

DEPARTURES



THE HOTELS ISSUE

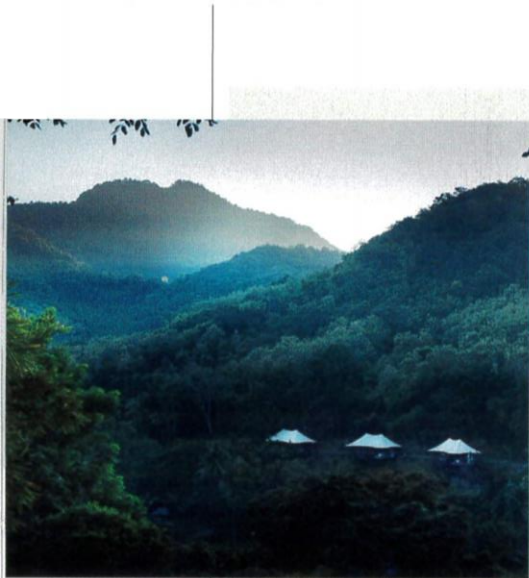
THE HOTELS ISSUE



The saltwater pool at Punta Caliza on Mexico's Holbox Island.

The Game Changers Five new hotels that are setting the standard in classic destinations around the world, from the Yucatán to Laos.

GAME CHANGERS



ROSEWOOD LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

A designated UNESCO World Heritage site, Luang Prabang has long had a sleepy, low-key vibe with its mix of Buddhist temples and French colonial architecture. Now, with the recent opening of Rosewood, the quiet hilltop town has its first luxury tented property, courtesy of celebrated designer Bill Bensley. The resort is divided into treetop tents, which offer views of the mountains in the distance, and villas, which are bordered by a stream or a riverbank. At every turn you're enveloped by leafy palms and the sound of rushing water from a natural waterfall, which is also the site of the Elephant Bridge Bar. Rooms are decorated with colonial-era artifacts like Kodak cameras, newspaper clippings, and illustrations, as well as textiles inspired by the Lisu and Akha peoples, hill tribes that still live in the surrounding area. *From \$620; rosewoodhotels.com. — Erin Riley*

PUNTA CALIZA, YUCATÁN, MEXICO

Isla de Holbox, a slender sandbar of an island that juts off the northern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula—at the point where the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean meet—is a sensory contradiction. The sand is so white it creates an almost blinding haze in the sun, while the water is calm and shallow, almost as if you could walk out for miles. Its hue constantly changes: Depending on the currents and wind, it's either crystal-clear turquoise or a moody swath of sea-glass green. With such a spectacular natural setting, the local accommodations have been pretty basic—think breezy, thatched-roof hotels dotting the coast—until now.

The owners of Punta Caliza, Holbox Island's newest and sure-to-be-most-photographed hotel, decided to create a property as dramatic as its surroundings. Set back from the beach on a triangular strip of land bordered by mangroves, it was designed by the Guadalajara-based firm Estudio Macías Peredo Arquitectos. It's a modern temple of concrete and red cedar, with a tranquil blue saltwater pool. All 12 of the loftlike guest rooms, which feature sleek, all-wood decor, are just a step from the pool. Co-owner Cuauhtémoc Muñoz (he owns it with his sister, Claudia Muñoz Vargas) fell in love with Holbox after a spontaneous family vacation eight years ago, and despite its minimalism, a sense of family permeates the property. Muñoz and his small staff serve breakfast in the slat-roofed restaurant while guests can spend breezy evenings sipping mezcal with his parents. The hotel is an ideal base from which to explore the island's other charms: the sand-covered, car-less streets; the pier where everyone gathers at sunset; the lagoon where bioluminescent plankton sparkle at midnight. "We want guests who love design but also understand the nature of the island," says Muñoz. "This is still a wild place." *Rooms from \$230; puntacaliza.com. — Christina Pérez*



GAME
CHANGERS



AWASI IGUAZÚ, ARGENTINA

Home to 275 towering waterfalls—not to mention miles of pristine nature trails—Argentina’s Iguazú National Park draws some 1.3 million visitors a year. Yet the hotels in the area didn’t live up to the destination and were certainly never worth more than a quick overnight. The only luxury option, Belmond Hotel das Cataratas, lay just across the border in Brazil, which shares the falls with Argentina and has its own national park. Now Awasi Iguazú is giving travelers a reason to stay on the Argentinean side. Blending seamlessly into the jungle, the 14 freestanding villas have sunken living rooms, plunge pools, and wraparound wooden decks, where you can celebrate after hiking the U-shaped Devil’s Throat—the most impressive of the park’s falls—with a glass of crisp Torrontés. At the main lodge, which acts as lobby, bar, and dining room, low-slung couches, colorful baskets, and a seven-piece light installation fashioned from fishing line set a rustic tone. Dinner at this Relais & Châteaux property features innovative dishes like a delicate *surubí* ceviche or umami-rich mushroom ravioli, which might be paired with a floral Pinot Noir from Mendoza. It’s all necessary fuel for your adventure-filled activities. In addition to accompanying you in the park, detailing native flora and fauna along the way, your guide can take you bird-watching, hiking, and kayaking. Rooms from \$950 per person, all-inclusive; awasi.com. —*Jacqueline Gifford*

**THE RAMBLE HOTEL,
DENVER**

When the owners of the illustrious cocktail bar Death & Co decided to venture into the hotel scene, red carpets awaited. Their choice of partners surprised some: the Ramble, a Denver hotel created by Ryan Diggins, a 33-year-old developer with little hospitality experience. Now the move seems as prescient as championing bespoke cocktails before the advent of “mixology.” Upon opening in May, the 50-room Ramble instantly became the nerve center of RiNo, or River North Art District, Denver’s nexus of industrial chic. Diggins wanted a hangout in tune with the come one, come all spirit of Colorado (one of America’s fastest-growing states), and he got it, thanks to Death & Co’s splendid pair of lobby bars. In the afternoons, as the light seeps through the Ramble’s intentionally transparent street-level windows, a cheerfully crepuscular mood descends on scenesters and families alike. Rooms from \$250; theramblehotel.com. —*Ben Ryder Howe*





The entrance of the Palácio Tangará hotel in the Burle Marx Park in São Paulo. *Below:* Inside one of the guest rooms.



PALÁCIO TANGARÁ, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

Stepping off a road in São Paulo's residential Morumbi neighborhood, I found myself engulfed in a swath of emerald rain forest. Saguí monkeys, with their white-tufted ears and striped tails, scampered up vines, and parakeets chirped from their perches in avocado

trees. It was hard to believe that I was in the middle of one of the most skyscraper-filled cities in the world, but at 27 acres, Burle Marx Park is a rare enclave of greenery—and the site of the city's latest hotel, Palácio Tangará.

The estate was owned in the 1940s by the Italian-Brazilian playboy Francisco "Baby" Pignatari. As a gift for his third wife, Pignatari hired the country's leading architect, Oscar Niemeyer, to build a lavish estate and enlisted landscape artist Roberto Burle Marx, who created the famous mosaic promenade in Rio de Janeiro, to design the grounds. Marx began work on the gardens and pools in the '50s, but then everything came to a halt after Pignatari's wife left him. Today, the 141-room property is less an extension of Niemeyer's Brasília and more of a modern grande dame, as envisioned by local architect William Simonato.

After wandering past Marx's pastel Cubist pavilions, checkerboard lawns, and a stately allée of imperial palm trees, I was greeted by the hotel's gleaming white

neoclassical façade. Inside, I found a palette of faded greens and blues inspired by the watercolors of French adventurer and artist Jean-Baptiste Debret, who traveled to Brazil in the 19th century.

The surrounding vegetation imbued the hotel with a feeling of tranquility, including the airy lobby with its Palladian windows and the cocktail bar and restaurant by chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, which serves innovative dishes like grilled octopus with paprika emulsion on the outdoor terrace. When I was getting ready to check out, I found that I couldn't fit all my purchases into my suitcase, so I called reception to ask where I could buy another. It wasn't long before one was delivered to my room. As I left the hotel, two suitcases in hand, I caught the afternoon's breeze, which was filled with the heady scents of eucalyptus, mimosa, and hibiscus. I felt worlds away from the towering skyscrapers and cinder-block-lined streets that loomed on the horizon.

🏠 Rooms from \$390; oetkercollection.com. —Lindsay Talbot