



Increasingly, hotels and resorts are becoming destinations in themselves, offering not just luxurious comfort, but a slew of amazing adventure, cultural, gourmet or eco experiences. Our society correspondent Elaine Kim recommends four of the most magical places she has set foot on.



**Aman at Summer Palace
BEIJING, CHINA**

Stepping into Aman at Summer Palace feels like going back in time – the resort is located in a 260-year old complex of the Summer Palace, where guests of Empress Dowager Cixi stayed. While Aman has retained the original architecture and ambience, it has not failed to offer guests modern pleasures: a subterranean spa and a heated indoor pool; exquisite meals at its three restaurants (we enjoyed a Kaiseki meal at Naoki); a private cinema which we had all to ourselves (at midnight!); and luxurious Ming dynasty-inspired rooms. The most magical experience was stepping through a small gate to find the Summer Palace, a Unesco World Heritage site. A stroll away is a beautiful lake, where you can take a private boat ride past the historical marble boat, under bridges and alongside traditional canal-side stalls of Suzhou Market Street.



**Londolozi Private Game Reserve Granite Suites
SABI SANDS GAME RESERVE, SOUTH AFRICA**

One of the earliest trips that I went on with my husband John was a safari in South Africa, and we stayed at Londolozi, which lies nestled in the pristine wilderness of the South Africa's Sabi Sands private reserve. We resided in one of its beautiful Granite Suites, which are three private villas perched along the Sands River. Each villa has a living area, bedroom, bathroom and terrace, all with

gorgeous views of the wilderness. Every day, our ranger Alfie would take us out in search of elephants, zebras, rhinos, lions and leopards. Once, he set up an afternoon tea table for us with a view of a pride of lions. When we returned to the villa after our game drive one day at dusk, we found our terrace lit by candles and lanterns, and there was even a surprise candle-lit dinner laid out.



**Eolo Lodge
ARGENTINIAN PATAGONIA, ARGENTINA**

It's difficult to describe Patagonia, a region of romanticised wilderness, straddling Chile and Argentina and stretching to the southernmost point of the continent. As we were driven from Buenos Aires to Eolo after a flight from El Calafate, the allure of Patagonia was plain to see. The road winds across miles of rugged, windswept steppes alongside Lago Argentina, a glittering lake tinged in brilliant hues of blue and green.

Eolo sits on an estancia (large rural estate) on a hill around which the valley stretches on for miles without another habitation in sight, providing magnificent vistas. Eolo is half an hour from the town of El Calafate, and also half an hour from the otherworldly Perito Moreno glacier.

The lodge planned unforgettable excursions for us: a boat ride and hike at the glacier; a fly-fishing trip; and horseback

riding. Each time they sent us out with an elaborate picnic lunch, amenity-filled backpacks and a member of their staff. Some of the activities we enjoyed best were savouring four-course meals with Malbecs and Patagonian wines (included in the room rate), and watching the stunning view by a log fire in our room, with sightings of wild horses and Hebridean cattle, or a jack rabbit pausing by our window.



**Auberge du Soleil
NAPA VALLEY, USA**

When we visit San Francisco's Bay area in springtime or fall, we love a Napa Valley weekend getaway. Our favourite place is the Auberge du Soleil, a luxurious hillside retreat with breathtaking views of the valley. After a day of wine-tasting and gourmet-dining (guests are offered free use of the resort's Mercedes Benz fleet to explore the valley), it is wonderful to return to your villa to wind down with a glass of wine and a soak in the tub. The rooms are all spacious and sun-drenched, with French doors that open onto private terraces or gardens. We love the little touches – a shelf of thoughtfully-curated books to read; lit candles, bath oils and a glass-enclosed television in the bathroom; a warm fire alight in the hearth when you return to the room after turn-down. There is also a delightful spa where you are invited to soak in three warm springs overlooking Napa Valley, as well as a Michelin-starred restaurant.

