

WIN A LUXURIOUS THREE-NIGHT STAY IN BANGKOK

# DestinAsian

PLENTY OF TRAVEL | LOTS OF LEISURE



## The 2005 Luxe List

Checking  
into the  
region's  
best new  
hotels



On the high  
road in  
Bhutan

Discovering  
Damascus

**PLUS**

TAKING ON INDIA'S  
TONS RIVER

SIX CLASSIC  
SINGAPOREAN  
RESTAURANTS

THE BEST OF BONDI

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2005

PRINTED AND BOUND IN THE USA

ISSN 1473-1294



23

# The LUXE LIST 20 05

From the former residence of a Laotian prince to a romantic desert oasis in Dubai, the past 12 months have seen a flurry of truly remarkable hotel openings.

This year's Luxe List, compiled from reports from our roving band of discerning contributors, identifies no fewer than 30 new properties in the Asia-Pacific region that more than make the grade in terms of style, service, and surrounds. Whether a boutique hideaway or a five-star urban address, the lodgings listed here guarantee that the luxury-minded traveler will be spoiled for choice.

Opposite: An overwater villa at the One & Only Reethi Rah in the Maldives, where lucky guests can lounge in sunbathing nets suspended above the azure lagoon.



Above: Zen-inspired design at the Chedi Chiang Mai. Right: Bathrooms with a view at Queenstown's newest lodge, Azur. Opposite: The courtyard swimming pool at Galle Fort Hotel in Sri Lanka.

#### SRI LANKA

##### **Galle Fort Hotel, Galle**

Situated in a 17th-century Dutch merchant's house in the heart of Galle Fort, this gem of a boutique hotel is as hip as it is historic. First-time hoteliers Christopher Ong and Karl Steinberg have made an impressive debut here, not only opening what has become the neighborhood's most popular bar, the Verandah, but also crafting rooms that are imminently stylish and comfortable: whisper-silent air conditioning, powerful showers, and mosquito-netted canopy beds made with crisp Indian cotton sheets. Set around a central courtyard, each of the nine suites is unique, thanks to the exceptional shopping skills of the owners, who have scoured Sri Lanka's markets for Chinese ceramics, Dutch East Indies furniture, and British colonial souvenirs. The two-story, antiques-rich Admiral Cheng Ho Suite, a favorite among return guests, was inspired by the Ming dynasty mariner's Sri Lankan sojourn in the 15th century (28 Church St.; 94-91/223-2570; [www.galleforthotel.com](http://www.galleforthotel.com); doubles from US\$150).

#### THAILAND

##### **The Chedi, Chiang Mai**

The arrival of The Chedi gives the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai something it has long lacked in one fell swoop: design-driven accommodation right on the banks of the Ping River. Architect Kerry Hill has called upon a spare, Zen-inspired design for the main structure, a four-story building clad dramatically in teak slats. Floor-to-



ceiling windows and marble decks keep the 84 rooms bright during the day, while rich color schemes, comfy daybeds, and deep-bored woods give the interior a sensuous warmth. Still, it's an adjacent building that is bound to draw the eye: a charmingly squat, 19th-century Anglo-Thai landmark that once housed a British consulate. The Chedi has put it to fine use for a moody series of public spaces, doing nothing much more than adding intelligent detailing to bring it into the 21st century. There's a lofted bar with pebble-colored pillows and opium beds, downstairs, a dark, mirror-lined pub serves as an anteroom for a restaurant whose menu spans Indian, Thai, and Western dishes. Outside, lines of colonial-style deck chairs make the perfect spot from which to admire the 50-meter swimming pool, the stylish grounds, and the nest-twins, slow-flowing Ping River (123 Chaoenprath Rd.; 66-53/253-333; [www.ghmhotels.com](http://www.ghmhotels.com); doubles from US\$254).

#### NEW ZEALAND

##### **Azur, Queenstown**

Forget the nondescript Queenstown subdivision you have to drive through to get here—Azur, set on a bluff overlooking Lake

Wakatipu and the Remarkables mountain range beyond, is one of the most welcoming new lodges to open in New Zealand for years. Sheathed in red cedar and local stone, all nine villas have dramatic sunset views from their decks, as does the main lodge, which contains a convivial lounge. Interiors are spacious at 75 square meters and have been given a subdued pan-Asian feel by Singapore-based design firm LFW Design Works, the same team behind the multimillion-dollar makeovers of the Oriental hotels in Bangkok and Singapore as well as the Oberoi resorts in Mauritius and Lombok. Expect timbered ceilings, plush sofas, moody black-and-white photographs on the walls, and beds washed in Egyptian cotton sheets under Thai silk headboards. Led by general manager Anthony Bos, formerly of the Singapore Sentosa Resort & Spa, the staff are of the best caliber, and the concierge service is second to none—which is a good thing when it comes to securing dinner reservations in town. Why choosing not to compete with Queenstown's host of good restaurants, Azur only serves breakfast, though snacks like toasted sandwiches appear miraculously throughout the day (23 McKinnon Terrace; 64-3/442-6360; [www.azur.co.nz](http://www.azur.co.nz); doubles from US\$625).