



All I want for Christmas

There are no socks, bubble bath or beach towels on our wish list. Instead **Ute Junker** lists the best hotels, spas and destinations on the planet.

Heavenly hotels

Azura, Benguerra Island, Mozambique

Travel gurus are heading to East Africa for the ultimate in beach escapes, and Azura, Mozambique, is hard to beat. The country's first luxury "ecolodge" is on a pristine island in the middle of a national park and has just 15 private villas and kilometres of unspoiled white-sand beaches.

www.slh.com/azura

The Lodge at Tarraleah, Tasmania

The bedrooms have king-size beds, huge baths, private balconies and fireplaces. The cliff-top hot tub has a superb mountain view, and the restaurant has a 300-strong wine list. Why would you ever want to leave? If you're tempted by the trout fishing, wildlife spotting, golfing or kayaking, of course.

www.tarraleahlodge.com

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, Oman

Oman is working hard to lure the five-star traveller, hence the glamorous Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah resort. Choose from three ultra-luxurious hotels, ranging from the family-friendly Al Waha to the super-indulgent Al Husn

www.shangri-la.com

Convento do Carmo Hotel, Salvador, Brazil.

With palm-fringed beaches, a beautifully preserved old city, and locals who seriously love to party, Salvador may be Brazil's most irresistible city. And the city's most irresistible hotel is the atmospheric Convento do Carmo Hotel, housed in a former convent that dates back to 1586.

www.pousadas.pt

Angorichina Station, Flinders Ranges, South Australia

Enjoy a uniquely Australian outback experience at Angorichina Station. In this remote and serenely beautiful part of the Flinders Ranges, there's plenty to do, from exploring rock art, to watching the sun sink from one of the peaks, to getting involved in life at a working sheep station.

www.angorichinastation.com

Hotel les Ottomans, Istanbul, Turkey

With its unique heritage and stunning setting, Istanbul is rapidly becoming one of the world's most exciting cities. The 10-suite Hotel les Ottomans draws on the richness of Ottoman tradition and also boasts a stellar restaurant and an indulgent spa.

www.slh.com/lesottomans

Faena Hotel and Universe, Buenos Aires, Argentina

There's no other hotel in South America quite like the Faena Hotel and Universe. Housed in a soaring converted Buenos Aires warehouse, it's a riotous fantasy of extravagant interiors, from the all-white restaurants to the sumptuous room furnished in rich colours. It even has its own Turkish baths.

www.faenahotelanduniverse.com

Likuliku Lagoon Resort, Malolo Island, Fiji

It's not just the picture-perfect setting or the overwater bungalows that tempt guests at Fiji's newest, couples-only resort. It's also the exquisite food, which some say is the best in the country. Sea, sand and stuffing your face - that's what we call a holiday.

www.likulikulagoon.com

Hotel de la Cité, Carcassonne, France

For a fairytale start to the day, check into Hotel de la Cité, the premier hotel in Carcassonne, Europe's largest medieval citadel. Perched on a sun-drenched hilltop in the south of France, with thick stone walls, stained glass windows and verdant gardens, it's like waking up in your own private chateau.

www.hoteldelacite.com

Byron Beach Suites, Byron Bay, NSW

Absolute waterfront location? Check. Wide beachfront decks, individual plunge pools, en suite spa baths? Check. Whichever way you look at it, it's clear the just-opened Byron Beach Suites is the most luxurious accommodation in Australia's favourite beach getaway destination.

www.beachsuites.com.au



Indulgent spas

Caudalie Vinotherapie, Hotel Marques de Riscal, Elciego, Spain

Given that it's in the heart of Spain's celebrated Rioja wine district, it's appropriate that the treatments at the Caudalie Vinotherapie spa are based on the rejuvenating power of grapes. Try the crushed cabernet body scrub, or the invigorating vigneron massage, inspired by the winemaking process. (Masseurs use a winemaker's stick as well as their hands)

www.caudalie.com

SAMAS spa, Park Hotel Kenmare, Ireland

Each treatment at SAMAS spa in the Park Hotel Kenmare includes a one-hour routine in the thermal suite. After sampling the steam room, the ice fountain and the monsoon shower, watch the mist rolling in through the Irish forest from the comfort of the heated outdoor pool.

www.samaskenmare.com

The Chedi, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Not all Thailand's best spas are on the beach. In the picturesque hillside town of Chiang Mai in the country's north, the Chedi offers serious pampering in a tranquil setting of lush gardens and murmuring water features. Try a traditional herbal bath or an invigorating Thai massage.

www.ghmhotels.com

Paradise Spa, Aleph Hotel, Rome, Italy

The ancient Romans knew all about extravagance; their modern counterparts are no slouches, either. The Paradise Spa in the Aleph

Hotel is the place to go for serious pampering, including indulgent body and face treatments using divine Vagheggi products.

www.boscoloaleph.hotelinroma.com

Le Spa, Sofitel Queenstown Hotel and Spa, New Zealand

A luxury spa is just one of the attractions at Le Spa in Queenstown, which also has a traditional hammam. Try a body wrap with manuka honey and Rotorua volcanic mud, or a massage using warm and cool greenstones.

www.sofitelqueenstown.com

Ananda in the Himalayas, Narendra Nagar, India.

Close to the holy towns of Rishikesh and Haridwar, and with views of the sacred Ganges River and the mystical Himalayas, this destination spa aims to be a haven for the spirit. It offers traditional Indian practices such as ayurveda and yoga.

www.anandaspa.com

Spa Grande, Grand Wailea Resort Hotel and Spa, Maui, Hawaii

Maui's Spa Grande is regularly named among the top 10 spas in the world, and little wonder. It covers 5000 square metres and has a menu of more than 100 treatments. Try one of the traditionally inspired treatments, such as the seashell massage or the volcanic ash facial.

www.grandwailea.com

Givenchy Spa, One&Only Royal Mirage, Dubai

Middle Eastern mystique meets traditional French pampering at the Givenchy Spa in Dubai. It's part of a "health and beauty institute", which also features a traditional hammam, steam baths, jacuzzis, authentic oriental massages, as well as deluxe spa treatments.

www.oneandonlyresorts.com

Banyan Tree Ringha, Yunnan, China

Spa connoisseurs know that Banyan Tree spas offer serious pampering. Banyan Tree Ringha has the most sensational setting of all, perched 3200 metres above sea level in the Chinese province of Greater Tibet, make this a unique experience, even before you discover the traditional Tibetan farmhouses where you'll be sleeping.

www.banyantree.com

Khwai River Lodge, Botswana

What's better than watching lions, leopards and elephants wander past from the private deck of your deluxe lodgings? Having a massage at the same time. At the Khwai River Lodge, on the edge of Botswana's Moremi Game Reserve, you can enjoy treatments including a full-body exfoliation with Namibian sea salt, a mineral mud wrap and an African hot-stone massage.

www.orient-express-safaris.co.za

Exotic experiences

Swim with stingrays

Sofitel Motu Bora Bora, French Polynesia

Tahiti's translucent turquoise waters are home to these delightfully playful wild animals, who come for a feed and stay for a romp. They love swimming over your legs, and the sensation is



surprisingly smooth and pleasant. A wildlife encounter with a difference.

www.sofitel.com

Trek the outback

Larapinta Trail, Northern Territory

Forget a flying visit to Uluru – to really experience this unique landscape, get your trekking shoes on. The six-day Larapinta Trail winds through the Northern Territory’s amazing MacDonnell Ranges, while the seven-day Heysen Trail takes in the pristine wilderness of the Flinders Ranges and Gammon Ranges National Park. Travelling with World Expeditions and their support vehicles means all you have to carry is your day pack.

www.worldexpeditions.com

On the ice

Antarctic cruise with the MV Orion

A trip to Antarctica remains one of the greatest travel experiences on the planet, and there’s no better way to go than on board the MV Orion. This luxurious ship takes just 100 passengers, who sleep in luxurious cabins and enjoy gourmet meals. Enjoy the luxury while you cruise among massive glaciers and encounter penguins, seals and killer whales.

www.orioncruises.com.au

Egypt from the air

There’s something mesmerising about the

ancient land of Egypt and monuments such as the magnificent temple at Luxor. The best way to appreciate their timeless beauty is on a hot-air balloon tour. Take off at sunset and drift over ancient temples, peaceful villages and the stately Nile River.

www.onthegotours.com

Mountain magic

Amankora resort, Bhutan

Five-star fans who want to try trekking but have a fear of sore feet should head for the remote mountain kingdom on Bhutan in the Himalayas. Amankora resort organises “treks” between its five luxurious lodges. They come complete with car and driver, letting you take in the sensational scenery of the area without working up too much of a sweat.

www.amanresorts.com

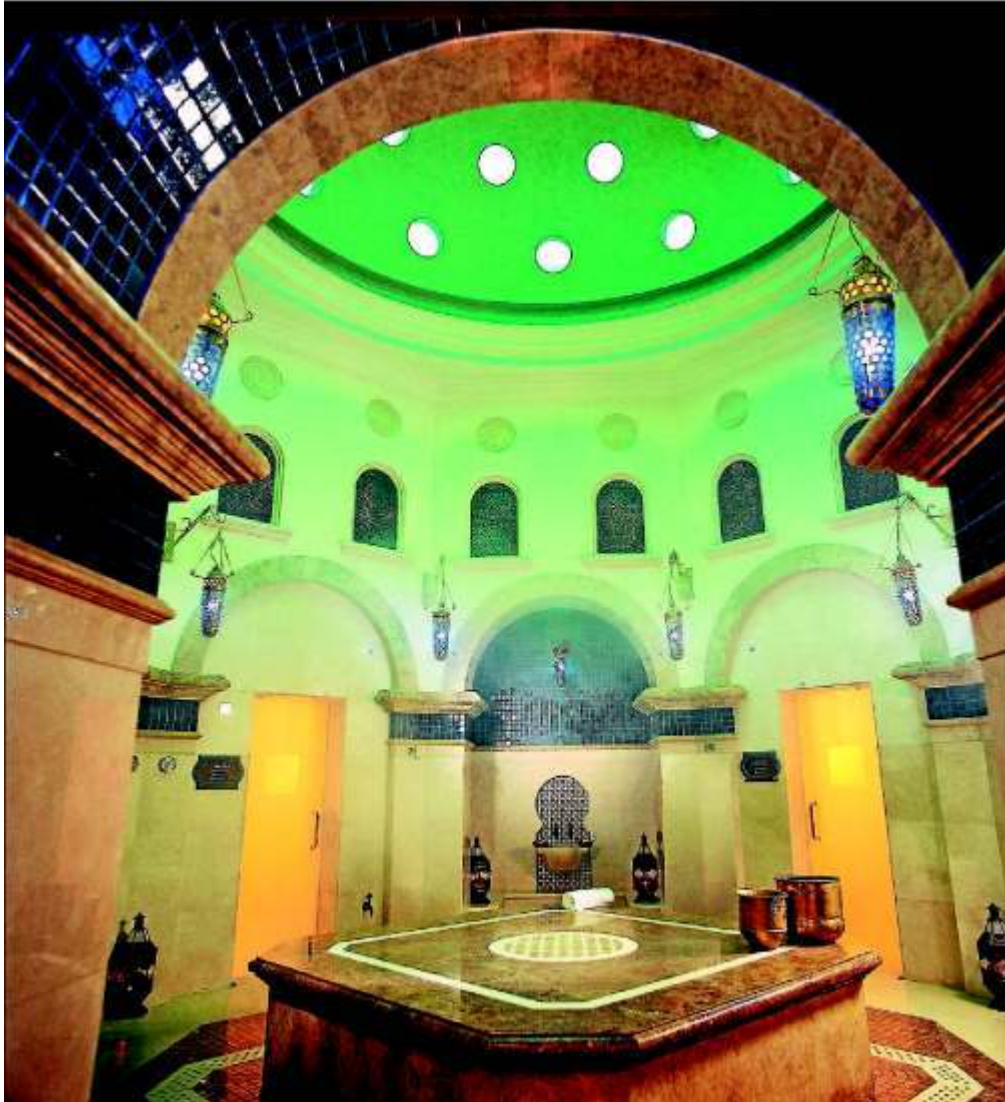
Fly high

Singapore Airlines first-class suites.

Singapore Airlines’ new A380 is the flying sensation everyone wants to try. Economy passengers benefit from more leg room and 1000 entertainment options, but real high-flyers can enjoy the exclusive suites, private cabins decked out in leather and wood, which feature real beds and full-length wardrobes. Talk about travelling in style.

www.singaporeairlines.com





Luxury living all the way ... (clockwise from top left) the Faena Hotel and Universe in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Givenchy Spa at the One&Only Royal Mirage; and kayaking at The Lodge at Tarraleah, Tasmania.





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Polar expedition ... a trip to the Antarctic is sure to be a memorable experience.

