

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Cond Nast Traveler debuts Hot List during coronavirus shutdowns

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The Mandarin Oriental in Lake Como. Image credit: Mandarin Oriental

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Luxury hotel chains Aman, Rosewood, Mandarin Oriental, Ritz-Carlton and Waldorf Astoria hotels have been selected on the 24th annual Cond Nast Traveler Hot List at a time when global travel has mostly been curbed due to the coronavirus.

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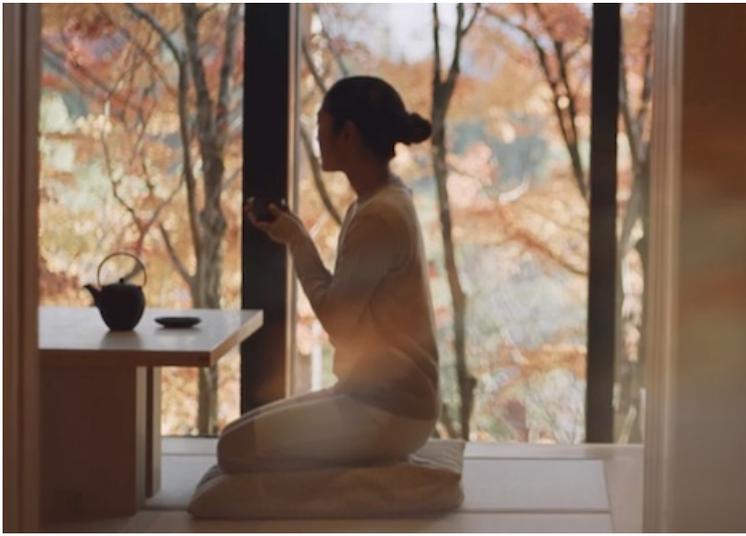
The listings rank the best new hotels and cruises in the world, which are vetted by the magazine's editorial team and shared on its Web site and in the May/June issue. The team visited 400 hotels and ships in person, selected 76 outstanding hotels and 10 ships.

"The travel industry is incredibly resilient and travelers have a lot of trust in it and its institutions," said Erin Florio, travel news director at Cond Nast Traveler, New York.

"The hotels on our Hot List represent the best in terms of service, design, food, location and experience," Ms. Florio said. "You can't lead in these fields without also having the savvy to navigate new obstacles in the travel space.

"In fact, there are so many agencies involved in how these and other hotels will be reopening, that it may never be a safer time to stay in a hotel than in the phase immediately after COVID-19."

Cond Nast Traveler is part of the Cond Nast magazine portfolio that includes Vogue, Vanity Fair, Tatler and The New Yorker.



Aman Kyoto. Image credit: Aman Resorts

Winning hotels

The Mandarin Oriental in Lake Como, Italy; The Mandarin Oriental in Beijing; The Rosewood Hong Kong; The Waldorf Astoria Dubai; Aman Kyoto; The Four Seasons Resort Los Cabos at Costa Palmas; The Four Seasons Astir Palace Hotel Athens; Rosewood Miramar Beach, CA; and the Sensei Lanai, A Four Seasons Resort made this year's hottest hotels list.

"Right now, hotels are demonstrating considerable responsiveness and flexibility," Ms. Florio said.

"From small boutique properties to larger global brands, measures are already being taken to ensure guests will be safe and comfortable when we are all ready to travel again," she said.

The question of when consumers will be ready to travel again is a big one.

The hotel stay may look different from the typical hotel stay in a pre-coronavirus world.

Marriott International and Hilton International are among hotel chains that have announced plans for their hygiene practices that include hospital-level cleanings. There will be hand sanitizers all over, plexiglass partitions in public areas for employee and customer protection, and perhaps even masks.

How employees and guests will interact will take some creativity.

"First and foremost is reimagining how guests interact with each other, staff and hotel spaces to minimize contact and sharing," Ms. Florio said. "It is incredibly likely that shared spaces like bars, restaurants and pools will be used differently.

"For example, mandatory dinner reservations," she said. "No more stools or standing room at the bar. Fewer chairs on the pool decks, restricted access. Maybe odd room numbers one day? Even the next? Speculation, but an idea on how to control. And no sharing pool loungers. You get allocated a chair on arrival for the entire stay."

Experiences at properties will likely include more self-guided hikes than guided fishing trips.

Additionally, in-room dining is set to be a new norm as hotels and resorts look to lower restaurant capacity.

"Room service will go from being a luxury to a necessity," Ms. Florio said. "Also, contactless check-in and phone keys using your phone to unlock your door will become more common.

"Many hotels are talking about waiting a period of days between a guest checking out of a room and a new guest checking into that same room," she said.

"Masks will be compulsory, as well standard self-distancing. Overall, hotels will operate at a lower capacity. And with increased medical staff on-site or close by."



Silversea Silver Explorer in the Northeast Passage. Image credit: Silversea Cruises

Winning cruises

Scenic Eclipse; Regent Seven Seas Splendor; Norwegian Encore; Silversea Silver Explorer in the Northeast Passage; Regent Seven Seas Explorer; Fjords of Iceland; Uniworld S.S. Bon Voyage; Oceania Regatta in Alaska; Celebrity Flora; Hurtigruten Roald Amundsen; and Aurora Expeditions Greg Mortimer are the 10 ships that made Cond Nast Traveler's hot list this year.

"Cruises are already showing recovery," Ms. Florio said. "Bookings are up for 2021. It is important to remember that cruisers may be the most loyal travelers around. The industry is resilient and has been publicly hit before.

"This is not new and they always show great flexibility," she said. "Cruising has been halted for 100 days, and the industry is using that time to revise safety measures that must be approved by the CDC before operations can start again so those onboard can feel more secure once they sail again."

When ships do set sail, it will not look like it did before the travel bans. Just as travel changed after 9/11, it will likely change after the coronavirus pandemic.

"Measures will include more medical screening, more medical training for staff, lower capacity, regulations on shared areas and tweaks to itineraries," Ms. Florio said.

"We are also seeing a surge in river and expedition-style cruises going into next year, both of which operate smaller ships compared to the rest of the fleet, meaning less passengers onboard," she said.



Scenic Eclipse. Image credit: Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours

Domestic tourism

But hotels in exotic locations and faraway cruises may be a bit ambitious for 2020.

When the world first begins to open up to tourism, consumers will likely be traveling to properties near home that do not involve flying.

"We already are seeing a spike in interest in rural, smaller-scale properties that serve an urban drive-in market," Ms. Florio said.

"Domestic travel will rebound more quickly for many reasons, especially areas that are removed from heaving centers - small towns, nature, parks," she said. "Though there is a limit to how deep into nature travelers may be willing to go."

Natural areas right outside of an urban area with safe and accessible medical facilities may be the first stop on an

affluent traveller's roadmap.

"Auberge Lodge at Blue Sky, which is on our Hot List and just opened outside of Park City, is a perfect example of this," Ms. Florio said.

"Also, urbanites will likely look to spend a few days in hotels in their own hometowns so that they don't need to go far, but also get a break from their quarantine homes," she said.

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