

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

How Cond Nast Traveler chose its pandemic-era Hot List

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Higashiyama Niseko Village, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve. Image credit: Ritz-Carlton/Cond Nast Traveler

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Cond Nast Traveler's 25th annual Hot List includes new properties from Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton and other hospitality brands that have provided elevated experiences amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The 2021 list includes 69 properties from 28 different countries and territories, as vetted and selected by *Cond Nast Traveler's* international network of correspondents. As travelers begin feeling more comfortable taking leisure trips, curating the Hot List a year into a global pandemic came with challenges and successes.

"We needed to make sure our messaging around what matters right now in travel reflected the reality of 2020," said Erin Florio, travel news director at *Cond Nast Traveler*, New York. "The travel industry was hit hard; it no longer felt appropriate to put out a list that celebrated only certain aspects of travel.

"Though we factored in the design, food, and amenities when settling on the final list, we also considered the idea of hospitality in a larger way," she said. "That meant looking at how the hotels managed to make people feel both safe and welcome, and how they prioritized their staff's well-being.

"Hotel staffers are some of the heroes of this pandemic and this Hot List needed to reflect and reward that."

Hospitality meets health and safety

The Hot List includes newly opened hotels from around the world. Among the countries represented are the United States, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina, Lebanon, Kenya, South Africa and Vietnam.

Notable winners include the Four Seasons Madrid; the Four Seasons Bangkok; Japan's Higashiyama Niseko Village, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve; Preferred Hotels' Lake House on Canandaigua in New York and Commodore Perry Estate, Auberge Resorts Collection in Austin ([see story](#)).



The Four Seasons Bangkok has a bar, spa, pool and other amenities. Image credit: Four Seasons/Cond Nast Traveler

"We take great pride in the fact that every property on Hot List each year is vetted by our trusted network of editors and contributors, no exceptions," Ms. Florio said. "With travel restrictions, that proved challenging.

"We had to be more strategic, coordinating our contributors in different markets to be the eyes and the ears for the brand more closely than years' past, while making sure we were not putting anyone including the hotel's staff at risk," she said.

The winners range from intimate boutiques in ski towns to luxurious lakeside cabins and glamorous hotels in bustling cities.

A commonality, according to Ms. Florio, is how each property creatively incorporated health and safety measures to ensure guests felt comfortable. For instance, some hotels added more outdoor space or adapted food and beverage concepts, while maintaining high-quality experiences and service.



Guests at Cielo Lodge can rent out the entire eco-lodge for their "bubble." Image credit: Cielo Lodge/Cond Nast Traveler

"This is a list of properties that are responsible without sacrificing the joy we all seek through travel, now maybe more than ever," Ms. Florio said.

"The right hotel won't give a guest any reason to worry about safety measures and protocols, which will help travelers relax and get on with what they checked in to do be on vacation," she said. "It's hospitality 101 applied to the times."

Ready to travel

Travelers are ready for vacations again, according to Cond Nast Traveler's "What Matters Now" research study which gauges consumer attitudes about travel throughout the pandemic.

A February 2021 survey found that nearly two in five respondents had already booked travel departing by this summer. Luxury travelers, those with household incomes of at least \$150,000, were 1.3 times more likely to have already booked a trip departing within the next 12 months.

More than three-quarters of luxury travelers are looking to travel internationally, and 65 percent are interested in multi-destination trips.

Cond Nast Traveler will continue to serve as a resource for expectant travelers, having expanded the Hot List to restaurants, transportation and destinations to be revealed online and in its May/June 2021 issue out this week.

"We added restaurants, transportation and destinations to this year's list, as a way to further celebrate the industry and everything it has overcome in 2020," Ms. Florio said.

Hospitality brands and independent hotels are also eager to welcome back guests, launching new marketing campaigns and introducing more mindful and immersive initiatives ([see story](#)).

"Responsible travel is a terrific way to help economies bounce back from the impact of COVID," Ms. Florio said. "Our Hot List is a celebration of the best in the industry, for sure.

"And this year it's also encouragement to travel again and help places and communities get back on their feet," she said. "The industry deserves it and so do we as travelers."

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