca Cortesin feels like the shape of the best of what's to come. **Website** fincacortesin.com **Book it** Black Tomato (tel: 020 7426 9888) offers five nights from £1,200, including flights, transfers and breakfast.▷



intellectual but brilliant with children too, so she'll bring Pompeii to thrilling life for thin, crispy pizzas – straight out of *The Godfather*. Contact bellinitravel.com