



THE
WORLD'S
BEST

Hotels and Resorts

Cigar Aficionado's panel of travel experts picks the most luxurious, most outstanding, most exciting range of destinations in the world

BY LARRY OLMSTED

Five years is a long time in the travel business. That's how long it's been since Cigar Aficionado first tackled the notion of selecting the Best Hotels and Resorts in the World. Since then, there are many more luxury hotels and resorts, despite the tough times of the last two years. Americans have continued to expand their travel horizons, and once exotic destinations have become more mainstream. Hotel industry trends have come and gone, new high-end chains have sprouted, and in short, today's traveler has more and better choices than ever – making vacation planning, in a way, harder than ever.

We are sticking to our original idea. Most travel publications ask readers to weigh in on their favorite properties. But we believe that readers' polls can be grossly distorted – one good example is a recent survey that named a hotel with a single par-3 golf course as the best golf resort in the Caribbean. The results rely on single visits, from people who may or may not have had a good experience. We have gone about our travel surveys differently every year for the last five years, focusing on topics like golf, beach or vacation resorts or some specific segment of the travel industry. We choose a group

(usually around 30 people) who work in the travel business, even major hotel executives who are then prohibited from voting for their own properties. Check out cigaraficionado.com for a list of our pollsters and the methodology under a new feature called MagPlus. This year, we are re-visiting the topic of our original poll in 2005: The World's Best Hotels and Resorts.

Before we get to the results, here is a round-up of how the travel landscape has changed – or not changed – since 2005.

What's Hot: A back to basics approach in the hotel industry, stressing the classic strengths of top operators and managers, service and cuisine. Any investor with enough money can build beautiful rooms with plenty of marble and electronics, but today's more discerning traveler is over flash and fizzle and demands first rate food and staffing to go with the gorgeous physical plant.

The Pacific Rim continues to emerge as one of travel's shining stars, with a staggering crop of true luxury hotels from all the top brands in both the usual suspect cities, Tokyo and Hong Kong, as well as Beijing, Shanghai, Hanoi, Macao and more. The same is true on the resort front, with impossibly gorgeous beach and spa properties throughout

When the Hotel George V reopened in 2000 after a \$125 million renovation, the redone hotel won accolades for its outstanding luxury and service, and today, it has earned its title as the best hotel in Paris and the world.



The Beverly Hills Hotel attracts a long list of celebrities and world leaders when they pass through Los Angeles because of its outstanding service and unparalleled setting in the heart of Beverly Hills.

Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and the South Pacific. South America is the other hotbed of new discoveries. For more than a decade, industry pundits have predicted the continent's emergence as vacation destination and this finally seems to be happening with wonderful lodging properties in every shape and size, from city hotels to tiny boutique lodges, tucked amongst historic city centers, ruins, mountains and rainforests, along with lavish golf and beach resorts.

Here at home, nowhere is the recent change to the luxury hotel scene more visible than in the ski business. It is hard to believe that no so long ago there was not a single luxury chain operating a slopeside hotel in this country, with just a few independents like the Little Nell and Stein Eriksen representing the entire upscale ski lodging market. Suddenly everyone has jumped in: Four Seasons, Ritz Carlton, Park Hyatt, Capella, Aman, Rockresorts, St. Regis, Waldorf Astoria, Viceroy, Montage, and so on. Just between the winters of 2009 and 2010 the luxury ski hotel selection in the US will have essentially doubled.

Globally, "authenticity," is the industry buzzword, leading to the demise of the cookie cutter hotel and rise of the sense of place. As obvious as it seems, travelers to Bali want to feel like they are in Bali, but this was not always the case. This search for authenticity has increased interest in destinations like Bhutan and to ancient ruins, and birthed a market for new hotel-based activities like cooking and language classes and even indigenous spa treatments.

Finally, a slew of new, smaller or imported luxury brands that had very little name recognition – or did not even exist – five years ago are stepping up to challenge the big boys. We saw the names Capella, Como, Shangri-La, Aman, Banyan Tree, Rocco Forte and Montage a lot more than in past polls.

What's Not: Hip hotels serving up style over substance are yesterday's news. The experienced concierge who can obtain hard to get reservations has proven far more enduring than designer uniforms on valet parking attendants. India, though increasingly an important part of the world's

economic and cultural landscape, has failed to ever, in all our polls, put one single luxury vote in the ballot box. Eastern Europe, once heralded as the next big thing, has been largely ignored by our panelists, and the once hot romance of the Greek Isles has shifted quite noticeably to our experts' beloved Italy, and its previously unsung Mediterranean islands, Sicily and Sardinia, which are trending upwards - fast. Celebrity chefs, for a brief time as vital to new hotels as spas, have slipped into the background even as hotel food quality has become more important to guests. The Caribbean has continued to lose ground to Mexico, where wonderful hotel after wonderful hotel has opened, while in the islands, too laid-back service standards for the high prices are increasingly being scrutinized by visitors, and in a very rare occurrence, a new Four Seasons in the Bahamas failed and closed quickly. No one heralded hotspot has fallen so far so fast as faddish Dubai, which only yesterday was touted as the "next Las Vegas." Meanwhile, with CityCenter, the Cosmopolitan, and new Michelin-starred gastronomic temples, Vegas actually has good news again.

What's the Same: Italy remains the hotel and resort favorite of our experts, and given its tiny size, the nation has a vastly disproportionate number of the world's finest accommodations. Five years ago, in our very first poll, for the category "Best Small Resort, International," all but two lonely votes were cast for properties in Italy. Considering the entire world, our panel was in near-unanimous agreement over one thing: whatever the best was, it was in Italy. Five years later, we asked them to choose the "Best Hotel or Resort Europe," this time including properties of all sizes and those in cities. It was déjà vu when all but two votes were again cast for Italian properties, large and small, city and country. La Dolce Vita lives! Elsewhere, our top vote getters worldwide remained The Four Seasons George V in Paris and the Peninsula Hong Kong, though the latter is facing markedly increased competition. Among boutique urban hotels, New York City has ruled the roost and this is even truer today, with myriad new, upscale small hotels opening in recent years.

Urban Hotels

BEST LARGE CITY HOTEL, US

TIE: The Beverly Hills Hotel & Bungalows, California; Peninsula Chicago, Illinois

The only surprise about these two standout selections is that they are not in New York, which in the past has almost exclusively ruled our domestic hotel categories, large and small. The “Pink Palace,” as the Beverly Hills Hotel & Bungalows (uber-critic Anthony Lassman of *Nota Bene* insists guests opt for the bungalows), is a perfect addition to our ranks, as the hotel is coming up on a century in the luxury business and has continued to wow Hollywood stars since the 1920s. Owner of a coveted *Forbes* (formerly *Mobil*) 5-star rating, “The Beverly Hills Hotel is the epitome of glamour and style with true 5-star service and attentiveness,” said celebrity travel agent Jason Miller, president of *The Accomplished Traveler*. New in 2010 are two 3,500 square foot “ultra-bungalows.” The Windy City choice might be more eye raising were the hotel not a Peninsula, a brand that has consistently excelled in *Cigar Aficionado* rankings and whose Hong Kong flagship is often our number one hotel on earth. Peninsula was the second most highly rated hotel brand in this poll, and unlike competitors, focuses almost exclusively on big city properties, like Chicago. “This hotel has it all...Midwestern hospitality and European elegance, luxurious guestrooms, extraordinary spa, and some of the finest dining in the US,” said another superstar travel agent, Anne Scully, President of *McCabe World Travel*.

BEST SMALL CITY HOTEL, US

The Surrey, New York City

No other city does small in as big a way as New York, which won this category handily in our original poll (*The Lowell*), in our Best New Hotels Poll (*Gansevoort*) and now sweeps the top places again. There have been a rash of hot Big Apple hotel openings, some trendy, some understated, but all more neighborhood-oriented than in the past. The Surrey is the best of the bunch, thanks in part to its exclusive rooftop bar, “open to hotel guests and ‘friends of the Surrey’ only, making it the most civilized place in the city for summer cocktails,” according to *New Yorker* and *ForbesLife* editor Ann Abel. “I absolutely love this art-filled, sleek boutique hotel,” added top LA travel agent Stacy Small of *Elite Travel International*. The Surrey occupies an oversized Upper East Side townhouse whose first life as a residence hotel was the choice of JFK and Bette Davis.

Runner-up: The Greenwich, New York City. The Greenwich also boasts a guest-only bar, in an interior courtyard, along with a standout spa. “It’s not easy to find many ‘cool’ hotels that offer 5-star service. I found



The Peninsula Chicago is praised for its Midwestern hospitality and European elegance in a big city setting.

this at The Greenwich,” said *The Accomplished Traveler*’s Jason Miller. **Honorable Mention: 21c Museum Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky**, which houses not only an incredible art collection and actual museum, but also the world’s largest selection of bourbon and domestic whiskies. This is now THE choice for Kentucky Derby bound A-listers.

BEST CITY HOTEL, INTERNATIONAL

Four Seasons George V, Paris

The George V is no newcomer to our list, having dominated Paris, one of the world’s great hotel cities, in our previous polls. What stands out is that in this much more competitive era and crowded luxury hotel market, while other top vote getters are falling back to the pack, this one keeps widening its lead, and was the top vote getter in this entire survey, displacing our previous runaway favorite, the Peninsula Hong Kong. The George V was the choice of everyone from *Nota Bene*’s persnickety Anthony Lassman to romantic honeymoon specialist Carrie Wallace. Several panelists noted that in addition to impeccable service and deluxe accommodations, the hotel was unique in the City of Lights for its open embrace of American travelers. “The surroundings are sumptuous and worthy of Louis XV,” proclaimed longtime luxury travel journalist Debbie Karpowicz Kickham.

Runner-Ups: TIE: Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi; Oriental Bangkok, Peninsula Hong Kong. The second place “Pen” was our past grand winner, and along with the venerable Oriental Bangkok, this one-two punch has long been the benchmark for global hotel excellence, while the Metropole Hanoi came out of left field to wow our panelists. “If you’re going to stay at a colonial grand hotel, you have to pull out all the stops. The Metropole does that, and has a perfectly central location,” said *ForbesLife* editor Ann Abel.

Resorts

BEST BEACH RESORT, US

TIE: Four Seasons Hualalai, Hawaii; The Breakers, Florida

Our experts went bi-coastal on this one, and two states, Hawaii and Florida, utterly dominated with well over 90% of votes cast. A number of hotels were worthy of ballots, but for the 50th State, Hualalai narrowly edged the recently reopened and totally rebuilt Mauna Kea, while the Breakers likewise edged out the much newer and nearby Acqualina. Honeymoon planner Wallace summed up the Four Seasons' appeal: "Among Hawaii's many high rise resorts, this low rise beauty really stands out. It offers the perfect mix of understated luxury, attentive service, beautiful grounds and world class facilities." How many hotels have a salt water swimming pool cum aquarium carved from black lava and filled with colorful fish and majestic rays? Meanwhile, the family-owned Breakers, which insists on reinvesting ludicrous amounts of money in keeping this grande dame in perfect shape, is no stranger to our poll. Five years ago it swept "Best Large Resort US," thanks to two golf courses, excellent restaurants and a perfect setting. Well known travel writer Lynn Seldon repeated what other travelers have said for more than a century: "The location, property, people, and food keep me coming back year after year." Among those in hearty agreement were travel agent Stacy Small and Emmy-award winning CBS News Travel Editor Peter Greenberg.

Runner Ups: *Mauna Kea, Hawaii; Acqualina Resort & Spa, Florida* Earthquake damaged Mauna Kea was totally redone, including its famous Robert Trent Jones, Sr. golf course, tweaked into better than ever shape by his son Rees Jones. TheAPostion.com founder Jeff Wallach called it "recently renovated within an inch of its life." Acqualina was more of a surprise, and our experts were wowed by its seaside setting, which travel agent Miller described as, "The most beautiful beach I've seen on the East Coast."

BEST BEACH RESORT DESTINATION, INTERNATIONAL

Bali

No destination on earth has more true luxury hotels per square mile than this fantasy island in Indonesia, where they come in all shapes and sizes, from tiny enclaves of over-the-top private villas to boutique hotels and large luxury beach resorts. Simply put, Bali has so many stunning luxury hotels that no one emerged as the clear winner, but our panel's consensus was Bali, Bali, Bali.

Favorites: *Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay; Amankila; Bulgari.* The

first of two Four Seasons on Bali, Jimbaran Bay famously led the global luxe resort movement away from mere "rooms" and to private compounds with plunge pools. Beloved boutique operator Aman Resorts got its start here on Bali, and according to Carrie Wallace, "Amankila continues to set the standard for what a romantic beach resort should be. Balinese to the core, guests naturally absorb the local culture whether they try to or not." Bulgari's Bali property is the luxury style company's first resort and features 59 ultra-deluxe villas.

BEST BOUTIQUE RESORT, US

Twin Farms, Vermont

This bucolic Vermont farm, once home of author Sinclair Lewis and his wife, journalist Dorothy Parker, has been turned into a compound of architecturally unique, individually decorated and artwork-laden luxury homes that has been compared to both an adult summer camp and a stay at the home of an eccentric billionaire. Either way it works, as Twin Farms has consistently been one of the most decorated hotels on the planet, despite having less than two dozen units. It has earned the top US ranking for Small Hotel from the Zagat Survey and has consistently received the 5-Star rating from Forbes/Mobil. I recently revisited it and was immediately and forcefully reminded why it is so amazing. This is the nation's most luxurious all-inclusive lodging, and though the setting leads to all sorts of oddball guest requests, nothing is too much for the attentive staff. The very elaborate and delicious seasonal farm-to-table philosophy existed here long before it became trendy elsewhere, and still excels.

Runner-Ups: *TIE: Amangiri, Utah; Post Ranch Inn, California.* While Aman's first foray into the US market underwhelmed with a Jackson, WY resort far removed from the fabled ski slopes, the follow-up, this back-to-nature escape on 600-acres in the desert Four Corners region wowed our experts. "It is the only resort I have ever seen that I felt God was the head architect," said Anne Scully, who has been to a lot of beautiful resorts. The Post Ranch Inn is no surprise to travelers seeking these kind of intimate experiences, having long been one of the nation's top such choices, combining great service with excellent food and an incomparable Big Sur setting.

Honorable Mention: Not many of our panelists have had a chance to get to the brand new Grand del Mar resort in San Diego, but those who have are wowed by this opulent up-and-comer built in the style of a European grand hotel. The buzz is already that this may be the last no-expense-spared monument to opulence built in this country for a very long time.

BEST GOLF RESORT, US

The Sanctuary Hotel, Kiawah Island Golf Resort, South Carolina

Showing just how dramatically the luxury landscape has changed in the past five years, The Sanctuary not only won a category previously dominated by Pebble Beach and Sea Island, but it won by a convincing margin. With the PGA Championship, its first Major, coming to the resort's famed Ocean Course, the Sanctuary's stock should only continue to rise. "True Southern Hospitality from the moment you arrive. Not one detail left



Hawaii's number one hotel was the Four Seasons Hualalai, above left; the best golf resort on the mainland was The Sanctuary on Kiawah Island; Thailand swept the best international spa resort category with the Banyan Tree Phuket pictured below.





With a multi-million dollar renovation and its gorgeous views of the Atlantic Ocean, the Breakers in Palm Beach shared top U.S. beach resort honors.

out. World class golf!” shouted Miller. As a longtime golf writer who has been to virtually ever top resort on the globe, I’ve long thought Kiawah’s 90-holes were the best golf on the east coast, but now with The Sanctuary there is finally world class lodging to match. “I was thoroughly impressed by this South Carolina gem. The architecture seemed to capture the unique character of the region. Staff were very accommodating and helpful and the spa and golf offerings were fabulous,” said Brian Richardson, vice president of rival Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, which itself operates some of the world’s highest profile golf properties. “Quite simply, Kiawah has everything for the golfer - and golf widows and widowers,” said golf and travel journalist Lynn Seldon.

Second Place: Bandon Dunes, Oregon. This dichotomy illustrated the different interpretations our panelists had of “golf resort.” Like the Sanctuary, third place winners Pebble Beach and Pinehurst excelled across the board, with multiple top golf courses, several hotels, and endless dining and activity choices, making these the most complete resorts. Some purists voted on the basis of quality of golf, pure and simple, and they overwhelmingly came out in support of low-key Bandon Dunes, which has the nation’s top ranked public course according to Golf Magazine, and three of the top ten. TheAPosition.com founder Jeff Wallach followed this logic: “Hands down, if golf is the most important part of this category, Bandon Dunes is the best golf resort on the planet.” Where Bandon fails to shine is off the courses, with very basic lodging and dining. “The best golf is definitely at Bandon, but it’s not much on the resort front,” said Robert Pedrero, founder of The Golf Insider (now part of Golf Odyssey). “If you didn’t play golf you’d be miserable there.”

Third Place: TIE: Pebble Beach, California; Pinehurst, North Carolina “While Bandon Dunes now offers a peerless collection of four golf courses, our choice is still Pebble Beach Resort, America’s shrine to the game,” declared David Baum, owner and editor of Golf Odyssey, the nation’s leading critical golf travel newsletter. Pinehurst has the most

courses of any domestic resort and won accolades for its southern hospitality and one-of-a-kind historic and spiritual ambiance, or as golf writer and broadcaster Michael Patrick Shiels put it, “our St. Andrews.”

BEST GOLF RESORT, INTERNATIONAL

Gleneagles, Scotland

Some things never change. While our golf rankings got pretty shaken up here at home, overseas the status quo prevailed, with Gleneagles winning again, just as it did in our initial 2005 poll, and our 2006 Best Resort poll. Our voters took a much different approach than they did at home, since virtually no one believed that Gleneagles has the best golf in this category, but rather is such an incredible overall resort. It combines true luxury with first-class facilities at every turn, from Michelin-starred dining to a state of the art equestrian center, a shooting compound with sporting clays, a famed off-road driving school, elaborate falconry programs, and virtually every other activity you could imagine, along with some you could not. Its classic Kings and Queen’s courses by James Braid are widely considered among the finest examples of “inland links style,” while its much criticized modern course by Jack Nicklaus has shrugged off the comments and was chosen to host Europe’s next Ryder Cup. “It’s the glaring choice, right in the middle of Scotland, close to lots of other great courses, but with the caveat that you don’t go just for the golf, you go for the awesome activities,” said Robert Pedrero.

Runner Ups: Kauri Cliffs, New Zealand; Old Course Hotel, Scotland; Westin Turnberry, Scotland; Mission Hills, China. Golf Odyssey’s David Baum champions stunning Kauri Cliffs, our previous winner for “Best Single Course Resort Overall,” and not surprisingly, he describes it as “the world’s finest single course getaway.” The Old Course Hotel, while unaffiliated with the famed courses of the Links Trust, wins for its perfect location alongside the world’s first course, plus a lavish spa and excellent



In a very competitive category, the Gleneagles hotel in Scotland, won out as the best international golf resort, besting its Scottish neighbors the Old Course hotel at St Andrews and the Westin Turnberry.

restaurants. Turnberry, another previous winner, wows not with lodging or food, but rather with a British Open venue our panelists consider one of the world's very best, the Ailsa. Finally, I had to throw my support behind Mission Hills – even though many of our panelist have not been yet, it is the world's largest golf resort, has first rate courses (a dozen of them!), impressive dining, a very full array of resort facilities, eager to please service, and in short, would be an error of omission not to recognize. Or as Pedrero put it, "It's the obvious answer for those who know about it, and in years to come, a lot more people are going to know about it."

BEST SPA RESORT, US

Canyon Ranch, Tucson, Arizona

Arizona is the undisputed champ of spa vacations, according to our experts. Five years ago, they chose Tucson's Miraval, with Canyon Ranch a close second. In our all-resort poll, Sedona's Mii Amo took top position, and while both still had fans, Canyon Ranch finally nabbed the top spot, and by a sizable margin (its sister property, Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires, MA, which previously won for "Best Wellness/Fitness Hotel," also fared well). Spa, beauty and travel writer Debbie Karpowicz Kickham could not believe the "fantastic low calorie food," or that the chocolate chip cookies had just 85 calories, and raved about the Euphoria spa treatment. "I'm relaxed just writing about it!" Luxury travel agent Stacy Small, CBS News

travel editor Peter Greenberg and prolific travel writer Everett Potter were among the many knowledgeable experts who loved Canyon Ranch.

Notable Mention: *California's Cal-a-vie*, is unique in combining a more traditional luxury resort experience and fine dining with the full destination spa experience and "ass-kicking fitness," according to Ann Abel, a longtime spa expert and former executive editor of Spa Finder magazine, who proclaimed, "Finally, a break from New Age Zen!"

BEST SPA RESORT DESTINATION, INTERNATIONAL

Thailand

Like our International Beach Resort category, won by Bali, this was more a matter of where to go than where to stay for our panel, who found so many great options that no clear winner emerged – especially in Thailand, where most of the votes were cast.

Favorites: *Banyan Tree Phuket; Six Senses Phuket; Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle*. Banyan Tree properties showed up with noticeable frequency in this poll, making it one of several successfully expanding luxury brands out of the Pacific Rim. Six Senses, a spa specific brand, was a runner-up in our previous resort poll and has been a panelist spa favorite for years. The smallest of all Four Seasons, Tented Camp Golden Triangle, was extremely popular with panelists and also won another category outright, Best Adventure/Wilderness Resort.

Switzerland topped our ski resort destinations with the Omnia in Zermatt, under the shadow of the Matterhorn, leading the way with the Riffelalp Resort in Zermatt and Badrutt's Palace in St. Moritz close behind.



Adventure & Active Travel Hotels

BEST SKI HOTEL, US

Four Seasons Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Our winner combines white glove service with a prime location at the base of what many consider the best ski mountain in the country, if not the world. I've been several times and everything from "Base Camp," as the ski concierge is known, to the après-ski sushi is first in class. "S'mores and cocktails at the hot tub, a spa that my wife loves, a great concierge, all right next to the lifts and tram, plus Jackson is a great town, it just doesn't get any better," said Patrick Gallagher, our road warrior business expert who also happens to be an avid skier with high standards. Thanks

to a recent onslaught of luxury slopeside properties, this turned out to be our most competitive category, and one of the most changed since our original poll. Our previous winner, the Ritz Carlton Bachelor Gulch, hung on for a second place tie, but it is clear that newer properties have raised the stakes. Expect this trend to continue, with another Four Seasons opening this winter in Vail, while the new Montage at Deer Valley, UT may well be the most heralded luxury hotel opening of 2010.

Runner-Ups: TIE Ritz Carlton Bachelor Gulch, Colorado; Little Nell, Aspen, Colorado

Previous winner the Ritz continues to wow with its upscale log cabin aesthetic, the new outpost of Wolfgang Puck's Spago, and sumptuous spa complete with a "grotto," but some bemoan its out of the way location. The Little Nell, on the other hand, has the best location in Aspen's gold plated real estate market, and after a thorough renovation this tried and true gem, one of the nation's original slopeside luxury hotels, is better than ever. Its exquisite Montagna restaurant is also arguably Aspen's best.

Honorable Mention: Deer Valley Ski Resort, Utah, suffers from too much of a great thing. Its array of luxury hotels split the vote, and with two third-place finishers, Stein Eriksen Lodge and St. Regis Deercrest, Deer Valley was our top overall luxury ski destination. This dynamic duo will soon become a terrific trio with the addition of the new Montage this winter, and Deer Valley cements its ritzy reputation.

BEST SKI DESTINATION, INTERNATIONAL

Switzerland

Most of the world's top hotel general managers learned their craft in Ithaca, NY or Switzerland, the homes of the finest hotel schools. Like its watches, Switzerland's hotels have become famous for enduring quality, precision and painstaking attention to details, and when you throw in the Alps, this combination makes Switzerland to skiing what Thailand was to spas and the Bali to beach resorts: number one. Our experts' consensus was simple: if you leave the US, the best ski accommodations are here.

Favorites: Riffelalp Resort, Zermatt; Badrutt's Palace, St. Moritz; Omnia, Zermatt The Riffelalp's signature feature is stunning views of the Matterhorn from virtually everywhere on the property, but especially from the highest altitude outdoor pool in Europe, complete with jetted tubs and massage showers. The spa and gastronomy are first class as well. The Omnia won as Best New Ski Hotel in our previous poll, and also showcases the local icon, the Matterhorn, with floor to ceiling glass and modern architecture that led one panelist to describe it as "luxury lodgings more like something out of Singapore or South Beach than Switzerland." Badrutt's



is one of the newest developments in America has been the construction of top notch hotels in ski areas, like the Four Seasons Jackson Hole.

is one of Europe's classic grand hotels, but the one that happens to be in Switzerland's most sophisticated ski town, the Aspen of the Alps.

BEST SAFARI LODGE/PROPERTY (WORLDWIDE)

Singita Lodges, South Africa and Tanzania

Upscale safaris are among the "authentic" travel experiences that have benefitted from the changing landscape of the last five years, with more vacationers forgoing the epic scale of the traditional hotel-to-hotel East African package tour experience for the intimate seclusion and luxury that until recently only South Africa offered. Thanks in large part to Singita, a leading operator of these deluxe boutique lodges, the possibilities have expanded as they opened three similar lodges in Tanzania. Singita finished tied for first in our original poll, but its collection of nine game preserve lodges broke out for a runaway win in a category where it faced daunting competition. High powered travel agent Anne Scully's Singita favorite was Boulder Lodge, "a Zen experience in the South African Bush. This lodge lends itself to the best safari experience while enjoying fine dining, fantastic wines and world class service. Private suites with plunge pools overlook the river." Honeymoon specialist Carrie Wallace of MoonRings does a lot of safari business and knows the product well, and she singled out Singita's Grumeti Reserve in Tanzania. "The three lodges each take advantage of their setting to deliver a quintessential Serengeti safari experience. How they deliver such a luxurious experience in the middle of the Serengeti is remarkable."

BEST ADVENTURE/WILDERNESS RESORT (WORLDWIDE)

Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, Thailand

This Toronto-based luxury brand has consistently been our panelists' favorite since our polls began, but Golden Triangle is unlike any other Four Seasons on earth – in a good way. Comprised of just 15 tents – albeit deluxe tents with hand-hammered copper tubs and teak furnishings – this is a satellite escapist property to the larger mothership resort 175-miles away at Chiang Mai. Run like a deluxe African safari lodge, it is all-inclusive and features daily guided excursions, including elephant rides, hikes and river cruising in tradition long tail canoes. Activities, food and drink are bundled as 3 or 4 night packages, simply called "The Camp Experience," and this is a place to experience things, not lounge around. As Wallace put it, "Guests have more to look forward to here than just elegant tents and fabulous service. How many of their friends can say they've been a mahout (elephant trainer)? Such a unique experience in such a beautiful setting!"

Runner Up: Explora Posada de Mike Rapu, Easter Island, Chile For a tiny hotel chain (four properties) based entirely in one country (Chile), Explora has lit up our polls. Its Patagonia resort, Hotel Salto Chico, won our inaugural poll in this category, then won again for Best Adventure/Eco Resort in our all-resort poll, and then this property on Easter Island won for Best New Adventure/Eco Resort. The facility is excellent, but it is the combination of location and by far the best guides that make Posada de Mike Rapu a true once in a lifetime experience. As a ruins junkie myself, I have been and can safely say that other top sites such as Machu Picchu and Tulum pale in comparison with the Moai of Easter Island.



In far off Australia, the South Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island was cited for its astonishing glass walls and views, and the abundance of wildlife.

Best by Region

BEST HOTEL NEW YORK CITY

The Surrey

Apparently size does not matter. The Surrey won earlier for Top US Small Hotel, and was also our favorite at any size in the Big Apple, the nation's most competitive hotel market. While most new hotels go through growing pains, this was not the case here, according to editor Ann Abel. "I stayed here last December, just a month after opening, and not a hair was out of place." It beat our defending champion the Four Seasons, which fell into a tie with up and coming Mandarin Oriental, which had previously scored in our Best New Hotels Poll.

Runner Ups: TIE Four Seasons, Mandarin Oriental

BEST HOTEL LONDON

Lanesborough

In previous polls, London was never able to yield a clear winner, suffering from an overabundance of top luxury properties. This time, however, despite plenty of votes spread among all the usual suspects, from the timeless Connaught to the hipper Haymarket by Firmdale, The Lanesborough won, and convincingly, showing a fundamental shift in the English capital. Amy Ziff, former Travelocity editor-at-large and longtime travel journalist said, "The Lanesborough is not just a classic hotel, it has become

an institution. You'll always be in style, and its fabulous location in Knightsbridge overlooks Hyde Park. Your personal butler will get you acclimated to the surroundings, and, things only go up from there."

Runner Ups: TIE The Goring; Dorchester; One Aldwych

BEST HOTEL LOS ANGELES

The Beverly Hills Hotel & Bungalows

Tying for the nation's Best Large Hotel, this one easily carried LA, with its combination of classic timelessness and up to the minute relevance, especially among the A-listers who frequent it and the countless stars who choose it to host interviews. It also enjoys an incredible location in the heart of the city's most desirable neighborhood. "With its hidden bungalows and iconic Old Hollywood nature, the 'Pink Palace' will have you posing poolside in your fluffy robe or taking an important phone call with the other glitterati in the Polo Lounge," said golf and travel writer and broadcaster Michael Patrick Shiels.

Runner Ups: TIE Beverly Wilshire; Peninsula Beverly Hills

BEST HOTEL PARIS

Four Seasons George V

Best in Paris, best anywhere. Perhaps the only hotel on earth famed for its incredibly excessive lobby flower arrangements, the George V won in a landslide and was the world's top vote getter in this poll. Nonetheless, the other grand dames of Paris had a good showing, with votes cast for the Meurice, Plaza Athenee and Crillon, which finished second. To journalist Everett Potter the George V's appeal is simple: "They get all the details correct." Carrie Wallace is quick to recommend it to romantic honeymooners, because "they understand the mentality of their US-based guests without compromising their French credentials." Not surprisingly, this hotel easily won the same category five years ago, prompting Nota Bene's

Lassman to credit it with, “The finest hotel service in Europe with arguably the most polished room service of any hotel in the world.”

Second Place: Hotel Crillon

BEST HOTEL LAS VEGAS

Wynn Encore

This upscale tower hotel within the larger Wynn Las Vegas was a bit of a surprise, edging out the luxury non-gaming Four Seasons, new Mandarin Oriental, over-the-top Mansions at MGM, butler served MGM Skylofts, and everything else bright and shiny in town. Then again, it was Steve Wynn who repeatedly rewrote the Vegas hospitality rulebook and raised the bar over several decades, and this is his latest and greatest feat. Former USA Today travel editor Chris Gray explained the appeal: “The casino hotel for those who don’t like casino hotels, Steve Wynn’s Encore seems geared for Monaco rather than the masses. Plus, natural light! When’s the last time you saw that in a Vegas casino?”

Runner Up: Mandarin Oriental

BEST HOTEL/RESORT EUROPE

TIE: Grand Hotel a Villa Feltrinelli, Lake Garda, Italy; Hotel Splendido, Portofino, Italy

There is no doubt about it – Italy has the world’s best hotels. Feltrinelli won our original poll, and this time tied with the Splendido, a spectacular property that has the best location in what many consider the most beautiful seaside town on earth, the pastel fantasy that is Portofino. If this is not enough, the Splendido also owns the best spot on the actual harbor, maintaining a satellite restaurant, where the front row seats coveted by passing throngs are reserved for hotel guests. In the case of the Grand Hotel a Villa Feltrinelli, set in Mussolini’s former villa, be careful what



The Lanesborough, in London, has risen to the top of the mountain in a city filled with great hotels, and, it has a lounge for smoking cigars.

you wish for when booking, because Carrie Wallace reports that, “After staying at this idyllic lakeside hideaway, many clients claim that they have been ‘spoiled for life.’”

Honorable Mention: The Rest of Italy. As in previous polls, Italy totally dominated the world beyond the US borders, and other acclaimed choices included Verdura Resort, Sicily; Palazzo Sasso, Ravello; Il San Pietro, Positano; Four Seasons Florence; and the Cipriani, Venice (a previous winner).

BEST HOTEL/RESORT CARIBBEAN

Jade Mountain, St. Lucia

One of the best new things to come online since our inaugural poll in 2005 is this fantasy creation of architect owner Nick Troubetzkoy. Untroubled by any rules of the hotel industry, Troubetzkoy indulged his every whim to create a one-of-a-kind property perched on a mountaintop, above a beach he also owns, with some of the world’s greatest views, including St. Lucia’s famed twin peaks, the Pitons, and the stunning sea. “It’s one of the most photographed resorts in the world due to its dramatic architecture and stunning scenery, yet also one of the most exclusive. Everyone dreams of visiting Jade Mountain,” said Jetsetter’s Farryn Wiener. There are just 28 suites, each butler serviced, an incredible array of facilities, dining options and activities, including one of the finest Scuba centers in the Caribbean, and each open air suite is more like a luxury home. My wife’s reaction upon arrival was, “this is all ours?” The suites are called “sanctuaries,” and as Valarie D’Elia, host of the popular “Travel With Val” segment on NY1, put it, “Each of the ‘sanctuaries’ at Jade Mountain has one missing wall exposed to the elements, facing the fuzzy Piton mountains. I felt like I was watching an IMAX movie, tuned to the same glorious scene.” Every Sanctuary also has an open air infinity pool and multi-level decks.

Runner Up: Parrott Cay, Turks & Caicos (a previous winner)

BEST HOTEL/RESORT MEXICO

One & Only Palmilla, Los Cabos

Air conditioned golf carts on the Jack Nicklaus Signature course is typical of the spare-no-comfort approach taken at the One & Only Palmilla, especially for guests in the newer butler-served luxury wing. A complete rethinking of a longtime favorite Los Cabos hotel, this won earlier for Best New Beach Resort, Mexico and was previously a runner-up in this category. The biggest news is that it displaced multiple-previous winner Las Ventanas al Paraíso, long regarded by our panelists as the world’s benchmark for luxury tropical resorts. “It boasts the only swimmable beach in Cabo. The attention to detail is impeccable – the light fixtures alone impress, and as the sun sets staffers meticulously set countless candle-lit lanterns along paths and flowerbeds, and the property takes on a magical air. More than just a gimmick or glorified housekeeping, butler service here is memorable,” said Elaine Srnka, editor of Virtuoso Life. Anne Scully added, “Luxurious suites complete with butler service keep the guests coming back year after year. This resort has the best among the best in dining, golf, spa, deep sea fishing and yacht charters,” as the resort has its own marina.

Runner Up: Las Ventanas al Paraíso, Los Cabos (a previous winner)

Notable Mention: Two newer resort communities fared very well in our polls, but simply had too much of a good thing, splitting votes

between their own multiple luxury hotels. Either Punta Mita, on the West Coast, with its Four Seasons and St. Regis, or Mayakoba, on the East Coast, with its Rosewood and Banyan Tree, would be the top vote getter if considered a single resort.

BEST CITY HOTEL FAR EAST

Peninsula Hong Kong

Don't call for a bellman until you are ready to leave, because they might be knocking before you hang up, such is the service at this legend. Five years ago we called the Pen the "800-pound gorilla of our survey, no other hotel could touch the Peninsula." Today, that honor has shifted thousands of miles west to Paris's George V. After a massive wave of ultra-luxury openings across Asia, especially in Tokyo, Hong Kong and pre-Olympics Beijing, the margin is much, much closer but the venerable Peninsula still wins, with several properties nipping at its heels. Ironically, these include several sister hotels, or as top tier travel agent Jason Miller put it, "Peninsula Hong Kong, Peninsula Beijing, Peninsula Shanghai, Peninsula Tokyo, Peninsula wins the prize in the Far East!"

Runner Ups: *TIE Peninsula Tokyo; Peninsula Bangkok; Shangri-La Tokyo; Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi*

BEST RESORT FAR EAST

Four Seasons Chiang Mai, Thailand

Another previous winner in this category still claiming its throne, this property is even better thanks to its association with smaller sibling, the Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, which shone in two other categories. "You couldn't ask for a more tranquil, quintessentially Asian setting for a resort. It's not hard to pass the entire day on your verandah gazing across the bright green rice paddies," said Wallace. Of course, if you want to get off the verandah, the resort, smack in the cultural heart of Thailand, offers a culinary school with four Thai cooking classes, plus a chef's tour of the local market, every day. There are two golf courses within five minutes, balloon rides, and many other local activities.

Runner Up: *Amankila, Bali*

BEST HOTEL/RESORT AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND

South Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island, Australia

"I still remember the hundreds of kangaroos hopping around us at sunset...this is a visit to Jurassic Park with a 5-star luxury resort attached... views of the wild southern ocean from one of the 21 suites... look for the koala bears in the trees and the wallabies running around playfully," recalled Anne Scully fondly. Despite a fine collection of urban hotels in both Melbourne and Sydney, our experts picked this tiny sanctuary on off the beaten path Kangaroo Island, often called "Australia's Galapagos." The luxury lodge sits on bluffs with tremendous views and is almost entirely glass for non-stop jaw dropping.

Runner Up: *Park Hyatt Sydney*

Notable Mention: Because New Zealand is much less urbanized, and tourists visit for nature's grandeur, votes were widely split amongst several smaller, far-flung properties worthy of mention: Kauri Cliffs; Cape



In a city where more new hotels have been built in the last 10 years than just about anywhere else in the world, the Wynn Encore leads the pack.

Kidnappers; Whare Kea Lodge. "I'm not someone who says 'Oh my God!'," but when I stayed at Whare Kea this year, OMG (or OMFG) was all I could manage for three days," recalled Ann Abel, who made this her most impassioned pick in the poll.

BEST HOTEL/RESORT SOUTH/CENTRAL AMERICA

Blancaneaux Lodge, Belize

First the Godfather, then fine California wines, now a beloved eco-luxury resort in Belize. Blancaneaux is the work of acclaimed director Francis Ford Coppola and has quickly garnered praise throughout the travel industry. "Francis Ford Coppola's Blancaneaux Lodge truly feels like a movie set; perched in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve, one of Belize's oldest national parks, 21 thatched-roof villas and cabanas are built into a hillside above the swift-moving Privassion Creek and waterfall...perfect for those who want a rustic hideaway with luxurious extras," said Jetsetter's Wiener, while *Virtuosos* Life editor Elaine Srnka simply said, "Love Blancaneaux Lodge."

Runner Up: *Four Seasons Peninsula Papagayo, Costa Rica*

BEST URBAN HOTEL SPA, US

Mandarin Oriental Miami

It's not enough that Miami's top hotel has a wonderful setting overlooking the Bay from Brickell Key, or that it is home to Azul, widely considered Miami's best fine dining restaurant, but also has an incredible, three-story spa that includes half a dozen VIP suites with floor to ceiling windows. The spa offers every wellness bell and whistle from an elaborate treatment menu to belly dancing lessons. It has won countless awards, yet is being improved again with an extensive renovation to be complete by the end of 2010. "This celebrity-favorite city spa promises to be even better when it emerges from an October refurbishment," said *Virtuoso* Life's Srnka.

Honorable Mention: *The rest of Miami:* when it comes to urban spas, this South Florida city was tops, with panelists praising several properties including the Viceroy and Canyon Ranch Miami Beach.



Luxury Brands

FAVORITE LARGE HOTEL & RESORT CHAIN/BRAND

Four Seasons

This is the first time we formally added this as a category, though in all our past polls the clear majority of votes across the board went to Four Seasons. Little has changed in regards to this love affair over five years – except there are a lot more of them. While Paris’s George V and the Thai and Balinese properties were the most cited favorites, our panelists praised everything from the Costa Rican golf resort to urban powerhouses in New York, Sydney and Vegas. The consistency of service was the hallmark, but in recent years Four Seasons has made great strides in avoiding a “cookie cutter” image. “It’s always reliable but not always the same,” observed Amy Ziff. Debbi Karpowicz Kickham said, “They move heaven and earth to provide stellar, unexpectedly wonderful service,” while Michael Patrick Shiels believes that “Four Seasons is consistently creative in an understated manner, yet there is always an elegant crispness and reliable simplicity.”

Second Place: Peninsula While the flagship Hong Kong hotel has been our dominant global winner for years, and again won its category despite stiff competition, every single Peninsula property on earth, with the sole exception of Manila, received votes in this poll. “When it comes to urban hotels, Peninsula sets the pace. Pick one in any city and you’ll be happy,” said Wallace. Next up is a new Paris hotel in 2012.

Third Place: Mandarin Oriental Much larger than Peninsula, Mandarin covers much of the same ground in big cities, Tokyo, but also is by far the dominant hotel in many lower profile destinations like Munich and Barcelona. The brand also has more resort properties, from

Chiang Mai to Mexico’s Riviera Maya, and the new Las Vegas hotel in CityCenter was a poll favorite.

Honorable Mention: Park Hyatt, which initially had difficulty creating its own name recognition apart from the broader Hyatt brand, is finally getting the respect it deserves, with several properties making our list and many more getting votes. Milan, Sydney, Melbourne, Beaver Creek, CO and Buenos Aires are among the standouts.

The Four Seasons Chiang Mai in Thailand won the best Far East resort category, but is also a symbol of the quality that the hotel chain brings to all its properties around the world.

FAVORITE SMALL HOTEL & RESORT CHAIN/BRAND

Aman Resorts

Combining the best of exquisite Asian service, an ultra-relaxing Zen aesthetic and a penchant for small hotels in perfect settings, Aman pioneered the current boutique luxury lodge craze, and has now taken its act – very successfully – to places like Beijing. Even more so than large brand winner Four Seasons, Aman manages to maintain a consistency of excellence but with radically different properties, like a string of remote outposts in Bhutan and a ranch-style Utah escape. “It’s all about the guest experience, and Aman excels on all levels, from thoughtful (and often not thought of) locales to construction to design and décor and of course over-the-top service. Amanfayun in China, for example, is woven throughout a village,” said Virtuoso’s Elaine Srnka. “What I love about Aman is that they strive to incorporate authentic, local culture into the guest experience. Staff training is clearly a top priority as service levels are arguably the best of any chain,” said MoonRing’s Wallace.

Second Place: Montage We asked for “small” chains and we got it. Our panelists loved Montage to death – though there are only two hotels open. The original Laguna Beach Montage won for Best Beach Resort, US in our initial pool, and since then, Montage Beverly Hills opened with a spectacular location across the street from Spago in the heart of the glitz. But that’s it, yet our panelists heaped praise, and noted the great anticipation surrounding the about to open (late-Dec 2010) Deer Valley, UT ski property, which many are predicting will be the world’s best ski hotel.

Index of Resorts & Hotels (in order of appearance)

The Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows
www.beverlyhillshotel.com (310) 276 2251

The Peninsula Chicago
peninsula.com (312) 337 2888

The Surrey thesurrey.com (212) 288 3700

The Greenwich Hotel
thegreenwichhotel.com (212) 941 8900

21c Museum Hotel
21cmuseumhotel.com (502) 217 6300

Four Seasons George V
fourseasons.com/paris/ 33 (0) 1 49 52 70 00

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sofitel.com (+84)4/38266919

Oriental Bangkok
mandarinoriental.com 66 (2) 659 9000

Peninsula Hong Kong
peninsula.com (852) 2920 2888

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Kauri Cliffs kauricliffs.com 64 9 407 0010

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Palazzo Sasso palazzosasso.com 39 089 81 81 81

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Parrot Cay parrotcay.como.bz (649) 946 7788

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fourseasons.com 66 (0) 53 298-181

Amankila Bali amanresorts.com 62 363 41333

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southernoceanlodge.com.au 61 2 9918 4355

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sydney.park.hyatt.com 61 2 9256 1234

Kauri Cliffs kauricliffs.com 64 9 407 0010

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Montage montagehotels.com (866).551.8244

Capella capellahotels.com (877) 247-6666

COMO Hotels como.bz 44 (0)20 7447 1029

Orient-Express
orient-express.com (800) 237 1236

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Third Place: TIE: Capella; COMO Hotels & Resorts Capella is the result of a longtime Ritz Carlton executive's desire to build an even better mousetrap, and by panelists' accounts it seems to be working, though the motto, "the world's first six star hotel and resort management company" is a self-proclaimed boast more typically associated with cruise lines and Dubai hotels eager to award themselves ratings no one else will give them. To date, Capella has only opened in offbeat locations, from Telluride to Veldene, Austria, though major city hotels are on the drawing board. COMO, another fast rising Asian-based chain, competes directly with Aman and its style of properties in places like Bali and Bhutan, runs the celebrity favorite Parrot Cay in the Turks & Caicos, a previous winner, and also operates more traditional luxury urban hotels in London. What ties these diverse holdings together is a focus on interior design and the omnipresent yoga and wellness programs.

Honorable Mention: Orient-Express Panelists largely skipped this as a brand, even while voting over and over again for its hotels. That is precisely because Orient-Express has taken great pains to not be perceived as a "chain" – there is absolutely nothing cookie cutter about it. The main ideology is to take one-of-a-kind historic buildings and lovingly convert them into one-of-a-kind hotels, often with the absolute best setting. Their Sanctuary Lodge in Peru, for instance, is the only sound choice for visitors to famed Machu Picchu, period. Likewise their Hotel Splendido in Portofino occupies some of the finest real estate on earth, while the Villa San Michele outside Florence still has original frescoes by Michelangelo on the wall. Several hotels made our list or got high acclaim, including the Observatory Sydney, Splendido, Cipriani and so on. The thing I personally love about Orient-Express is that almost anywhere you find one, you know it is going to be the best – and most memorable – in town.

Larry Olmsted is contributing editor for Cigar Aficionado.

Our Expert Panelists

Thanks to the following travel experts who generously agreed to serve on our panel and take the time to thoroughly answer our questionnaire. Panelists were not allowed to vote for properties they own, manage, or are affiliated with. For the entire bios, check out Expert Panel in our MagPlus section at cigaraficionado.com

Anne Morgan Scully, CTC: President of McCabe World Travel.
www.mccabeworld.com

Peter Greenberg: travel editor, CBS News.
www.PeterGreenberg.com

Anthony Lassman: owner, Nota Bene. www.nbreview.com

Elaine Srnka: editor, Virtuoso Life www.virtuoso.com

Stacy Small: Elite Travel International www.elitetravelinternational.com

Farryn Weiner: "Jetset Farryn" is a prolific travel blogger.
www.jetsetter.com

Everett Potter, editor-in-chief of Everett Potter's Travel Report.

Jason Miller, President, The Accomplished Traveler. www.accomplishedtraveler.com,

Brian Richardson, Vice President of Brand Marketing for Fairmont Hotels & Resorts.

Chris McGinnis, director, Travel Skills Group, Inc. www.travelskills.com

Chris Gray Faust, editor, Chris Around The World, www.Caroundtheworld.com

Carrie Wallace: President and co-founder of MoonRings Inc., www.moonrings.com.

Ann Abel: senior editor, ForbesLife magazine.

Jeff Wallach: Executive Editor, TheAposition.com www.theAposition.com, www.jeffwallach.com.

Michael Patrick Shiels: author, blogger at www.TravelTattler.com.

George L. Ruff: Senior Principal of Trinity Hotel Investors LLC, www.trinityhotels.com

Drew Limsy travel writer and editor, Lexus and Mariner.

Leigh Sullivan: Vice President, Regency Travel in Memphis, TN.
www.regencytravel.net

David Baum: editor-in-chief, Golf Odyssey and www.golfvacationinsider.com.

Steve Jermanok: columnist, for National Geographic Adventure, blogs daily at www.ActiveTravels.com.

Patrick Gallagher: Founder and managing partner of BDR LLC,

Kim Fredericks: travel and real estate journalist.

Lynn Seldon: travel and golf journalist, www.lynneldon.com

Amy Ziff: travel consultant and freelance journalist.

Robert Pedrero: publisher of The Golf Insider newsletter.

Valarie D'Elia: executive editor of www.travelwithval.com.

Debbi Karpowicz Kickham: A longtime travel writer, editor and author, www.Marketingauthor.com



In the small resort and hotel chain category, the Aman company earned high marks, with Amankila resort in Bali a prime example of its quality.

The Breakers thebreakers.com (888) 273-2537)

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