

FINANCIAL TIMES

How to spend it



travelista

Wander woman **Maria Shollenbarger** fast-tracks international intelligence on where to be and what to see

✈ If **AUSTRALIA** is going from lifestyle strength to strength – its chefs garnering kudos around the globe, its designers luring major fashion editors to Sydney for a buzzy week of collections – then Cabarita Beach, halfway between Queensland's Gold Coast and Byron Bay in New South Wales, is the country's latest show of it. It's here that **Halcyon House** (www.halcyonhotel.com.au; from about £277), a former surfers' motel that has been given an admirably glam overhaul, opened in May. Designer Anna Spiro, who seems to have been inspired by London's own Kit Kemp and Ben Pentreath, has beautifully reimaged Halcyon's 21 rooms; beach-house blue and white predominate, while vintage mirrors, portraits and lights mix it up with rattan and wicker.

But it's the service that promises to excel – Halcyon's owners enticed the brilliant VIP concierge from Capri's JK Place to make sure of it. Now, with One&Only's presence expanded in Oz as well – along with Hayman Island, it recently assumed management of the venerable **Wolgan Valley** resort (www.oneandonlyresorts.com; from £1,038), just a two-hour drive from Sydney in the Greater Blue Mountains – there's a style circuit that utterly merits the 22-hour flight time.

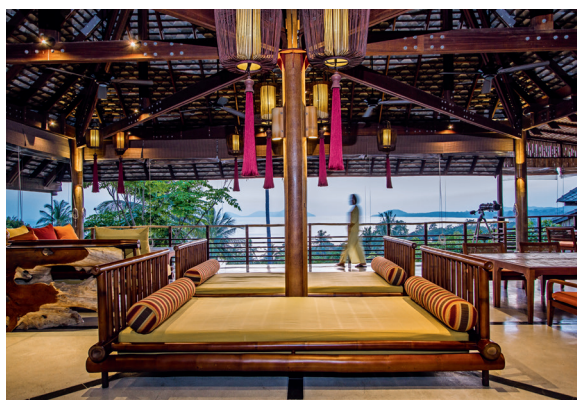
✈ On **KOH SAMUI** the appetite for luxury villas is undampened – witness **Samujana** (www.samujana.com; villas from \$825 per night), a collection of ultra-contemporary serviced residences on

the island's northeast coast. Ranging from three to eight bedrooms, they tumble down a hill that alternates hypermanicuring with unfettered jungle, all the way to the jade waters of the Gulf of Siam. For a bit of hi-lo fun that typifies the island's nightlife, there's Choeng Mon Beach nearby. And for those preferring to concentrate on world-class detox and wellness, **Kamalaya** (www.kamalaya.com; from £240) has seen in its 10th anniversary with a total makeover; its guest villas, all redesigned, have been augmented with 16 one- and two-bedroom suites. Kamalaya's cuisine is notoriously delicious enough to put paid to guests' best weight-loss intentions, but the new state-of-the-art fitness centre and 25m pool should help redress the balance.

✈ The mountains of the Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, in **CHINA**'s remote Gansu Province, offer succour



Above: the pool at Halcyon House, Cabarita Beach, Australia. Below: Emirates One&Only's Wolgan Valley resort in Australia's Greater Blue Mountains



Above: Kamalaya's Alchemy Tea Lounge, Koh Samui





Above: a tent at Norden Camp in China's Gansu Province. Below: the open-air living room in one of the villas at Samujana, Koh Samui

(arguably the most important Tibetan Buddhist site outside Tibet itself), Norden marries sustainability bona fides – wood-burning stoves, solar power, bucket showers – with generous luxury hits. Besides the cloud-like European beds and Finnish sauna, guests benefit from the owners' other business: the production of cashmere-like *khullu* textiles from yak hair for fashion houses such as Lanvin and Céline. So while monastery tours, horse trekking and grassland yoga are all available, so are gorgeous shawls, blankets and accessories – sold under the brand name Norlha (www.norlha.fr) – in the camp's boutique.

➔ There's a significant reopening at **SOUTH AFRICA's** Sabi Sand reserve, where **Singita Ebony Lodge** (www.singita.com; from £935 per person per night, full board) has been completely refurbished after a five-month absence from the Singita Sabi circuit, which also includes recently reappointed Boulders and Castleton. But Ebony is special – it's where Singita, which now manages more than 1m acres of African wilderness, started 22 years ago. Pale canvas and glass now stand in for stone walls, monochrome black and white (a nod to the surrounding ebony-wood forest) defines the palette, and campaign furniture from owner Luke Bailes' private collection punctuates the sleek tents.

➔ In **MILAN**, Expo 2015 rolls on, and an Asian powerhouse hotel brand has opened its doors in time to profit from the influx of the culturally curious. With 104 rooms spread across four adjacent 19th-century palazzi near the top of Via Montenapoleone, the **Mandarin Oriental Milan** (www.mandarinoriental.com; from €850) has the city's most comprehensive spa and a pared-down, neutral Zen elegance based on rich silks and linens, marble and oak that should play very well with Milan's understated tastemakers.

➔ If an escape in the cypress-dotted landscapes of **TUSCANY** seems in order, **Borgo Pignano** (www.borgopignano.com; from €200) is one of the most bucolic. The main villa has 14 suites – with kilims layered over terracotta floors and velvet-clad slipper chairs next to claw-foot tubs in the bathrooms, they are the quintessence of boho chic. Farmhouses also dot the property – one sequestered in poplar groves, another overlooking a small lake – all equally appealing in their unfussy style. The proximity to Volterra, once an Etruscan stronghold and one of the region's loveliest hill towns, is one bonus; *The English Patient*-calibre views from almost every window are another. ♦



Above: the main villa at Borgo Pignano, Tuscany

