

a busy junction is Asia's first Philippe Starck-designed hotel. But the transformation of the former budget guest house has been startling. Inside, the ultra-sexy lobby may border on the ostentatious, but the 57 rooms are much less intimidating and both fast-living business travellers and demanding jet-setters will appreciate the serviced-apartment set-up: all rooms have fully equipped kitchenettes and living spaces. There are the usual hi-tech trappings, including complimentary Internet access and flat-screen swivel TVs, plus whimsical touches such as yellow-tinted mirrors and mismatched furniture (for example Starck's silver stools alongside Frank Gehry's Wiggle side chair around a marble dining table). The studio apartments are smallish but the ingenious use of sheer curtains creates a sense of height. The spacious one-bedroom apartments have the feel of a bachelor pad. Opia restaurant is overseen by Australian chef Teage Ezard: expect Modern Australian cuisine with Asian influences. Y's Asian bistro offers street food from across the region.

WHEN TO GO During the shopping festival from late June to August

ROOM TO BOOK The two-bedroom duplex penthouse, especially if you're planning to do some entertaining *Jia, 1-5 Irving Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, China (00 852 3196 9000; fax: 3196 9001). Rooms from HK\$1,808 (about £120); penthouse about £455*

THE SCARLET Singapore

Few Chinatowns are as much fun as the one in Singapore. Advertising agencies, publishing houses and hip restaurants and bars have given the area a real buzz and the pre-war architecture a new lease of life. The Scarlet is in a 1924 building, a stone's throw from the business district and some of the city's liveliest markets. The exterior has been immaculately restored in accordance with conservation regulations, but the interior was ripped out to make way for 84 rooms, some of which are woefully small. Yet the extravagant public spaces are a triumph for first-time hotelier Geeson Lawadinata and first-time hotel designer Michael Tan, the concept director. Old-fashioned extravagance features strongly, with gorgeous chandeliers, gilded mirrors, Victorian-style wall sconces, rose-patterned upholstery and creative use of fabrics and textures such as faux snakeskin, velvet, organza, silk and leather. Three colours – crimson, gold and bronze – predominate, while the intimate Desire restaurant, which opens

onto the street, sports a sexy black-and-red scheme. The in-room facilities are superb, especially in the five lavishly decorated suites. All bedrooms come with a pillow menu, gourmet mini-bar and complimentary Internet access.

WHEN TO GO It's hot and humid all year round. If you're looking for action, check out the arts festival and shopping festival (both late May to late July)

ROOM TO BOOK Any of the five suites, Splendour, Swank, Opulent, Lavish and Passion. Passion has an outdoor Jacuzzi
The Scarlet, 33 Erskine Road, Singapore (00 65 6511 3333; fax: 6511 3303; www.thescarlethotel.com). Doubles from S\$233 (about £75); suites from about £180

EVASON HIDEAWAY AT ANA MANDARA Vietnam

Lounging by the beachside pool of one of Vietnam's most glamorous resorts, the Ana Mandara, you'd be forgiven for forgetting that just outside your oasis is a clogged thoroughfare and busy international airport at Nha Trang. But at the newly opened sister property, the Evason Hideaway at Ana Mandara, on a 300-acre island in idyllic Ninh Van Bay, the feeling of tranquillity is not an illusion. The 52 airy villas – choose between one nestled into the lush hillside, on the beach, or among dramatic rocky outcrops – have panoramic views of the sea, private plunge pools, and daybeds where you can sprawl for hours. When you can pull yourself away, book treatments at the Six Senses spa (next to a waterfall), hike through the surrounding acres, take cooking classes (using produce from the hotel's vegetable garden and fruit grove) or a boat ride to Nha Trang's main market or other islands nearby. This is where to find the Vietnam of old, with only the occasional fishing boat anchored in the bay for company.

WHEN TO GO Between Christmas and Chinese New Year when the weather is warm but not stifling
ROOM TO BOOK Number 5, a rock villa with spectacular views *Evason Hideaway at Ana Mandara, Ninh Van, Vietnam (00 84 58 829829; fax: 829629; www.sixsenses.com). Doubles from US\$460; rock villas from US\$540*

CAPELLA LODGE Lord Howe Island, Australia

Lord Howe Island is 700km (a two-hour flight) north-east of Sydney in the Pacific Ocean. The island is just 11km long and has the world's most

➤ southerly coral reef. From the new Capella Lodge there are dress-circle views of the flawless lagoon and the island's volcanic peak. With just nine suites, this is a friendly seaside retreat rather than a bustling resort. Guests are encouraged to use the main lodge building (a restaurant, bar, terrace and plunge pool) as their 'private pad', although many prefer their own rooms, which are a little further up the hill. Despite bold, contemporary lines, the buildings retain a touch of the Old Pacific through the use of timber shutters, ceiling fans, rattan furniture and colourful fabrics designed by Sydney artist Bruce Goold (of Mambo fame). Suites are packed with the usual gizmos such as CD players, televisions and fridges – although Internet access is erratic, at best. Food is firmly in the Mod Oz tradition and the menu features a wide range of local fish and island-grown vegetables. The wine list is limited, but showcases some of Australia's better regional wineries. The in-house spa is an unexpected delight, offering a host of beauty treatments, massages and yoga sessions. Just the thing after a busy day exploring Australia's most accessible and yet still pristine island wilderness.

WHEN TO GO Any time between September and May is fine, with temperatures averaging 25°C

ROOM TO BOOK The Lidgbird Suite has a larger patio and outdoor spa bath *Capella Lodge, Lord Howe Island, New South Wales, Australia (00 61 2 9918 4355; fax: 9918 4381; www.lordhowe.com). Suites from A\$750 (about £310); Lidgbird Suite from about £350*

WROTHAM PARK LODGE Queensland

Teetering on the banks of the Mitchell River in northern Queensland, this is the most persuasive attempt at bringing style and serenity to the outback-cattle-station experience. Architecture and decor take their cues from the vernacular – roofs are corrugated iron, verandahs have 'squat' chairs with leg-rests that swing out to accommodate feet tired from a day of boots and spurs – but the comfort level is set to maximum. The big deck at the front of the homestead has an infinity-edged swimming pool that mirrors the sky, there's an air-conditioned lounge with a well-stocked open bar, and after every sweaty foray a smiling member of staff appears with an iced towel scented with Wrotham's signature essential oil. Distributed along the river bank, the 10 guest bungalows – or 'quarters' – are

smart, minimalist and decorated in chocolate, grey and taupe. The bird life is astonishing. Kites and wedge-tailed eagles hover overhead, sarus cranes stalk across the biscuit-coloured plains and on the lagoon, whistler ducks and magpie geese riot and honk among the water lilies. At the heart of the 600,000-hectare property is a small and largely self-sufficient community of mechanics, cooks, drovers and chopper pilots. They manage 35,000 brahmin cattle and nourish the essential bush skills of horsemanship and hard-edged practicality, and will spin you a stirring yarn at the end of the day.

WHEN TO GO April–October
ROOM TO BOOK Views are equal, but the quarters west of the homestead have more trees *Wrotham Park Lodge, Queensland, Australia (00 61 2 8296 8010; fax: 00 61 2 9299 2103; www.wrothampark.com.au). Quarters for two from A\$1,600 (about £660) all-inclusive*

THE HENRY JONES ART HOTEL Tasmania

The Henry Jones Art Hotel, which opened in October, has already established itself as incontestably Hobart's best hotel. The raw materials are hard to beat: the waterfront site overlooks the harbour from where Scott and Amundsen sailed to the Antarctic; and it is clear why Charles Darwin and Agatha Christie were so enchanted by Tasmania's capital that they contemplated retirement here. Then the building: the former jam factory of Henry Jones, a gruff, bull-necked teetotaler who provided jams for all the world under the label 'IXL'. His motto – 'I excel in all the products I make' – might also serve for the 50-room hotel that takes his name. Kim Millington, general manager and one of its three directors, brashly claimed that he would create the best hotel with the best service and restaurant in Tasmania – brash, because the island's service industry is famously deplorable. Amazing to report, he has succeeded. The Australian Hotels Association recently awarding the HJAH a rash of Bests, including Best Superior Accommodation in Tasmania. What makes it so good? First, the open-plan rooms designed by local architect Robert Morris-Nunn, where modern touches – elliptical spa baths, walk-in showers – are grounded by the exposed beams and stonework of the old building. Chinese silk eiderdowns smother the large beds, and the walls, painted in signature ox-blood ('Henry Jones red'), are hung with significant