

Three Far Flung Luxury Retreats

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With some hotels, all that is required is that you turn up, check in and the fun begins. With others, however, the path leading to the front door can be a winding one.

From a mountain guesthouse overlooking the Bernese Alps to a private estate once owned by an Italian Duchess, here are three hotels that require you spend a little time and effort in getting there. Why? Because they're worth it!

Verana Jungle Spa, Mexico



Ensnconced high on a hillside overlooking the captivating Bay of Banderas sits Verana – a boutique jungle retreat straight out of a Hollywood film set.

As a guest in this bohemian rustic resort, you'll have the delightful task of choosing from one of ten individually designed hand-made rooms: there's the Stone House with four walls and a door or the Tea House: completely open to the jungle elements where you'll fall asleep in Zen-full tranquillity under a mosquito net and a canopy of twinkling stars.

Daytime activities include yoga, watsu sessions and pampering massages in the Jungle Spa, where every treatment is preceded with a relaxing foot bath, a cup of herbal tea and the heart-warming sight of butterflies fluttering by.

How to get there: From Puerto Vallarta, you'll take a taxi to the beach at Boca de Tomatlan where Verana staff will be waiting to transport you on their panga to Yelapa. From Yelapa, it's an energetic hike up the hill while your luggage is transported by mule.

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Berrgasthaus Wasenalp, Switzerland



Located on a mountain above the Simplon Pass Road, Berrgasthaus Wasenalp offers an ideal place from which to drink in enchanting mountain views of the Aletsch-Bietschhorn - a UNESCO World Heritage site.

With comfortable, contemporary and functional interiors (they have to be at this height), you'll be catching your breath at the guesthouse bar whilst enjoying a sip of Chardonnay and feeling mighty proud that you snowshoe-hiked all the way up here, with assistance and encouragement from Freddy, the owner.

After a delicious home-made dinner in the guesthouse restaurant, you'll sit by the fire and wave goodbye to the hardy skiers who don their helmets and night lights in preparation for their descent down the mountain. But luckily for you, the only journey you will be making is to the bubbling hot tub on the balcony, overlooking the town of Brig, thousands of metres below you.

How to get there: At almost 2,000m above the Simplon Pass Road, in the depths of winter, you'll have the option of undertaking a snowshoe-hike up the mountain under the watchful eye of experienced mountain guide and owner, Freddy. Alternatively, it's a 20-minute drive up a winding mountain road.

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Esencia Estate, Mexico



More akin to a private house than a hotel, Esencia Estate, the former home of an Italian Duchess, is now a luxurious 50-acre beach-side retreat.

The hotel offers a range of secluded yet sophisticated accommodation firmly rooted in the Mayan heritage of Mexico's Yucatan: home to pristine white sandy beaches bordered by the verdant green and blue hues of the Caribbean Ocean.

Choose from a garden view room, an ocean view or a cottage where you'll swing on your hammock overlooking lush tropical gardens surrounding not one, but two resort pools. On the other hand, indulge in an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live like royalty in the Duchess' private accommodation – Rosa Ocean View Master Suite.

No matter which room you choose, blissful mornings at Esencia consist of leisurely breakfasts on the patio followed by native Mayan treatments at the all-organic Aistoma Spa. After indulging in the Mexican ritual of an afternoon siesta you'll want to refresh with a dip in your very own private plunge pool. As the sun sets on another day, enjoy a bare-foot stroll along the estate's deserted beach where you'll work up an appetite for your evening of Duchess-approved dining in Sal Y Fuego, Esencia's gourmet restaurant.

How to get there: From Cancun International Airport you'll be south in a private transfer or rental car past the one-time sleepy resort of Playa Del Carmen, then onwards to just twenty minutes North of Tulum. At the side of the dusty road, you'll enter a cabana outpost where your golf cart awaits to transport you through the estate's lush vegetation. On arrival at the White House, expect to be treated royally.

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