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SETTING THE BENCHMARK FOR HIGH-END TRAVELLERS



Part of the outdoor living area of the Amangiri Suite; the fire-pit lit as the sun goes down over the mesas, at Amangiri, Utah.

Captured in interminable movies and TV series, the vast, empty primeval landscapes of Utah remain as silent and untouched as they did millions of years

ago, whilst in Nevada, the desert strip of Las Vegas spreads and sparkles unremittingly like a jeweller's window. I cannot imagine a greater contrast, yet it is just this antithesis that makes these

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two destinations so attractive for high-end leisure travellers; a little sin, followed by a world of tranquillity. Unmissable.

Amangiri, Utah.

Like you, I never thought for a moment that a North American Aman could ever live up to an Asian Aman. I was so wrong. Amangiri impressed us to such an extent that we even considered creating a new rating for it. One in five million? Life-changing? All apply, without doubt.

Foolishly, we only stayed 3 nights, whereas you should stay, at the very least, 5 nights, for there is so much here to experience, and many of those experiences are, quite sincerely, life-changing. How many resorts in this world can you say that about?

The architecture and design, by Rick Joy, Marwan Al-Sayed and Wendell Burnette, reflect the extraordinary vision required to build this resort, by Adrian Zecha and investors, Canyon Equity. It was not an easy path, as, originally, Canyon had secured a very different site for the project. Mr Zecha, however, as is his wont, discovered a location that was so special that he asked Canyon to do a swap. Impossible, said everyone. This is protected land! As with so many Aman projects, the barriers were magically lifted and the plots were exchanged. Amangiri, or 'peaceful mountain' was born in the region known as Four Corners, as this is where the States of Utah, Arizona, New



At Amangiri, the raised central lounge and library is a relaxing island within the Dining Room.

Mexico and Colorado meet. The sensitive, discrete site comprises 600 acres of sheltered valley; the resort architecture paying homage to the primeval rock formations and utter stillness of the land, just 2½ hours from Monument Valley, 20 minutes from Lake Powell and close to the region's other legendary National Parks.

Most North Americans, we found, knew

next to nothing about Utah and generally dismissed it as a non-event State, which is entirely misjudged, as the landscapes are majestic and unspoilt and the people gentle and genuinely welcoming.

Nature is celebrated and respected at Amangiri. The water originates from an aquifer 600 ft below the 150 million year old sandstone mesas on this 600-acre property



At Amangiri, one side of the Dining Room looks onto the outdoor pool, whilst the other faces the mesas and is warmed by three fireplaces.

All photography by David Maslin ©



At Amangiri, Mesa View Suite, #19, is just one category up from entry-level and offers an incredible amount of space and comfort.

and is naturally filtered before going through the resort's own purification system. This means that you can, amazingly, drink the tap water as there are no chemicals and no chlorine.

Much of the restaurant produce is organic and sourced locally; the cuisine seasonal and bursting with flavour. My Ranch Eggs were the best ever, fantastically fresh and beautifully presented. Tasting menus can be created by Amangiri's excellent young Chef, Robinson Dalzell, such as our unique 7-course Garden Tasting Menu, with stunning wine pairings by clever Sommelier, Amy Racine, who managed to pair some excellent biodynamic wines with vegetarian dishes;

the tables look onto the unique freeform outdoor swimming pool that wraps itself around the central mesa.

Behind the reception desk is a gem of a Gallery shop, with Navaho rugs, handmade baskets and Native American jewellery.

The architecture is like a movie lens, as it captures endless cinematic vistas of the landscape, framed by a seating area, cut

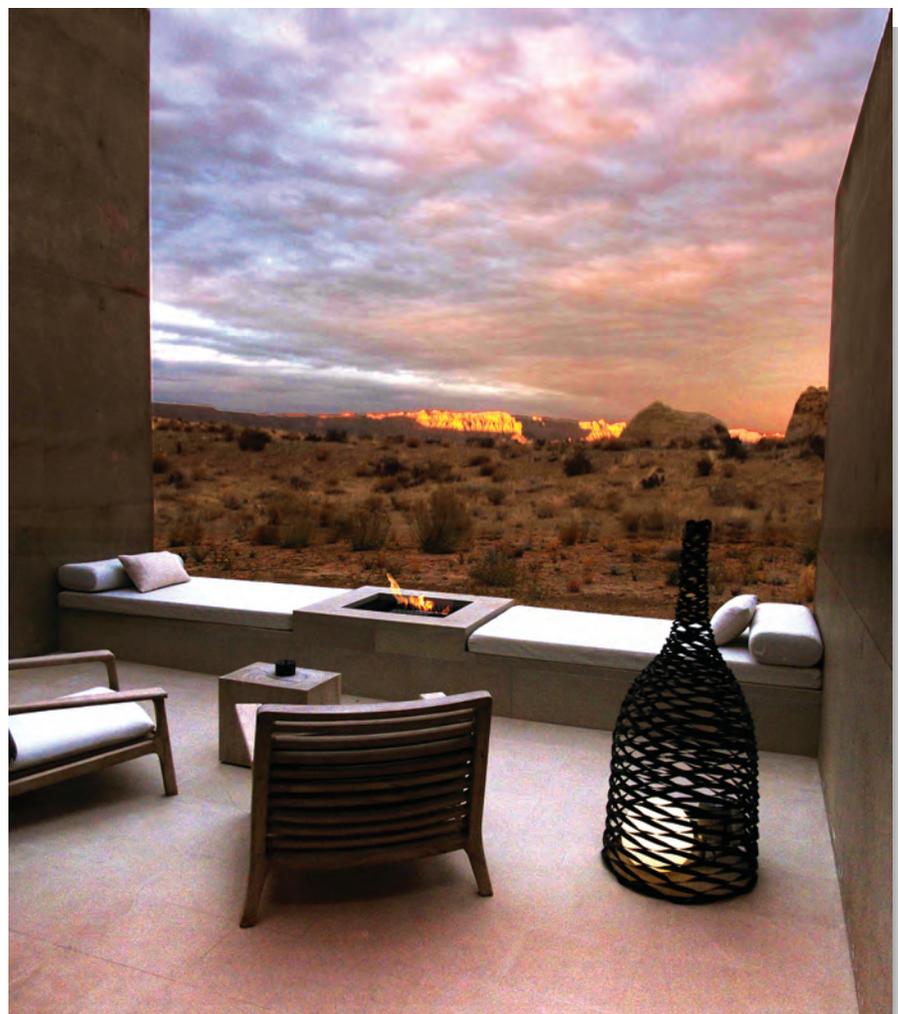
vertically like a slot canyon between buildings, glimpsed through a spa window, edged by a fire pit. As you walk towards the Desert Wing, walls trickle with water, making patterns of algae that resemble artworks. Sandstone sinks of dripping water glow at night with eerie colours and sometimes, as with the landscape, you feel as though you are on another planet.



Cinematic views cut into the architecture at Amangiri.

es; a feat I have never experienced before. No, we are not vegetarians, but we do recognise magic when it is made, and indeed, magic was made every day in the Dining Room, where we relished some of the very best cuisine in North America.

The central Dining Room is set around a raised lounge cum Library; like a big Hawaiian hall. On one side, there are three areas with real log fireplaces, whilst on the other,



The fire-pit terrace, off the bedroom of the Amangiri Suite, #1, captures the sunset.



The lounge cum library, cum bar island at night, as staff set up the tables in the Dining Room for dinner, at Amangiri.

Meticulous design and attention to detail even extend to the restrooms, with their central black terrazzo blocks, topped by four shallow glass bowls. However, design never supercedes comfort. Feather, duvet-topped beds are sublime and, because it is so quiet here, you sleep like a child. Sofas are comfortable, cream wool throws are covetable; the leather and stone accessories totally of the place.

The Spa is a vast yet intimate sanctuary; perhaps the best I have ever experienced in my entire life. Yes, says David,



The open kitchen at Amangiri, where you can, if you wish, dine.

I agree. Your journey begins at reception, where Spa Manager, Anthony Andra and the quietly radiant Erika greet you with the sort of relaxed grace that you envy. A real

log fire crackles in the hearth and Navaho tea brings a glow to your cheeks and you realise that you could sit here all day and chat. Everyone is so happy, so at ease, so different from the usual 21st Century spa. It is as though they know that you will be changed by this place, just as they have been.

Water trickles everywhere - water, fire, earth - the elements pervade the entire resort. This is, without doubt, the best spa in North America and maybe even the best spa anywhere, with so many extraordinary and often life-changing treatments that you could, quite easily, spend every hour here. My Craniosacral therapy with Corrie was



The unique water walls at Amangiri create living artworks. Imagine what this will look like in summer when the trees are in bloom!



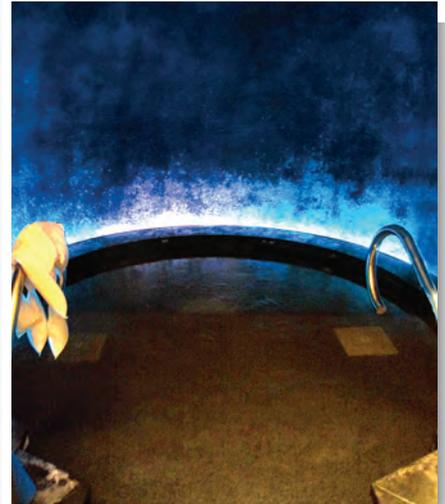
The bedroom of the Amangiri Suite, #1, is a haven of calm.

decidedly life-changing, whilst David's massage left him ecstatic. An Acupressure Facial, using Aman's incredible chemical-free skincare, is also to be recommended, and in the warmer months, time by the Water Pavilion with its stone-lined step

pool and outdoor fireplace, or perhaps an adventure in the unique Flotation Pavilion, Thai massage in one of the two outdoor salas, or a journey, maybe, in Native American style, at dawn, at midday, twilight or night, depending upon your need.

Down to earth, in the second building, is a fabulously equipped fitness facility with a Yoga and Pilates room, and if you need it, a Salon for manicures and pedicures.

If you can bear to leave, Amangiri is enveloped by thousands of square miles of pristine, unspoilt land, so excursions are infinite in their diversity, from boating and rafting on Lake Powell and the Colorado River, to private scenic flights over the Col-



Amangiri's unique Flotation Pavilion.

orado Plateau from the Amangiri helipad, to hiking, with or without a guide, on-property Via Ferratas for 'iron road' extreme sports fans, hot air balloon flights, Grand Canyon tours, lunch in the Broken Arrow cave, and endless other opportunities. Now do you see why you need to stay longer?

The other great thing about Amangiri is that, like all Amans, there is a no-tipping



The pool at Amangiri wraps itself around an ancient mesa that, at night, looks, for all the world, like a baby elephant.



Even in winter, Amangiri's architecture and landscape are breathtakingly beautiful.

policy, which is a huge relief in tip-hungry North America. WiFi is, of course, complimentary and password-free. There is a complimentary alcohol-free mini-bar in each suite, a BOSE system and iPod dock, concealed TV, easy to use mood lighting, and ethanol outdoor fireplaces. Indeed, try as we may, we could not fault Amangiri. Even its laundry was immaculate.

There are just 34 suites at Amangiri; 14 in the Mesa View wing and 13 Desert View Suites, plus one Terrace Suite, two Pool Suites, two Terrace Pool Suites, #24 and



Trace plays Native American flutes at Amangiri.

#25; the Amangiri Suite, #1, in the Desert wing, and the Girijaala Suite, #34, in the Mesa wing.

#19, for instance, is a Mesa View Suite, which is just one category up from entry level. As with most of the suites, these have wet-rooms which incorporate the tub and twin showers in one space. All the Pool Suites, such as Desert View Pool Suite, #7, have an upstairs Sky Lounge, which is an outdoor kingsize bed that is open to the stars; a very popular concept with many guests who relish sleeping in the open air.



A Spa Suite at Amangiri; the shutters flung open to the landscape.



At Amangiri, the mesa view side of the Dining Room serves as a lounge bar in the evening; the big log fires lit in the winter months.

Both the Amangiri and Girijaala suites can connect to entry-level suites and have cinematic views from their private pools and outdoor areas. For me, the Amangiri Suite is more private and has a larger exterior space with outdoor log fire and a bigger pool, although the Girijaala has incredible views of the mesa. Is Mesa better than Desert? Frankly, it is purely a matter of choice. Mesa is closer to the Spa, but the Desert suites are more private.

Just beyond the resort's main area is the first of the two dozen or so proposed resi-

dential villas; each of which will average 7,000 sq ft on footprints of between 1.5 to



General Manager, Bret Borshell and Sommelier, Amy Racine, at the incomparable Amangiri.

10.5 acres. Now available to rent, The

Owner's Villa, #6, is a 3-level haven with a full-size infinity-edge pool, four identically sized bedroom suites, a large kitchen and acres of relaxing and entertaining space, ringed by balconies. This villa is quite isolated, so will not appeal to everyone, but if you relish silence, then it is perfect.

Staff, under the infinitely charming Bret Borshell, is gentle, caring and exceptionally genuine. From our delightful young driver, Joseph, to veteran Aman Manager, JP, I cannot imagine a group of nicer individuals.



Amangiri's Spa reception incorporates the elements of earth, water and fire and is one of the most welcoming of places.



Amangiri's talented Chef, Robinson Dalzell, is passionate about locally sourced fresh produce, which he turns into superlative dishes, from snacks to tasting menus.

You can request a car transfer from Las Vegas, Phoenix, Flagstaff or St George, or fly from Las Vegas to Page, which is just 30 minutes from the resort by complimentary

drives are never boring as the scenery is so striking.

150 million years later, another miracle has bloomed in Utah's desert. Amangiri is,



Private pool of the Owner's Villa, #6, at Amangiri.

transfer. St George is around 2 1/2 hours from the resort and about 50 minute's flight to Los Angeles, but as you can imagine, the

in every respect, unique. Go now, go back, go regularly, or even live there. I would.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★

Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas.

You expect Vegas hotels to be glitzy and brash, rather than elegant and intimate, so when you walk into the non-gaming Mandarin Oriental, it is quite a culture shock because it oozes style, quality and up-scale confidence; a little Asian heritage coupled with European gravitas and the new sophistication of Las Vegas. The mix is sensational. Indeed, if I were to check into this hotel in New York or Paris, I would be impressed. In Vegas, I was astounded.

Set in the relatively new City Center, adjacent to the high-end Crystals Retail and Entertainment mall and opposite its sister hotel, Aria, which offers gaming, Mandarin Oriental is everything you do not expect.



The porte cochère at the infinitely intimate Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.



The lower Lobby at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.

The hotel is home to Pierre Gagnaire's first US restaurant, Twist; a stylish 72-cover delight on the 23rd Sky Lobby floor. Here, the talented Chef de Cuisine, Pascal Sanchez, conjures culinary clusters of astonishing complexity; each menu item not merely comprising one plate, but three or even five complementary dishes.

Wherever you venture, views abound. The Sky Lobby has its own unique Tea Lounge, which has proved hugely popular, but the best views are reserved for the



The intimate Tea Lounge is a unique and very popular feature at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.

Mandarin Bar, which, I believe, is designer, Adam Tihany's most successful bar design ever. On the 3rd floor, you find the equally intimate all-day-dining Mozen Bistro, where I had some of the best Huevos Rancheros. Service is incredibly personal and tutored and I had to pinch myself to believe I was in Vegas.



Mandarin Oriental's visionary GM, Rajesh Jhingon.

On the 7th and 8th floors is the linear 16-room Spa, well-equipped fitness facility (with views, of course) and a large Yoga and Pilates studio. The Dragon Suites here are beautiful. Outside is a spectacular pool area, with two pools shaped like the individual blades of a fan, a Pool Café, adult-only area with jacuzzis, a raft of cabanas replete with TVs, coffee machines and,

quite possibly, the kitchen sink.

Hugely talented General Manager, Rajesh Jhingon has added his typical residential style to this hotel, so that even entry-level rooms are accessorised with objects and thoughtful touches, such as hair tongs. Las Vegas? I know, it is hard to believe.

such as #2212, gives you 500 sq ft, striking views and lots of caring residential touches. Even better is a Premier room, such as #2219, which has an extra 150 sq ft of space, a separate loo that connects both to the dressing room and the bathroom, a pleasant office area and even an in-mirror



Bedroom of Dynasty Suite, #2228, at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.

This relatively tiny Las Vegas hotel has 392 rooms, including 56 suites and 3 Presidentials. Even a Cityscape entry-level,

bathroom TV. The 6 Dynasty Suites are all a little different and I highly recommend them for comfort, quality and space. Ours,



View of the sitting room and dining room of Dynasty Suite, #2228, at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.



The spectacular Mandarin Bar at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.

#2228, became a second home within a day. However, even the entry-level suites, with their corner aspects, are delightful,

Apparently, the #00 series are larger, such as #1900 and #1800, which have bigger bathrooms, sitting rooms and bedrooms,

half way through; but what that meant was that other MGM properties, such as the Four Seasons, had their much-needed refurbishments delayed.



At Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas, Executive Pastry Chef, Gianni Santin, and an array of temptations.

such as Strip-view Suite, #2201, which has a large bar area but a rather small closet.

with lots of natural daylight and, of course, spectacular views.

Happily, business is picking up in Nevada and Four Seasons' refurbishment is about to commence, starting with a complete re-think of the rooms and suites, which will be transformed in classic modern style. Economies are being made, of course, but sensible ones. The single vanity bathrooms will benefit from an up-date, but the marble will remain, as will the single vanities.

The public areas will be addressed in 2013 and this could be very exciting as they intend to open up the lobby into the garden beyond, thus increasing the level of light and optimising this Las Vegas rarity of green trees and languid poolside living.

All told, including the room refurbishment, MGM will spend around \$30 million;



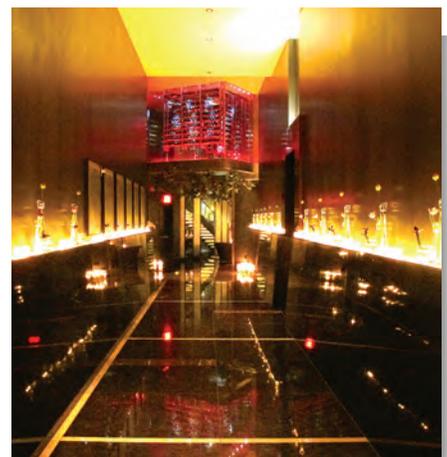
The delightful Mozen Bistro at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.

Staff here is warm, welcoming and super professional, to the extent that this is a much more accomplished hotel than the Mandarin Orientals in New York and San Francisco. We loved it.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★

Four Seasons Hotel, Las Vegas.

Four Seasons is owned by MGM, who also own the City Center and Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas. When the downturn came, MGM had to finish the Mandarin, as they could hardly leave it



Entrance to Twist at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.



A Dragon Suite in Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas' elegant Spa.

not a fortune for a 424-room property, but certainly sufficient to make a marked difference, and hopefully enough to put Four Seasons back on the high-end hotel ladder.

Can they compete with Mandarin, though? I am not so sure, as Mandarin is decidedly of the 21st Century, with two distinct high-end restaurants and a great bar, whereas Four Seasons relies solely on its all-day-din-



Outdoor pools at Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas.

ing Verandah Restaurant and the franchised Charlie Palmer Steak (which, happily, has been nicely remodelled). There is, however, no stand-alone bar, just an area within The Verandah, and this now boasts the ubiquitous large 'sports bar' TV, which I find deeply irritating.

This is, however, a Four Seasons, so staff, under General Manager Mark Hellrung and Hotel Manager, Sunil Narang, is special and is certainly in the top league compared to the casino hotels.

On the culinary front, breakfasts and lunches were, for me, overly domestic in nature, but in the evening, Italian Chef, Antonio Minichiello and Pastry Chef, Jean-Luc Daul, created small miracles. Desserts, especially, were whimsical and show-stopping, particularly the cotton candy, which managed to turn every head in the restaurant. I also loved Antonio's clever and delicious kilner jar of homemade pasta and seafood, steamed in a bain marie.

The Spa, under Director Shane Kelly, will also benefit from a makeover, but

here, some treatment rooms are overly tiny and although the dimmed lighting and candles help, you are still aware of the age of this facility.

Currently, the 2 Presidentials have lost their views due to nearby building, so Four Seasons intend to create 5 new Presidentials with Strip views, created from the current wraparound suites. The look of the new accommodations will centre upon aubergine and russet, and celadon and copper, with brand new artworks, Swarovski crystal lamps, task chairs at the desks and, in the suites, rich shantung silks and chocolate lacquer chairs.



Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas' GM, Mark Hellrung.

I saw the plans for the refurbishment and they will certainly make a big difference. I just wonder if that difference will be sufficient and whether it is brave enough. We shall see.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓



Whimsical desserts at Four Seasons Vegas.

AT A GLANCE

AMANGIRI.

Internet: www.amanresorts.com/amangiri **Suites:** 34. **Rack Rates:** Desert View: \$1,050. Mesa View: \$1,150. Terrace: \$1,250. Desert Pool: \$1,650. Mesa Pool: \$1,750. Girijaala: \$3,300. Amangiri: \$3,600. The Owner's Villa: Approx. \$7,000, inc. complimentary airport transfers from Page Airport, + 4.25% room tax, 6.9% sales tax & 10% service.

MANDARIN ORIENTAL LAS VEGAS.

Internet: www.mandarinoriental.com/lasvegas **Rooms:** 392, inc. 56 Suites & 3 Presidentials. **Rack Rates:** See website for current packages and offers, especially 'Suite Temptations'.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL LAS VEGAS.

Internet: www.fourseasons.com/lasvegas **Rooms:** 424, inc. 86 suites. **Rack Rates:** See website for current packages and offers.

Aman still publish rack rates, but most other groups now vary their rates according to occupancy and season.



Suite, #37113, at Four Seasons Hotel, Las Vegas; soon to be remodelled.

GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



OPENING NEXT MONTH is **Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa**, on Italy's Amalfi Coast. With 20 light and airy sea view rooms and suites, together with an elegantly designed spa, the Sea View Penthouse could be the one for you. www.monasterosantarosa.com

ALTHOUGH I HAVE NEVER BEEN A GREAT FAN of Thailand's Hua Hin, the new **Hôtel de La Paix Cha-Am** (a short drive from Hua Hin) looks rather splendid. Sister to the eponymous Siem Reap property, and with 79 Studios and Pool Villas, designed by renowned Thai architect, Duangrid Bunnag, this could become the easy option for a beach break from Bangkok. www.hoteldelapaixhh.com

HIGH ON MY RADAR is **Rosewood Hotels & Resorts**, especially since Radha Arora took over as President. We bumped into him in California and he told us that a massive renovation is scheduled for New York's **The Carlyle** and Rosewood's original property, **The Mansion on Turtle Creek** in Dallas, which is excellent news. Rosewood are also building a 70-plus-floor mixed use right next door to The InterContinental Hong Kong on Kowloon, so watch this space!

DO NOT THINK FOR A MINUTE that **Las Vegas** is all about gaming. These days, most of the money is made from high-end retail, top notch restaurants and world-beating shows by **Cirque du Soleil**, such as 'O', 'Love' and, our latest find, 'Kà', live at the MGM Grand and highly recommended. Great concierges at Mandarin Oriental and Four Seasons will secure you the best seats.

IDEAL FOR PRIVATE PARTIES, **Ariara**, in the remote Calamian Islands of the **Philippines**, is a new 125-acre island owned by British couple, Charles and Carrie McCulloch. Depending upon the season, this private island accommodates 6-17 guests on an exclusive basis. www.ariaraisland.com

CHINA'S HOTEL DEVELOPMENTS CONTINUE TO SKYROCKET. The latest is Kerzner International's announcement that it will develop and manage a **One&Only resort on Tufu Bay in Sanya**, Hainan - the Chinese domestic equivalent of Hawaii - scheduled to open 2014, with 180 rooms and villas. Is this really the sort of resort that high-end guests are craving for?

EVERY WEDNESDAY AND SUNDAY, **Montenegro Airlines** now offer direct flights from London to Tivat airport, which is just 30 minutes complimentary transfer by car from **Aman Sveti Stefan**. No excuse not to go!

IHAVE NOTICED THAT **Four Seasons** are dispensing with **Room Directories** in favour of putting all the information on their in-room TVs, which is fine if you have the TV turned on all day, but less so if you just want to know what time breakfast finishes. A much more accessible high-tech solution is to have iPads in every room which display all the room directory information, as they do at the revitalised **Hotel Bel-Air** in Los Angeles, which you can read about next month in our California special issue.

AS KEMPINSKI ENDS ITS MANAGEMENT of two Tanzanian hotels, rumour has it that Dubai-based Ali Albwardy's 78-room **Bilila Lodge in Serengeti, Tanzania**, is to be managed by **Four Seasons**. Interestingly, when you check out the existing website, the hotel already looks like a Four Seasons, right down to the website photography, so the fit would be perfect. Fingers crossed as this is a beautiful property with some spectacular suites. www.bililalodgeserengeti.com

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