



# Suite dreams are made of this

*Thousands of votes were cast in the second annual Mr & Mrs Smith Hotel Awards, revealing the best bars, spas, baths and bedrooms around the world*

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Are these the world's best hotels? According to 25,000 public voters and a panel of travel and hospitality experts, they are. At an awards event on Thursday, this year's top holiday resorts, boutique boltholes and romantic rendezvous were revealed by the boutique travel specialists at Mr & Mrs Smith in their second annual hotel awards. Hotel-lovers voted to create top-10 shortlists in 12 categories; the overall winners were then selected by a panel of judges, among them chef Marcus Wareing, designer Ilse Crawford and *The Independent's* travel editor, Sophie Lam. The winners are ....

#### Above and beyond

**Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island, Australia**  
The Smith Hotel Award for exceptional service and generosity of spirit went to a hotel that goes the extra mile at every opportunity. From the moment of arrival at this outdoors-embracing, ocean-facing eyrie, everything is taken care of: bountiful food, drinks and activities are all included. Every stylish space – including airy rooms with private terraces and spectacular views; a lobby with a walk-in wine cellar; shop selling local produce, arts and crafts; and sunken lounge with an outdoor plunge pool – feels generous, too. Knowledgeable staff and a spa with indigenous treatments and expert therapists complete the pampering picture (southernoceanlodge.com.au; **picture 1**).

#### Best hotel restaurant

**Lime Wood, Hampshire, UK**  
This forest-flanked, modern-mannered manor not only brings the country-house hotel into the 21st century, it has made culinary concepts – such as foraging, home-smoking and haute comfort food courtesy of its brace of bravura chefs – mainstream. You'll be hard-pressed to sniff out a more perfect cheffy pairing than Angela Hartnett (an alumna of Gordon Ramsay and Marcus Wareing and now a legend in her own right) and Luke Holder (fresh from Tuscany's three-star Enoteca Pinchiorri). At Lime Wood's aristocratic-but-cosy restaurant Hartnett Holder & Co, they plunder their British

and Italian heritage to bring refreshingly unfussy food to a fast-growing and loyal clientele (limewoodhotel.co.uk; **picture 2**).

#### Best budget boutique hotel

**1888 Hotel, Sydney, Australia**  
This hotel punches well above its weight given the affordable price point. Housed in a converted wool store, it champions historic and modern Australia, with reclaimed ironbark beams and period windows in rooms, and a smart bar menu that plumps for local providers. Vibrant interiors are distinctly forward-looking – artfully distressed brick wall here; colourful bucket chair there; a tree in the lobby – as are nice touches such as iPads in rooms and designated “selfie spots”. The eatery also impresses: its short but grown-up menu suggests wine pairings for the Wagyu burgers and crispy-skin salmon (1888hotel.com.au; **picture 3**).

#### Best spa hotel

**Dormy House, Cotswolds, UK**  
All honey-hued stone on the outside and clean-lined Scandi-chic on the inside, this recently revamped retreat is now firmly on the Cotswolds spa map. The candlelit infinity pool may be its centrepiece, but the rhasoul-mud room, outdoor hydrotherapy pool, fragrant thermal suite and host of indulgent Temple Spa treatments are equally tempting. Judges were especially enamoured of the great-looking Veuve Clicquot nail bar – less quick-fix pit stop; more cocktail lounge to linger in – and its mani-pedis, which use non-toxic nail lacquers. Comfortable country-house bedrooms, inventive West Country cuisine and beautiful grounds make for a restful dose of relaxation (dormyhouse.co.uk; **picture 4**).

#### Sexiest bedroom in the world

**Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, Nha Trang, Vietnam**  
The world's most romantic hotel rooms should (according to Mr & Mrs Smith) seduce, delight and surprise at every turn; this Vietnamese love nest more than meets the criteria. Set in a beautiful crescent-moon bay accessible only by boat, Six





Senses' ravishing Water Villa 5 blends luxury with rusticity to create a romantic bubble of barefoot chic. A private deck and infinity-edge plunge pool set among the rocks, a seaside staircase that dips directly into the coral-lined sea, and a secluded position with jaw-dropping sunset vistas – this abode promises peace, privacy and a complete break from reality (sixsenses.com; **picture 5**).

**Hottest hotel bar**

*The NoMad Hotel, New York City, US*  
Sultry and decadent, The Elephant Bar at this 1920s-style hotel attracts an elegantly attired, grown-up crowd with a well-crafted cocktail menu and gleaming mahogany bar. Rare spirits are clearly bar manager Leo Robitschek's passion; his know-how shines through on the menu, which is split into light and dark libations, alongside sought-after wines and craft-beer collaborations. The exclusive, upmarket ambience – and decorative pachyderms – lures New York's savviest socialisers. It's not the hotel's only drinks emporium, either, allowing you to bar-hop gracefully without blistering your heels (thenomadhotel.com; **picture 6**).

**Best hotel pool**

*Monastero Santa Rosa, Amalfi Coast, Italy*  
Infinity pools are rarely more stunning than the heated patch of perfection at this painstakingly renovated 17th-century monastery. Set on a cliff-top carved with cascading terraces, this winner resembles a length of shoreline melting into the azure blur between sky and sea. This stylish swim-spot's beach-like edge is the perfect perch to enjoy an unfettered panorama, from Ravello to Positano. After completing a few lazy laps, sunloungers beckon for restoration from the pool menu: there are mouthwatering morsels such as swordfish carpaccio, with juicy mocktails and tip-top champagne tipples to wash it all down with (monasterosantarosa.com; **picture 7**).

**Best newcomer**

*Ham Yard Hotel, London, UK*  
Firmdale has always impressed, but the latest,

largest offering from the stylish hotel group steals the show with an array of alluring attractions – not least of which is the expressive and quietly startling decor by queen of colour, Kit Kemp. Her whimsical pageant of print romps through this Soho address's 96 rooms, accompanied by art and installation pieces by Turner Prize-winners, quirky *objets trouvés* from Kemp's travels, bespoke de Gournay wallpapers, and her trademark tailor's dummies. A basement bowling alley, 190-seat theatre and buzzing bar and restaurant operate on a scale that could have been blighted by corporate largesse; but Ham Yard's endearing blend of personality and quality maintain the intimate feel (firmdalehotels.com; **picture 8**).

**Best-dressed hotel**

*El Fenn, Marrakech, Morocco*  
El Fenn flies the flag for bold and beautiful interiors with its Moorish mish-mash of colour and comfort: it's a patchwork, labour of love incorporating the restoration of a derelict riad, a creative's dream of an art collection and a bohemian sophisticate's palette. Traditional polished *tadelakt* (plasterwork) and carved cedarwood in vibrant hues form the backdrop for the owners' enviable art stash, among which are gallery-standard pieces by Antony Gormley, Bridget Riley and David Shrigley. Vanessa Branson's passion for Arabic art also saw the foundation of the Marrakech Biennale – creative verve is at the heart of a stay in this gorgeous hotel (el-fenn.com; **picture 9**).

**The eco award**

*Sal Salis, Ningaloo Reef, Australia*  
There was a time when "luxury holiday" and "eco-friendly" were unhappy bedfellows, but Sal Salis demonstrates that they needn't be mutually exclusive. This beachside bush camp in Cape Range National Park affords a privileged glimpse of a rare eco-system, in a remote spot where only visitors are the occasional kangaroo. Luxury tented accommodation is run on solar power and every detail is considered: toiletries are chemical-free; the bedlinen is organic cotton, and there's

a tightly controlled water system. It's an inspirational place to stay (salsalis.com.au; **picture 10**).

**Best for families**

*Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa, Blue Mountains, Australia*  
How often can a parent give their children the opportunity to explore wide-open spaces and experience true adventure? At Wolgan Valley, there are 4,000 acres to roam, horses and bikes to ride, and wildlife to wonder at. For the youngest guests, there's a free crèche; for your budding Bear Grylls, the junior bushcraft courses teach animal tracking and shelter-building skills; and nature photography, stargazing and kite-flying will appeal to gentler souls. With exceptional staff, a superb wine list, and a cossetting spa, this is an all-action adventure playground (wolganvalley.com; **picture 11**).

**Best Smith hotel 2014**

*Uxua Casa Hotel & Spa, Bahia, Brazil*  
A repeat candidate on awards shortlists, a hit with Brazil's elite and a favourite with all its guests, Uxua Casa captures the imagination and lingers in the memory. Sitting between Trancoso's historic Quadrado and a strip of tropical beach, it's a dream of a getaway that balances laid-back luxury and exclusivity with genuine charm, passion for its setting and respect for the local community. The genius of designer Wilbert Das (former creative head at Diesel) was to blend chic, simple interiors that celebrate the vernacular with environmentally friendly touches: this quirky collection of casas was "upcycling" and "repurposing" before the in-crowd even knew the jargon. Hollow tree trunks are now shower stalls; taps and pipes are made of eucalyptus branches and reclaimed copper, and the bar was once a fishing boat. Spa treatments in tree-flanked pavilions, a quartz-lined pool and inventive Brazilian cuisine with garden-gathered ingredients all add up to a world-beating escape (uxua.com; **picture 12**).

See the 12 shortlists at [smithhotelawards.com](http://smithhotelawards.com). For more information, or to book any of these hotels, visit [mrاندmrrsmith.com](http://mrاندmrrsmith.com) or call 0330 100 3180.

**'El Fenn is a Moorish mish-mash of colour and comfort'**