

TATTLER[®]

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Travel



Guide

2007



Villa San Michele

Florence, Italy

Some hotels try too hard. Some just have it. You can tell a lot by the sugared blackberries you find in your room here: no rotting apples, just good old-fashioned class. The views of Florence are unbeatable: a peach-coloured ToyTown. And what a relief to get away from the crowds screeching round the Uffizi and the Duomo and getting their sticky fingers all over Valentino. The renovated Presidential Suite in the Limonaia in the garden is surrounded by natural springs. The Michelangelo Suite, where Napoleon once hung out, was also renovated this year, and has light pouring in from sunrise to sunset, with its vast window that stretches along the whole façade of the hotel. This is Italy as you need it to be. **Website** villasanmichele.com. **UK reservations** Elegant Resorts (tel: 01244 897000). **Rates** Double, from £660.

Royal Malewane

Kruger National Park, South Africa

What is it about Royal Malewane that makes you want to grab people and shake them until they promise to go?

This is Africa as you dream it, a combination of wilderness, elegance and grace. Everything hits the right note: the air of the rooms smells sweet thanks to the grass-thatched roof, which contrasts with the Persian rugs and antiques. Tubs are claw-foot,



the stone-lined showers are so vast that Elton John referred to his as 'the carwash' and the linen sheets are pressed daily. Since safari is really about food – ie, you spend your days waiting for animals to eat each other – it makes you kind of peckish too. And this place, quite rightly, has won endless awards for its cooking, from grilled impala as tender as kobe beef to curried vichyssoise with fresh garden chives. But nothing overwhelms the real reason you're here: the bush. The guides are top-notch. Ask for Craig McFarlane – his knowledge is astounding. It wasn't just about ticking off the big five (although we saw leopards daily), but the importance given to every element of nature. I held a chameleon in my hand, learned how fig trees pollinate (wasps, not blossoms) and about dwarf stars, black holes, termite society and wildflowers. At the end of three days you'll want to propose, but a previous guest from Chile has already done that – she now runs the impeccable new spa with its beautiful lap pool. Royal Malewane – a big hitter that just keeps getting better.

Website royalmalewane.com. **UK reservations** Africa Travel Centre (tel: 0845 450 1533). **Rates** Double, from £990, full board, including game activities.

Villa Feltrinelli

Gargnano, Italy

The hotelier's hotel. Ask the real professionals which gets their number one vote, and, more often than not, this is it. A baby grand on the shores of Lake Garda, the 19th-century villa was bought by the legendary Bob Burns, of Regent Hotels, as the house where he wanted to live in his retirement. But he couldn't stop restoring it, and soon the budget had run out through the front doors waving its arms about and wailing and screaming. Lucky for us. Burns invented the modern luxury hotel as we know it. This is his labour of love, with history, with class – a hotel so bent on perfection that the staff test-drove no less than seven hairdryers before making their final decision. A perfect setting, antique Murano glass, an 60-metre custom-built pleasureboat to take you to a special island for lunch, or to Verona for the opera. Everything just goes that one step further – this place is hotel haute couture. **Website** villafeltrinelli.com. **UK reservations** Bellini Travel (tel: 020 7602 7602). **Rates** Suite, from £480, including breakfast. □

