

A FAR

WHERE **TRAVEL** CAN TAKE YOU

KENYA

MAINE

COPENHAGEN

MOROCCO

CHINA

BUDAPEST

TRAVEL DEEPER

9 UNUSUAL
DESTINATIONS

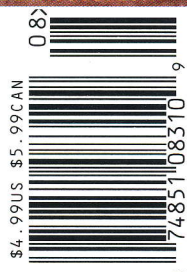
THE MOST
INTERESTING CITY
IN SOUTH AMERICA

A MODERN NOMAD

ITALY'S SWEET
SECRET

WHERE TO
GO NEXT

JULY/AUGUST 2011



afar.com

declare my work “not bad” in a way that says, “Don’t quit your day job.”

The next morning our guide, Jerry, picks up a group of us, and we drive through the pine forests of Fragrant Hills Park to a remote part of the Great Wall. We walk along narrow trails as Jerry tells us of his life as a young man in modern China. He confesses that he knew nothing about the massacre at Tiananmen Square until five years ago. Even now, he is prohibited by law from discussing it further. Jerry charts China’s remarkable embrace of capitalism in three sentences. “When my

parents’ generation got married in the 1970s, everyone bought three things: a watch, a bicycle, and a sewing machine. My uncle’s generation in the ’80s bought a refrigerator, a TV, and a washing machine. My generation buys a big apartment and a BMW.” Empress Cixi, who is said to have drunk from a jade cup and eaten with golden chopsticks, was clearly ahead of her time.

As I wander the Summer Palace grounds on the last day of my trip, I watch kites dance across the sky. They are anchored by children and adults scattered amid the 544 marble

lions that line Seventeen Arch Bridge, which connects to an island in Kunming Lake. I imagine the empress could have witnessed a similar scene. Then I come upon 70 people linedancing to a perky rendition of “It’s So Easy (to Fall in Love)” sung in Mandarin and ponder what Cixi might have thought of that.

The kinetic crowds make me glad that I have a tranquil retreat. I return to my cocoon and heed the call of the tub. I light candles, draw a warm bath, and relax as Chinese classical music wafts in from the CD player in the bedroom. It’s good to be empress. **A**

Palace Hotels Around the World



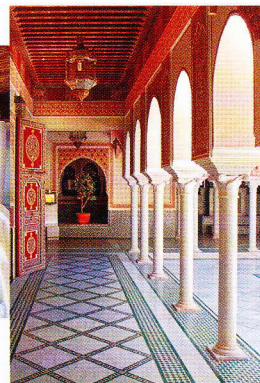
Hotel Gritti Palace, Italy



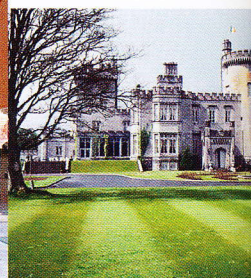
Devi Garh, India



Esencia, Mexico



La Mamounia, Morocco



Dromoland Castle, Ireland

INDIA

Devi Garh
Udaipur, Rajasthan
91/(0) 2953-289-211
devigarh.in

An ornate facade conceals a minimalist hideaway where sleek guest rooms feature marble tubs and shimmering walls inlaid with semiprecious stones. Survey your kingdom on a camel safari or indulge in a spa treatment at India’s only L’Occitane outpost. And don’t be surprised if you see Shah Rukh Khan, aka the King of Bollywood; Devi Garh is a popular location for film shoots. From \$652.

IRELAND

Dromoland Castle
Newmarket-on-Fergus, County Clare
353/(0) 61-368-144
dromoland.ie

Dromoland, with its towers, turrets, and suits of armor, dates back to 1014. Your room is appointed with ornate furniture, vibrant fabrics, and fairy-tale garden views. While you’re there, try your hand at the regal art of falconry. From \$655.

ITALY

Hotel Gritti Palace
Campo Santa Maria del Giglio, Venice
39/041-794611
luxurycollection.com/gritti

Built in 1525 as the family home of Doge Andrea Gritti, this antique-stocked palazzo has rooms with mosaic floors, hand-painted furniture, and panoramic views of the Grand Canal. Murano glass chandeliers and sconces light up the hotel that Ernest Hemingway called “the best hotel in a city of great hotels.” From \$519.

MALTA

The Xara Palace
Misrah il-Kunsill, Mdina
356/21-450-560
xarapalace.com

Rising amid the historic walls overlooking medieval Mdina, Xara Palace was built in the 17th century for the noble family of Moscati Parisio. Suites are decorated with gilded mirrors, original oil paintings, and antique furniture, and most have sweeping

views of the islands of the Maltese archipelago. For a royal treat, check into one of four rooms with a Jacuzzi on a private terrace and order the king crab. From \$238.

MEXICO

Esencia
Xpu-Ha, Playa del Carmen
(877) 528-3490
hotelesencia.com

A white-walled estate built in the 1990s for an Italian duchess looks out over the Caribbean Sea. Indulge in a Caribeña cocktail, a blend of mezcal and pineapple juice, in the communal living room. Rosemary and juniper berries from the garden are used in spa treatments. From \$499.

MOROCCO

La Mamounia
Avenue Bab Jdid, Marrakech
212/(0) 524-388-600
mamounia.com

Star designer Jacques Garcia recently restored La Mamounia’s grandeur, updating rooms with painted wooden doors, hand-carved ceilings, and

a blend of art deco and Moorish antiques. In the surrounding park, bougainvillea and roses grow wild in a grove of olive trees. From \$755.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Desert Islands Resort and Spa
Sir Bani Yas Island, Abu Dhabi
971/(0) 2-801-5400
desertislands.anantara.com

This refuge is set on a rustic island off the coast of Abu Dhabi that the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan fought to conserve. Overlooking white sandy beaches and the Arabian Gulf, the resort offers a desert playground where you can kayak through flamingo-filled mangrove swamps and see giraffes, cheetahs, and endangered Arabian oryx. Last year, a nearby seventh-century monastery (the UAE’s only known Christian archaeological site) opened to the public. From \$408.