



Gallivanter's Guide

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IDYLIC PLACES FOR DEDICATED TRAVELLERS

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- ✓✓✓✓ Extraordinary
- ✓✓✓ Highly recommended
- ✓✓ Well worth a visit
- ✓✓ Good in parts
- ✓ Go if you must

When ignorance is not bliss.

Last year, David and I were enjoying dinner in a very good new hotel, when we became aware of a seriously inebriated guest at a nearby table. Upon enquiring about him, we were told by the staff that he was a very important journalist, there to write about the hotel. The following week, I read his review in one of the British newspapers and failed utterly to recognise the hotel from his description, for most of it was sheer fabrication, tinged with that particular brand of envious vitriol that many British journalists seem to specialise in.

Still, at least this journalist had taken the trouble to visit the hotel. Most 'recommendations' these days seem to be culled solely from brochures and press releases, meaning that you, dear readers, could be in for a very nasty surprise if you follow them.

More recently, another well respected newspaper published a guide to the world's top 100 hotels. We were horrified by the seemingly arbitrary choices and even more perturbed by the raft of inaccuracies. According to them, the best place to stay in Mexico City is somewhere called the Maria Cristina. They told us that The Oberoi Lombok has three swimming pools, whereas in fact, it only has one, which is sandwiched between two reflecting ponds. The article ranked the dowdy Tinakilly Country House in Ireland (which it managed to spell 'Tinkalilly') a whole two points higher than the sublime Las Ventanas al Paraiso in Mexico. Even worse, Mount Nelson in Cape Town was described as being at the foot of the Atlas Mountains! A little informed desk research could have steered the newspaper away from this embarrassment and taught them

that the Atlas Mountains are, last time I looked, in Morocco and that Table Mountain is in Cape Town. In the same article, Aman-dari in Bali was ranked way below a gamut of lesser hotels, including budget boltholes in Spain and Rajasthan.

Writing about hotels is not a game. It can make or break businesses; so when I read some of the drivel published in newspapers and travel magazines that purports to be fact, I become really cross. Sorry about that, but I happen to care about these things.

Some time ago, in an American glossy, I read an editorial about Europe, which spoke lovingly about London's famous fogs. Now, from 40 years experience, I can testify that London has not suffered from fog since the 1960's when the clean air bill was introduced. Frighteningly, thousands of unsuspecting Americans now believe that London still looks like something from a Sherlock Holmes black and white movie.

There are, of course, some very good travel magazines, especially in America and Asia, but when travel is treated as a sideline and newspapers send sports writers and fashion editors to critique new hotels, then the results are rarely worth the paper they are printed on.

The Gallivanter's Guide employs no journalists, has no advertisers to please, no sponsors to placate. We simply tell it like it is. Truthfully.

Editor/Publisher



Taking the sea air

One of Amanpuri's newest Villa Homes.

FROM THAILAND TO NORTH AMERICA AND MEXICO, WE PRESENT THREE PERFECT RESORTS FOR YOUR SPRING BREAK.

There is something magical and curative about beaches; the sharp sniff of ozone in the air, the child-ish joy of running from the incoming surf, the feel of powdered sand between your toes. T.S. Eliot captured the image perfectly when he wrote: "I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each." He did not believe that they would sing for him, but they could sing for you, dear reader. So kick off your shoes and follow us now to three quite different beachside resorts, all of which offer perfect weather for your much-needed Spring break.

Amanpuri Hotel & Villas, Phuket, Thailand.

I sauntered over to a parasoled lounge on Amanpuri's icing sugar beach and behind me, a young man scurried through

the pale blond sand bearing towels, whilst another managed to arrange glasses of iced water and cold towels on a side table even before I had sat down. Half an hour later, having had my water constantly refreshed with ice, another member of staff circled the loungers with a huge tray of cut pineapple and watermelon. I wondered if they peeled grapes for you here, too!

Now, I must admit to having fallen in and out of love with Amanpuri over the years. We first visited in 1988, when the resort opened and we loved it so much that we returned the following year. Then, perhaps because we were seduced by ensuing Amanresorts across the world, we started to find fault with the original. The service was not as sharp as Amankila and Amanpulo, we said. The loungers around the pool did not have parasols, causing one to bake without recourse to shade, and so on and so on. Well, there are still no parasols around the main pool (Ed Tuttle, the

architect, says they spoil the look), but in every other respect, Amanpuri has matured and evolved in a most magical way and I am now hopelessly in love again.

You would never believe that this resort had passed its first decade as *all* the accommodation gleams like a new pin. The lovely pavilions are now shrouded by vast natural screens of delicate green bamboo so one may sip a cool cocktail on one's *sala*, clad only in a soft grey robe and do whatever one will in utter privacy. The delightful assistant managers who throng around the main lobby pavilion will organise anything you care to do, from a private car for shopping to a luxury private charter across the Andaman Sea. They will even dispatch a tailor to your Villa so you can have all your favourite clothes copied.

I recognised one of these exquisitely dressed ladies from our first visit in 1988; a most unusual piece of consistency for a Thai beach resort; but then, Amanpuri is not

like other Thai beach resorts. It is utterly unique. There are simply no comparisons to be made.

The beach and sea are sublime. From your comfortable lounger, shaded by a Chinese parasol, you can swim out to the bathing platform through calm waters as warm as one's bath, there to discover a box filled with clean towels and chilled mineral water. You can dine at *The Restaurant* overlooking the bay on first class Italian cuisine cooked by an Italian chef. You can breakfast, lunch or dine on *The Terrace* overlooking the huge, black slate pool and think that you have gone to Heaven. You can pull on a pair of shorts and climb up the steps to the elegant *Beach Café* and enjoy a perfect Italian-inspired snack or a light Thai confection.

The resort sprawls along the entire length of a perfect peninsula; the *Andaman Sea* on all three sides and a winding access road cutting, spine-like through the palm groves. If you opt for a Pavilion Suite, choose one overlooking *Pansea Bay*. They are all identical; the price varying purely by the proximity of the view. However, the ultimate choice has to be one of the 30 walled *Villa Homes*, where one has one's own full-size pool (with parasols), two to six detached pavilion suites, a huge outdoor dining pavilion, airconditioned sitting room pavilion and one's own cook and staff to pamper you from dawn to dusk.

These fabulously designed traditional Thai homes are crafted, like the Pavilions, in graceful Thai style from burnished teak, most with breathtaking views of the sea. The newest Villas are the most sumptuous, with huge gardens, pools and mesmeric views. #17 has sea views from every terrace, so beautiful that they hurt. Villas #23-#27 will, and already have, astounded even the most pampered film stars. Ask GM, Anthony Lark, what Pierce Brosnan said about his.

For David's birthday, we hopped on an *Eva Air* flight to Bangkok (the superb Taiwanese airline that offers no less than four different value-packed classes), then flew down to Phuket with our closest friend, who happens to be a *Feng Shui* consultant (You can read her fascinating *Feng Shui* analysis of Amanpuri opposite).

In celebratory mood, we stayed in the exquisite 4-bedroom Villa #2, which is

owned by hotelier, Georg Rafael. It was so marvellous, that we never wanted to leave. Wondrous cuisine and genuinely caring service by talented chef, Guan and her assistant Ji made every meal, from breakfast to dinner, a sheer delight.

Perhaps our most memorable experience, though, was a whole day aboard *Kbunying*, Amanpuri's 37ft Luxury Sports Cruiser, which took us through the magical natural rock kingdom of *Phang Nga*; a full crew catering to our every whim, including a multi-course Thai lunch cooked on board as we moored by a coral-rimmed desert island.

Amanpuri has a huge fleet of private charter vessels at your disposal; the most exotic being Ed Tuttle's *Maha Bhetra*, which is a 90ft southern Thailand motor yacht featuring three exquisite double state rooms with lavish en suite bathrooms. The top deck is an open-sided Thai-style living *sala*, just like the ones that you find in the Villas; an architectural fantasy that is perfect for overnight cruises, as it virtually recreates Amanpuri on the water.

Whilst in Phuket, we checked out the so-called competition and, frankly, it was so disappointing that we did not consider it worthy of a full review. *The Banyan Tree Phuket* apart from a rather good boutique, was utterly soulless, with amateurish staff, dusty public areas, bland concrete architecture, indifferent restaurants, a good if visually uninspiring Spa and absolutely no incentive to stay there, as the hotel is sited on a lagoon rather than by the beach. *The Phuket Yacht Club*, which was the first deluxe resort to be built on Phuket, is now part of the *Meridien* chain and is overly fond of the package-tour trade for my taste. *The Chedi Phuket*, sited next door to Amanpuri, is the exception; simple but professional, with the same wonderful beach, elegant understated interiors, small shower-only thatched accommodation and very acceptable cuisine. In my view, this is the next best resort, after Amanpuri.

As there is so much unused acreage at Amanpuri, the next phase of its development hopes to create a proper spa overlooking the bay on the opposite shore to Pansea; a brilliant idea that will, I suspect rob *The Banyan Tree* of its up-scale spa business overnight.

Meanwhile, if you have not stayed at Amanpuri for a while, do go back and

The Pearl of Phuket.

Feng Shui, by Kathie Merriman.

IF YOU are a student of Feng Shui, a reasonable swimmer and you happen to find yourself in Phuket, then a real treat awaits you in Pansea Bay. Swim out to Amanpuri's floating deck about 500m from the shore, use the urn containing a ladle, fresh water and orchids to sluice off the salt, take a towel and a chilled bottle of water from the cooler, sit down and look back at the landscape. You will be presented with a rare and perfect example of "Two Dragons Playing with the Pearl", a formation I have only seen once before in Central China at the site of a Ming Dynasty prince's tomb. The Two Dragons are hill formations which rise gently out of the water in near perfect symmetry either side of the bay. They undulate towards the centre (rather like the undulations on the back of a dragon) where they encircle Amanpuri, the Pearl. The hills also clasp the bay like two protective arms; the hotel, with its villas and pavilions nestling snugly into the hillsides. One feels protected here. The elements are in harmony. The buildings are constructed from teak and are surrounded by beautiful trees, creating the element of 'Wood'. They are built on stilts, which could feel insecure, but are saved by the cunning underplanting of shrubs and bamboo which provide 'support'. The roofs are flame shaped, echoing the element of 'Fire', so each building has the feeling of 'Wood' feeding 'Fire'. Below the buildings is the 'Water' which nourishes the 'Wood'. The fire /flame shape buildings sit comfortably in the hillside and nourish the 'Earth'. The 'Earth' produces the tall, spiky pillars of palm trees which represent 'Metal', not to mention the many beautiful obelisk-like statues in the grounds. The hills could be deemed to be falling too steeply into the bay, but they are saved by the giant palm trees which soar upwards and provide a delicate counterbalance. 'Fire' supports 'Earth' supports 'Metal' supports 'Water' supports 'Wood'. Perfect harmony. Then again, if you do not study Feng Shui, you could just sit on Amanpuri's beach of peachy golden sand and drink in the view.

Kathie Merriman is a Feng Shui consultant who will take both private and corporate commissions. Written or faxed enquiries should be addressed via The Gallivanter's Guide.

stay in one of the Villa Homes. I know that they are expensive, but not if you take along a few friends. Just tell your bank manager that Amanpuri will save your life. It certainly beats medical insurance.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

Four Seasons Resort Aviara, Carlsbad, California.

We arranged for a limo to collect us from San Diego airport and it took just 25 minutes to reach Aviara; a vast up-scale vacation home enclave set inland from the ocean, with the Four Seasons Resort at its epicentre. You can hire a car from the resort, which is well worth doing as there are some lovely little seaside towns in the area, such as Carlsbad, Del Mar, La Jolla and Seaport Village.

Aviara will not suit everyone, but it is absolutely perfect for golfers, as there is a beautifully landscaped Arnold Palmer championship course in the grounds, together with a proper Golf Academy. It is also an excellent resort for families with children, offering really thoughtful facilities, from a special Kid's Club to a custom kid's pool, children's boutique, Pro tennis lessons, a Sony Play Station in every armoire and child-friendly cuisine both in the restaurants and through room service. Even the Sunday Brunch has a little

people's section which is set at child height!

Equally, if you crave peace and quiet, you will not be disturbed by exuberant youngsters or corporate conventions, as everything here has been carefully designed to keep that from happening.

One's first impression of Aviara is of sculptured fountains, acres of lavish marble and heaps of style. Its public areas are hugely elegant, designed on a grand scale with super-wide hallways interspersed with a central tea lounge, bar and cozy fireplaced library lounge; a raft of truly excellent boutiques curving around the whole length of the property. Shopping here is irresistible. *Premier* is a treasure trove of decorative collectibles and trinkets, and the unisex fashion store, *Peaches en Regalia* tempted both David and me to burn the plastic!

If you are activity oriented, Aviara can arrange everything, from horseriding at nearby Rancho Santa Fé (home of the 1984 Olympic Equestrian Finals) to hot air ballooning at sunset, with a glass of Champagne in your hand. There are six lit tennis courts with USPTA certified staff and if you fish, the resort can arrange a variety of activities from the nearby Oceanside or San Diego Harbour.

Numerous Pacific coast beaches are close at hand; but do not expect Aviara to be *on* the beach; it is not. The Ocean is

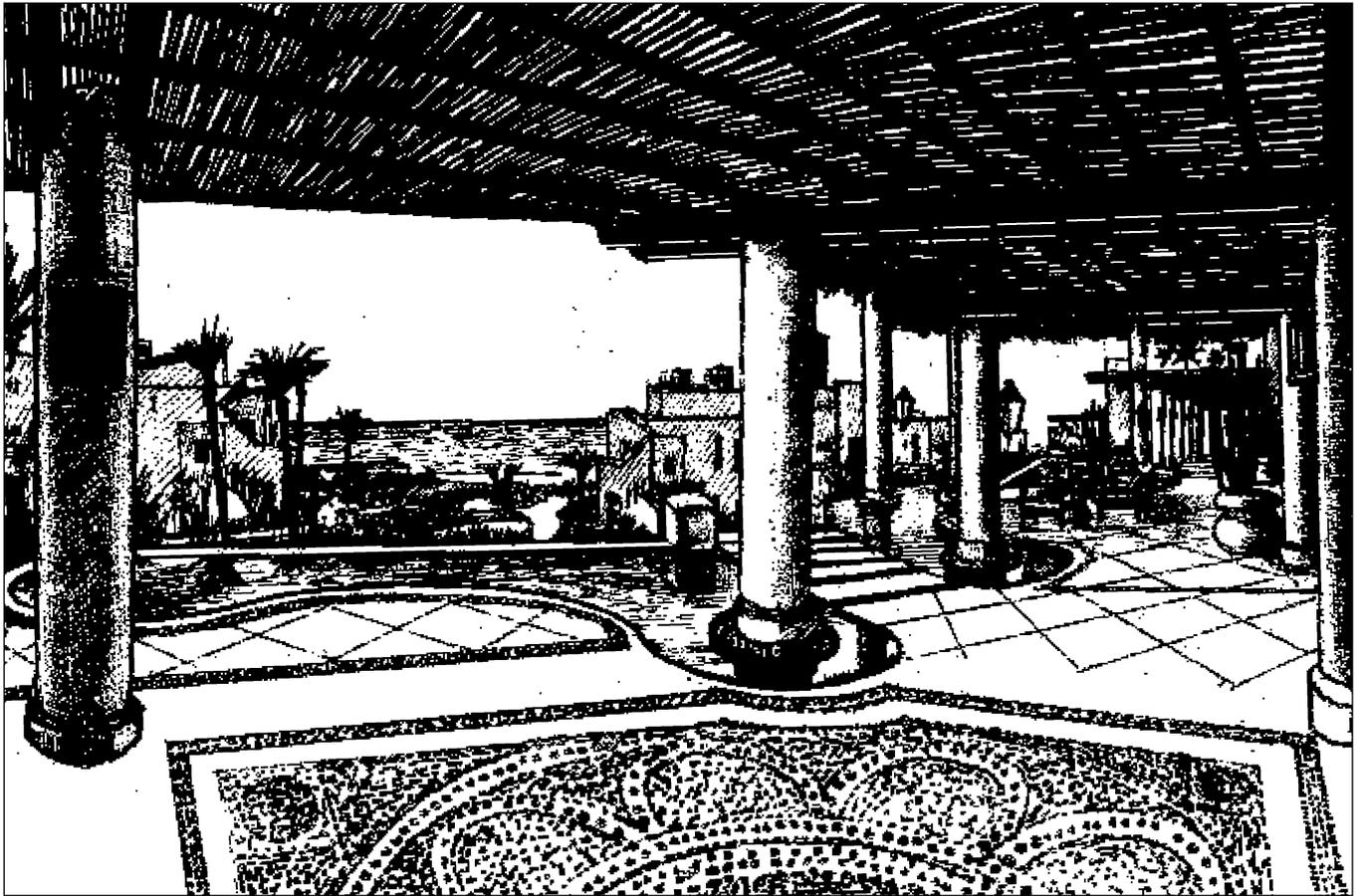
visible from the resort, but it is by no means near, although the *Batiquitos Lagoon* does wind inwards near the golf course and this is where the protected wildlife aspect of Aviara can be experienced; from Greater Yellowlegs to Kingfishers and Egrets.

Aviara was conceived over 10 years ago as part of the 1,000 acre planned community here. The main resort opened in 1997 whilst the golf club was established as far back as 1991. The main building houses 331 rooms and suites, four restaurants and lounges, a top notch hair salon and a good sized Fitness & Spa Centre, which utilises some exceptional products (Buy a giant bottle of Aviara Coastal Grapefruit Body Lotion from the Spa; custom made by a local company and utterly addictive).

The grounds are landscaped around two courtyards; one of which houses the main freeform pool, children's pool, whirlpools and attractive Ocean Pool Bar & Grill. The pool area is dotted with green and white striped cabanas and service here is warm, friendly and extremely impressive; cold towels and iced water arriving in a constant stream. Here, you can watch the hummingbirds, gaze across to the distant lagoon and Ocean and sun yourself in carefully sheltered corners, which offer rather more privacy than most resorts this size.



The fireplaced Library lounge at Four Seasons Aviara is just one of many splendidly opulent public areas.



View across Las Ventanas al Paraíso from the lobby terrace, looking out to sea.

Aviara caters predominantly to the domestic market and because of this, there are one or two aspects of the resort that may shock European and Asian guests. For instance, like most American hotels, there are no amenities in the rooms and suites, such as welcome notes, flowers or fruit. Check-in, too, is very casual and we were amazed to be handed a key and told to find our own room. When we asked about this, we were informed that the bellboy should have led us there, but over the three days we stayed, we noticed several guests who received exactly the same treatment and it was only the groups who appeared to benefit from this service.

In traditional American resort style, we found the guest accommodation to be somewhat dull compared to the lavish public areas; rather like Four Seasons Singapore. Our Oceanview Deluxe Double, #412, was very spacious, with the usual sublime Sealy kingsize and lightweight duvet, but it was very boringly configured in the traditional closet-on-the-right, bathroom-on-the-left style, with all the furniture hugging the walls. Beige carpet, duck-egg blue walls and beige and green upholstery set the tone and although the quality of everything was good, this was

not a room that could ever be called memorable.

A pleasant twin-vanity marbled bathroom, with separate loo, tiny tub and good step-in shower worked perfectly well, with soft piped towelling robes and a thoughtful nightlight. In the suites, you also get Bulgari toiletries. There were, however, no slippers and no sewing kit and apart from a small pot plant in the sitting area, the room felt excessively bare.

The well-stocked mini-bar was topped by a coffee machine and big terracotta mugs, and a small balcony was dressed with a breakfast table and two very comfortable lounging chairs.

The one thing about this resort that really raises the game is the cuisine, which is superb. *Vivace*, the fine dining room, is outstanding; Italian chef, Marco Cavouto creating world class cuisine in a gorgeous, intimate setting, with striking spot-lit flower arrangements, rich terracotta walls, spot-lit alcoves of carved wooden bowls and striking Murano glass on the big stone fireplace. Especially memorable was the Foccacio bread served on a hot granite stone with balsamic and olive oil dipping dishes. The Sautéed Chilean Sea Bass on a bed of Bell Peppers and Fingerling Potatoes,

Balsamic Syrup and Mint scented oil was the most moreish dish we sampled.

The *Californian Bistro's* all-day dining was also exceptional, from perfect breakfasts to snack lunches and one of the best Sunday Brunches we have ever experienced; even better than The Phoenician in Scottsdale.

Even if you are not a golfer, you must take the regular shuttle down to the Clubhouse, where *The Argyle* restaurant serves wondrous fish dishes and pastas overlooking the scenic vistas of the *Batiquitos Lagoon* and the 18th green. Go here for breakfast or lunch and try their excellent Crab Cake. The staff here are great, especially Stephanie, who is super knowledgeable regarding the local wines.

Accommodation-wise, opt for one of the Executive Suites, which are interestingly configured with separate sitting rooms, guest loos and good sized bedrooms; most of which are sited on or close to the corners of the building. Even better are the lavishly themed Luxury Suites, available in Floral, Contemporary or Classic style. We looked at #103 (Floral) which was a very traditional and comfortable option, with 1 or 2 bedrooms and a large dining area. We also saw #165

(Classic), which was easily our favourite; all blond wood panelled walls and gold fabric; the Deco Moderne design incorporating a guest bathroom and good sized butler's pantry.

For a trouble-free stay, make sure you book your tee-times and Spa treatments when you reserve your room, as this is a very popular resort. Despite a few niggles, David and I liked Aviara as it is very good indeed for the activity-minded, with spectacular golf, warm Southern Californian service and truly excellent cuisine, from breakfast to room-service.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

**Las Ventanas al Paraíso,
Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.**

Seven pelicans fly in a long straight line across the *Sea of Cortés*, so low that they skim the water. Migrating whales send geysers of water into the air, their slick backs huge against the endless horizon. The broad gold beach is seemingly infinite; a silk screen of ochre against the deep blue water and turquoise sky.

We sit on soft towelled loungers beneath a cream calico parasol; our semi-private infinity-edge pool snaking towards a second one, then on into the main free-form swirl of water, where guests sit on underwater stools and sip Margaritas from sunken painted tables.

Las Ventanas al
Paraíso means
“windows onto
Paradise”. The
name does
not exaggerate.

The pool service here is unique. During the morning, we are offered CD Walkmans and a choice of disks, cold perfumed towels, complimentary iced Evian water, home-made chocolates and Evian aerosol misters. It is good to be so spoilt and as we slip into the warm water of the pool, we remember how to relax, how to sit still and remember who we are.

Las Ventanas al Paraíso means “windows onto Paradise”. The name does not exaggerate. This is, without doubt, the ultimate Mexican beach resort. Perhaps the only negative is that the cross currents make the sea too cruel to swim in. We do not mind. The sectioned swimming pools here wrap around virtually the entire beach frontage of the property like a river and

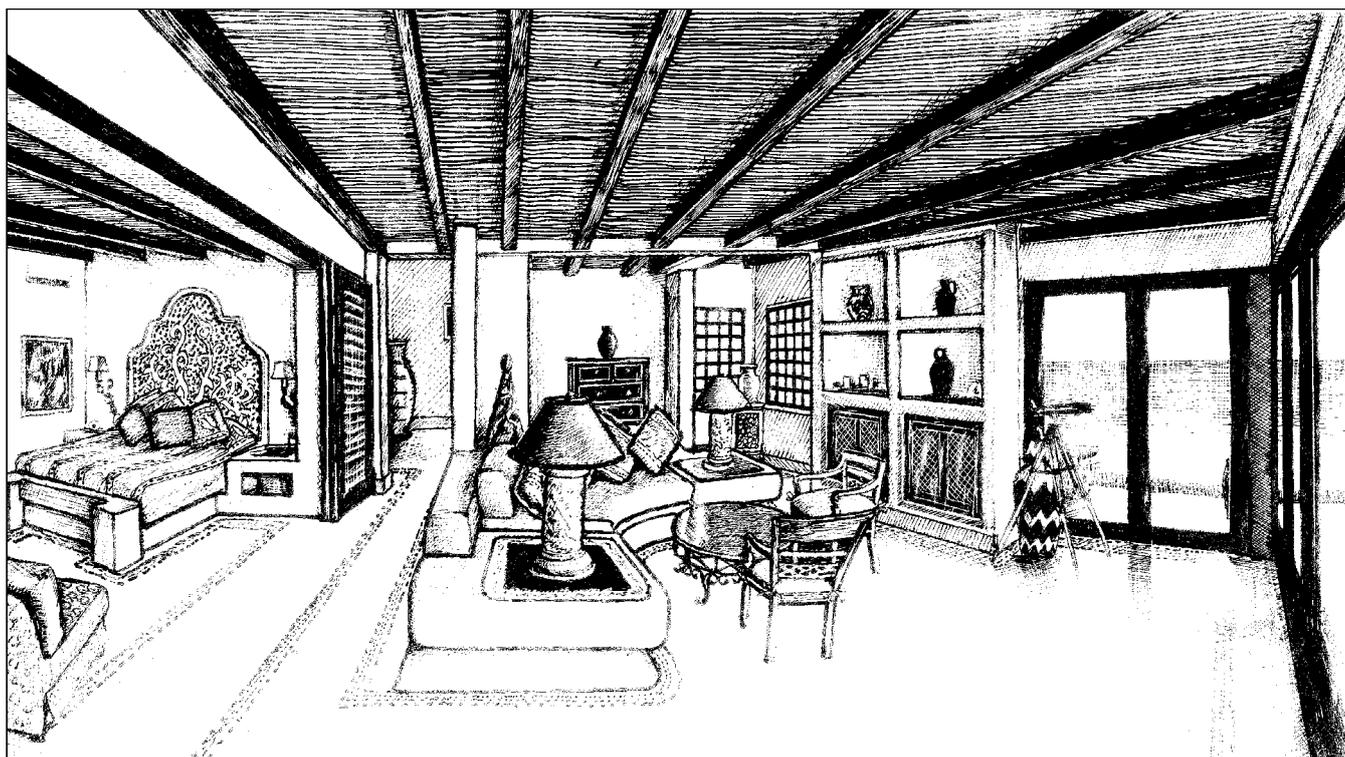
the sound and sharp ozone smell of the sea are forever present.

As the sun is swallowed by the horizon, two stone towers burst into flame; bright braziers against a sky filled with stars. Each Villa Suite has its own big telescope; a window onto the night's celestial grandeur. We watch the spectacle in awe.

Along the coastline, there is the 500-room Westin, where entertainment is manufactured and people with badges and clipboards cluster in frantic groups. Here, however, people remember what life was like before organised leisure. They admire the bright desert gardens that swirl in Japanese sand patterns from level to level. They gaze at the vast celestial chandeliers created from dozens of punched tin stars; little universes of light that create shifting shadow patterns on *The Restaurant* terrace. They sit on the cream curving sofas in their outdoor living rooms beneath latilla beams as the gas lanterns flicker in the breeze and room-service delivers wide frosted glasses of lime scented cocktails, sharp with salt.

Yes, there are 'phones, televisions, video players; but all are concealed behind carved wood doors, as if unwilling to compete with the roar of the surf.

The suites are beautiful; so beautiful that even the weariest traveller will want to unpack instantly and be at home. Organic-shaped kiva fireplaces make one



Suite #102 at Las Ventanas al Paraíso really does have windows onto Paradise.

long to return here for chill winter evenings. Bedheads, formed into swirling designs from polished pebbles, stir one into creative thought. The bathrooms are vast corridors of hedonism; first one vanity, set with a giant framed mirror and closets; then a second room with another vanity, a deep jacuzzi, separate loo and massive step-in shower with its own marbled seat and window. Toiletries come in organically shaped glass; the bath crystals and gel in 8 inch high cork-stoppered flacons whilst hair products and body lotion are in stoppered apothecary bottles; so fragrant, so delicious that you have to buy some from the charming boutique; that and some elegant beachware, classic silver and local artifacts. Our luggage groans.

This is a small resort; just 61 suites set in white 2-level casitas. At the rear of the property, there are two higher structures which house 114 elegant vacation apartments. The feeling is of an exquisite Mexican village designed for a very privileged few. Unlike the other resorts on this unique desert peninsula, people cannot just wander into Las Ventanas. You are either a guest or you have a table reservation. Believe me, they will check your credentials at the gate.

As you wander along a myriad of pathways created from local fossilised stone and inset by intricate hand-laid pebble borders, you wonder what to do first, where to feast your eyes. An iron mermaid trickles water into a stone-filled pond. A little bridge crosses one of the snaking pools. A *Ceviche Bar* huddles beneath a thatched roundel on a sun-filled terrace. A stone fountain greets one at the entrance to the small Spa and exercise room. A hundred collectible artifacts mesmerise in the main *Restaurant* whilst by the pool, the casual *Sea Grill* demands that you linger over delicate Chicken Quesadillas or creamy home-made ice creams; the espresso wonderful.

We have never stayed anywhere in Mexico where the cuisine could be described as good; but Las Ventanas begins to break the mould. In the main *Restaurant* starters and desserts are very acceptable indeed. Only the main courses disappoint, with too many flavours fighting for recognition. Most guests tend to dine here, but in my view, the more

casual *Sea Grill* serves by far the best cuisine at dinner. Wondrous home-baked breads with chilli oil dip are followed by superb chargrilled meats, vegetables, salads and top notch Mexican specialities. The desserts, too, are exceptional; the service hugely accomplished. On chill nights, they bring you big cream ponchos with embroidered crests to wear. At Las Ventanas, the details are such that you want to take everything home.

We stay in an Ocean View Junior Suite, #204, which is on the ground level; a shared swimming pool right in front of our living terrace. The beach is just steps away; a cluster of thatched lounging palapas catering to the beachcombers.

It is difficult to know which suites to recommend here, for all are beautiful. However, those on the front row are best, in buildings 200 and 300, where the two shared pools are. Each unit houses 8 Junior Suites. The Rooftop Terrace Suites on the upper level have outdoor jacuzzis in their open air living rooms and a spiral staircase leads to a spectacular upper terrace, with carved loungers and wondrous views. That said, many guests who stay in these find that they do not use the upper terrace very much and prefer to sit around the well-serviced pools. At the top end, there are 4 spectacular 1-bedroom Villa Suites, each with their own outdoor jacuzzi and private freeform plunge pool. Bathrooms also have an extra Swiss waterfall outdoor shower and very spacious indoor as well as outdoor sitting rooms. #101 and #102 have the best beach views, but #101 is somewhat overlooked by the neighbouring resort. On the other edge of the property, right on the 18th-hole golf course, suites #802 and #803 afford more privacy, if less spectacular beach vistas. Finally, #801 is a 3-bedroom bi-level Pool Suite with a full kitchen, 2 kingsize bedrooms and one twin-queen; the ultimate family retreat.

Service in Mexico is generally rather slow, but at Las Ventanas, it is fast, friendly and wholly professional; on a par with any of the world's top resorts. Resident Manager, André Boersma, although somewhat shy and retiring, runs a very tight ship and obviously cares deeply about quality and standards here, making Las Ventanas not only Mexico's best resort, but also one of the world's.

Some of our LA-based readers asked us how Las Ventanas compared to the newly re-modelled Hotel Palmilla, managed by Rockresorts and considered to be the only competition. Well, put it like this; we would give Palmilla one tick, whereas Las Ventanas scores an easy five. Need we say more?

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

AT A GLANCE

AMANPURI HOTEL & VILLAS.

Address: Panesaa Beach, 83000 Phuket Island, Thailand. **Tel:** +66 76 324 333. **Fax:** +66 76 324 100. **Affiliation:** Prima Hotels. **Rooms:** 40 Pavilions & 30 Villa Homes. **Approx Rates:** *Garden Pavilion:* US\$390-\$490. *Superior Garden:* US\$470-\$580. *Superior partial Ocean:* US\$550-\$680. *Deluxe Ocean:* US\$700-\$870. *Ocean Pavilion 103:* US\$780-\$980. *Ocean Pavilion 105:* US\$900-\$1,120. *2-bed Villa Homes:* US\$1,080-\$2,000. *3-bed Villa Homes:* US\$1,600-\$3,000. *4-bed Villa Homes:* US\$2,150-\$4,000. *5 & 6 Villa Homes:* US\$4,000-\$6,000 + 10% service & 11% tax. Rates vary according to season. Special Millennium rates apply.

FOUR SEASONS RESORT AVIARA.

Address: 7100 Four Seasons Point, Carlsbad, CA 92009, USA. **Tel:** +1 760 603 6800. **Fax:** +1 760 603 6801. **Affiliation:** Four Seasons Hotel Co. **Rooms:** 331, including 44 suites. **Approx Rates:** *Doubles:* \$345-\$465. *Executive Suites:* \$550-\$575, *Deluxe Executive Suites:* \$600-\$625. *1-bed Suites:* \$750-\$775. *Deluxe 1-bed Suites:* \$825-\$850. *Luxury 1-bed Suites:* \$1,400-\$1,500. *2-bed Suites:* \$1,125-\$1,850. *3-bed Presidential:* \$4,000+ 10% occupancy tax.

LAS VENTANAS AL PARAISO.

Address: Km 19.5 Carretera Transpeninsular, San Jose del Cabo, Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur, Mexico 23400. **Tel:** +52 114 40300. **Fax:** +52 114 40301. **Affiliation:** Rosewood Hotels & Resorts, Preferred Hotels & Resorts Worldwide. **Rooms:** 56 Junior Suites plus 4 1-bed Suites & 1 3-bed Suite. **Approx Rates:** *Suites:* US\$475-\$3,000 + 12% tax. Package rates available.

All rates are expressed in US\$.

Gallivanter's Gossip



FOR ALL THOSE READERS WHO LIKE A LITTLE SPA ACTIVITY with their white sand beaches, the Maldives resort, **Four Seasons at Kuda Huraa** plans to open a serious Spa at the end of this year and is currently in the process of investing US\$3 million in enhancing the entire property, which it took over last year. The new Beach Pool Bungalows, with private plunge pools, promise to be one of the ultimate choices for New Year revellers. Meanwhile, Four Seasons plan numerous new openings for this year, including the **Hotel George V** in Paris, which has been closed for refurbishment for well over 12 months. **Hotel Cairo at First Residence** is scheduled to open in Egypt, together with the **Resort Sharm El Sheikh** on the Red Sea. In North America, the 'tiny' non-gaming 424-room **Hotel Las Vegas** soft-opened last month and the 210-room **Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale**, arranged in one and two storey casitas, is planned to open this autumn. This month in Mexico, the 140-room casita-style beach **Resort at Punta Mita** soft-opens, followed in late 1999 by the 214-room **Hotel Caracas** in politically uncertain Venezuela. As Four Season's first South American property, this will be a welcome addition to what is currently an hotel desert, but we wonder if anyone will be brave enough to venture there.

WHILST MANY SPANISH RESORT HOTELS SLOWLY DECLINE, **Las Dunas Beach Hotel & Spa**, between Marbella and Estepona, remains the exception and has just introduced a private butler service for Executive Suite guests and its own chauffeured stretch Rolls Royce. Arrivals, too, have been finessed. Now, one is led to the first floor lounge and served hot towels and cold drinks during check-in. We have had nothing but praise for this chic, gourmet Costa del Sol hideaway, which, under the talented direction of hotelier, Frank Pfaller, constantly strives to improve itself. Now is the perfect time for a warm, rejuvenating Spring break. Tel: +34 5 279 43 45. Fax: +34 5 279 48 25.

THE YEAR-LONG REFURBISHMENT of Amanresorts' Carcosa Mansion, part of the two-residence **Carcosa Seri Negara** on the leafy outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, is now complete and a much-needed major face-lift has left the public areas and Mahsuri Dining Room in splendid shape. The 7 Colonial-style suites now sport Langkawi marble bathrooms with restored brass fittings, new audio visual equipment and the usual 21st century electronic gizmos. Guests now enjoy one-way complimentary limousine transfers between the new KL International and Carcosa. Book through Prima Hotels.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION in North America, which has resulted in entirely **no-smoking restaurants**, bars and public areas in numerous states has caused a drop in sales of between 12% and 20%.

Meanwhile, business travellers are spending more time in their rooms. Could there be a link, we wonder? Occasionally, we receive smoking related complaints from US and British readers, whereas from European and Asian readers, the opposite is true. Many are horrified to find total smoking bans in US and British hotel restaurants. Any views on this?

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