

TRAVEL NEWS

Find your centre

Remote escapes and city stays that will put you at the heart of local life

WORDS BY MARIA SHOLENBARGER

Joshua Tree in southern California has long attracted seekers of some of North America's widest open skies. More recently the area has become a hive of music and culture thanks to habitués of the Coachella Festival, who often repair here post-revelry for downtime in nature (and, usually, more revelry). Homestead Modern has a toehold in the area for years as a purveyor of sleek, modern rental properties, from upcycled prefab houses and cabins to full-blown luxury escapes. For 2021 they've honed the inventory to a select portfolio of stays with hospitality attached. The team will lay on private chefs from across the state (home to some of the world's best restaurants, it's worth remembering). A concierge service sorts in-house indulgences (spa therapists, sommeliers who host tastings in the comforts of your own sunken living room or next to your fireplace) and others that exploit the park to its fullest, from hiking guides to quad bikes to shamans (yes, shamans. See: California). homesteadmodern.com; from \$350 a night; luxury stays from \$2,000

A CONCIERGE SORTS OUT INDULGENCES FROM QUAD BIKES TO SHAMANS

HOME ON THE HACIENDA

Among those places to which the luckier among us have decamped long-term during Covid, Costa Rica has been especially popular with North Americans. Not that there aren't a thousand things to recommend it in non-pandemic times. Plan South America, always au fait with all that's best in these parts, has an ideal redoubt here: Hacienda Montezuma, a 1,500-acre cattle

estate in the shadow of the Tenorio volcano. Guests can hike, wild swim (in the property's own freshwater lake), sample cacao produced at a farm just down the road (among Costa Rica's most famous) or roar out to set camera traps for monitoring the local charismatic fauna, among which are ocelot and puma. The hacienda accommodates up to 16 across two houses, but will take as few as two guests at a time. It's an exclusive experience – a real dive into agricultural life in the Costa Rican highlands.

plansouthamerica.com; from \$4,500 a night full-board with hiking, riding and birdwatching

BELLE EPOQUE BUDAPEST

Should an old-fashioned European city hotel stay be the thing you're pining

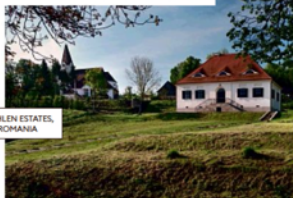
for, look to that quintessential European city, Budapest, where a very grand address is about to reopen its doors after another long restoration effort. Matild Palace dates to 1902, one of two belle-époque buildings flanking the Elizabeth Bridge commissioned by Marie Clotilde of Sax-Coburg and Gotha. Nearly 120 years later, The Luxury Collection has breathed life back into its 130 rooms and suites (the top floor Danube "lofts", with cantilevered floor-to-ceiling windows, limed-plank floors and free-standing platform beds, promise to be the coolest). Billed as the hotel's pièce de résistance, meanwhile, is the Matild Café and Cabaret, originally opened in 1901 and meticulously reimaged for 2021 – complete with live performances. marriott.com; from €480 a night for two guests

TRANSYLVANIAN TRAMPING

Untrammelled Europe might seem a contradiction in terms, but we've heard enough about the allure of Transylvania recently to buy into the idea that its pristine Saxon villages and bucolic pre-industrial landscapes actually fit the bill. Close to the centre of this out-of-time bit of Romania is Bethlen Estates, a restoration-hospitality project begun in 2007 by the Bethlen family on the outskirts of the village of Cris that is now accepting bookings from early May. The estate combines private villa stays (in a four-bedroom caretaker's house or a two-bedroom cottage) and hotel accommodation (in a converted barn, whose four ensuite rooms will be available to let individually from September).

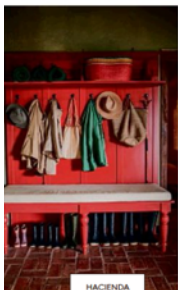
Preservation of original detail was paramount for the owners, and from the outside it's as though virtually nothing has changed in a century. Inside, it's a different story, with plush beds and antique kilims, sleek Tom Dixon-lit kitchens, and even a sanatorium for post-exertion decompressing. Breakfasts and teas are served daily, and any other tailor-made menus on request. But it's local access that promises to make the Bethlen difference: (sustainable) hunting on a nearby 40,000-acre private estate, cycling, birdwatching, riding and half-day-long picnics on empty hillsides – all part of itineraries that expertly mine the place. bethlenestates.com; rooms from €135 ■HTS

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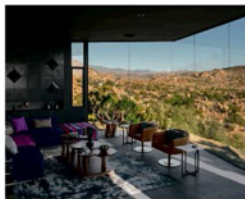


BETHLEN ESTATES, ROMANIA

Below: a cloakroom at Hacienda Montezuma in Costa Rica. Bottom: the smaller house at the Hacienda. Bottom right: the caretaker's house at Bethlen Estates in Romania



HACIENDA MONTEZUMA



Top left: Homestead Modern's Black Desert house in Joshua Tree, California. Top: the house's living room. Above: the swimming pool