The Hot List

Condé Nast Traveller Middle East

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JAPAN
AZUMI SETODA, IKUHIJIMA

Beneath waves of grey roof tiles, a sliding door in a jigsaw of dark timber marks the quiet entrance to this hotel. Located on an island famed for its temples in Japan’s Seto Inland Sea, it is an understated and exquisitely executed as you’d expect from Adrian Zecha, the original Aman founder. The fine opening for his new Aman brand, co-owned with Nisso Developments, aims to reinvent the traditional ryokan for contemporary times. Azumi Setoda has taken over a 140-year-old residence with a pared-back renovation by Kyoto-based architect Shiro Mihara. The lowly communal restaurant is a central hub that serves modern Japanese plates with a Silk Road edge (octopus sashimi, coriander and tofu), tapping into the island’s shipping route heritage. An inner garden is wrapped by 20ft cedar fences known as kaki, showcasing a cherry tree and curved pines. Nearby is Anomura – a meditative space on the site of a former teahouse. The 22 guest rooms are no less serene: swathes of light wood, paper screens raising only halfway to draw focus to the garden views; low beds, bamboo express tubs. But it’s no bubble; Azumi is rooted in community, reflected in its experiences – fruit picking, temple visits – and neighbourhood projects (it repaired the main street outside the hotel). It’s perhaps best embodied by Yuhime, its stock sento bathhouse just opposite, where visitors and locals soak together in steaming baths, lemon bolling on the surface.

FLASH POINT: This is truly inclusive retreat families should check into one of the four two-storey rooms, while Yuhime has 14 simpler spaces for those on a budget. Doubles from about JPY 2,495, azumi.co.jp

SEYCHELLES
ANANTARA MAIA SEYCHELLES VILLAS

Already dominating holidays on the Atlas across the Asia Pacific, Middle East and the Indian Ocean, Anantara has added another corner of paradise to its burgeoning portfolio: Seychelles. Taking over operation from Thailand Minor Hotels Group, the luxury hotel brand has refurbished Maia Seychelles Villas, an ultra-exclusive collection of 50 thatched villas on the island of Mahe. To create the new ambience, Anantara enlisted the help of American designer Bill Bensley, and the beautiful location has been untouched; spread across granite cliffs and backing onto Anse Louis beach and 30 acres of jungle. Bordered by the cooling tropical lush of the 250-square-metre villas, guests are greeted by Hermès bathroom amenities, rainfall showers and private terraces with infinity pools, sunken bathtubs, gazebos and daybeds. Those familiar with Anantara will recognise the Anantara Spa, hidden in the resort’s gardens and an oasis of Balinese-inspired treatments using Osmovitiza products. Guests can arrive here, kick off their shoes and put away their wallets, thanks to the resort’s Beyond All-Inclusive offering. Dining can take place in the privacy of one’s villa, on a private stretch of sand – the ideal spot for a proposal – or three F&B outlets, where five chefs champion five cuisines. Beach yoga, water sports and yacht and helicopter are all popular pursuits.

FLASH POINT: A short walk away from the hotel you’ll find the National Botanical Gardens, lush with palms, orchids and horse to Adalite tomahawks and fruit bats.
Villas from JPY 7,751, maia.anantara.com