

VICEROY SUGAR BEACH

ST LUCIA, CARIBBEAN

What's in a name change? Quite a lot, actually. The rechristening and slick refurb of the Jalousie Plantation, by funksters Viceroy, would surely have raised a smile from the late Lord Glenconner. Fed up with the mega-villas of Mustique, he flounced off to St Lucia and, in 1981, bought this old estate in the lap of the glorious Piton peaks (now Unesco listed) to create the next jetsetters' playground. Today's owner, Roger Myers, one-time accountant to the rock-star firmament, has finally realised Glenconner's vision for this hotel in its 100-acre tangle of jungle. Clapboard cottages and their plunge pools cling to the hillside with outrageous views of those soaring volcanic cones, and thatched beach bungalows sit right up against the icing-sugary sandy shores. The Rainforest Spa with its treetop cabanas is enchanting, while the lip of the reshaped swimming pool is the place to hang for supercharged ocean sunsets. The tropics don't get any hotter than this. **Website** viceroysugarbeach.com **Book it** British Airways (ba.com) offers seven nights from £2,060, including flights and breakfast.



BIRKENHEAD HOUSE

HERMANUS, SOUTH AFRICA

This is the pinnacle of seaside living, in a Nantucket-meets-Provence style. Eleven bedrooms are set around a groovy split-level pool. Inside are painted armoires, pretty chandeliers, shell-framed mirrors, Venetian headboards and vases full of lilies. Decanters of whisky are left on silver trays next to marble baths; contemporary art punctuates the walls. The eagle eye of GM Shane Brummer, a gorgeous bronzed surfer, ensures everything runs as smooth as honey – including seafood barbecues under the stars (or oxtail stews with local merlot when the evenings grow cold). Birkenhead is often overlooked because sister properties Royal Malewane and Le Residence are so in-your-face fabulous, but it's good to remember this little nugget. **Website** birkenheadhouse.com **Book it** Africa Travel (020 7843 3580) offers three nights from £1,665, full board, including flights and car hire.



SONG SAA

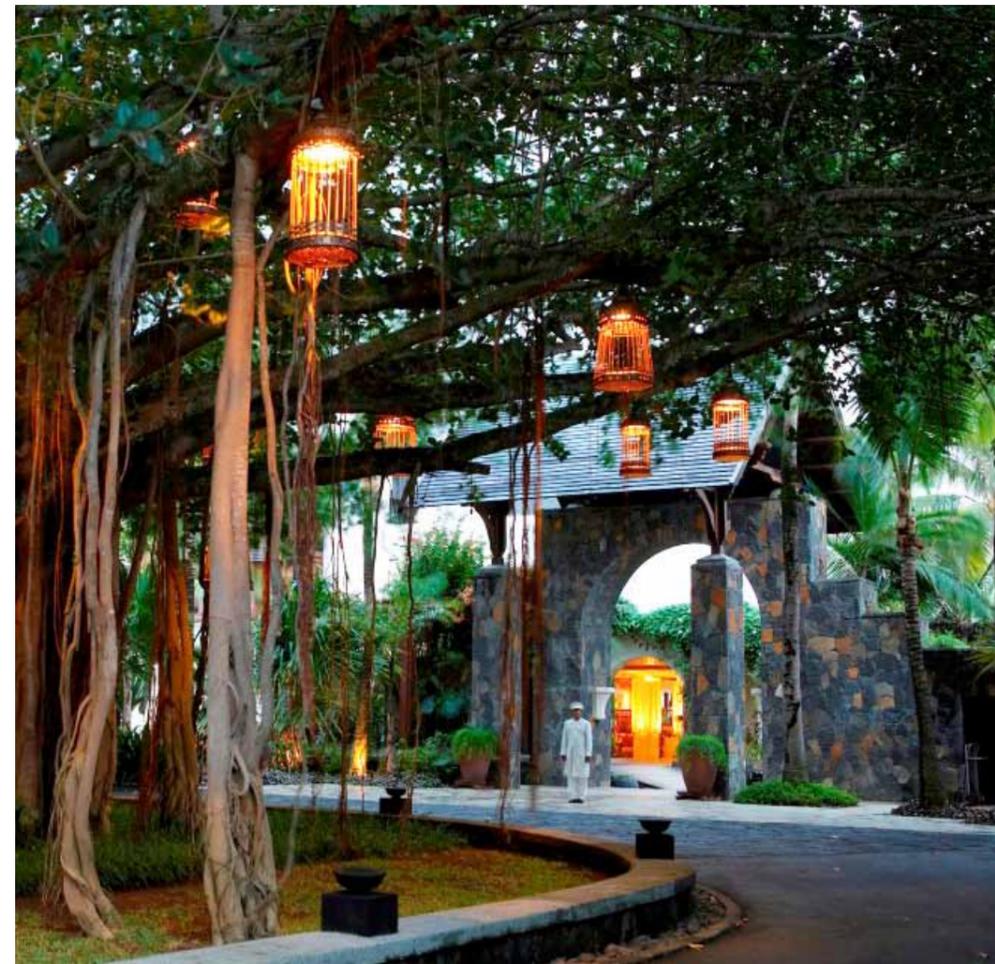
KOH RONG ARCHIPELAGO, CAMBODIA

Now this is something special. Two private isles adrift in the turquoise seas of the Gulf of Thailand, dotted with over-water jungle-timber villas, roofed with dried grass, each with their own pool. The detail astounds: the sunken bath's driftwood rack, studded with tealights for your night-time soak in Aesop scents; the posts on the bed, wrapped tight in fine muslin during the day, only to be unwound by delicate hands at turndown. An Ila spa chimes perfectly with the local philosophy, as does the food. Chef Neil Wager, who came here from North Island (wahoo!), whips up Khmer classics like banana-blossom salad or crab spring rolls, in a restaurant with a 360° view of the ocean and white sands. **Website** songsaa.com **Book it** Cazenove + Loyd (020 7384 2332) offers seven nights from £4,495, full board, including flights and transfers.

LE TOUESSROK

TROU D'EAU DOUCE, MAURITIUS

Le Touessrok is all about service. Finger-snapping, heel-clicking, brilliant service. Yes, effortless easy-breezy charm is a Mauritian thing, but it's mainlined here. Staff will scoop you up from the airport in an icy air-conditioned Cayenne; steal the hearts of your under-fives and entertain them so you can wolf down your grilled snapper in peace; appear with a scoop of mango sorbet when you least expect but most need it; and not only remember your name but how many ice cubes you take in your vodka tonic. This old-school hotel is one of the original island hotspots but it still feels fresh. There's lots of shiny stuff – a Givenchy spa, an outrageously preened golf course, huge villas. And there's lots of simple stuff too, like searching for starfish in the calm lagoon, spotting the tortoises snoozing in the shade of a banyan tree, and eating homemade pizza with sand between your toes. **Website** letouessrokrecreation.com **Book it** Seasons (01244 202002) offers seven nights from £1,995, half board, including flights and transfers.



HOTEL DE LA PAIX

HUA HIN, THAILAND

Climb the massive marble steps and the view at the top socks you one – mirror-shiny pool; sexy, sharp edges. Rooms are a bit New York loft, all polished concrete floors and huge, low-slung, wooden-platformed bed. The Apple TV is fully loaded and wi-fi pings on without a password. There's not much to do here except laze, so grab a cabana on the endless sand or trail over to the small but stylish spa for a skinny mochaccino: not Starbucks but a ground-coffee scrub and massage with lashings of coconut butter. The morning buffet is a fit-to-burst pan-Asian/farang feast – all kinds of steaming noodles if you're feeling brave, or boiled eggs and mini-muffins with English breakfast tea if you're not. You won't find full-moon frolics but, at just two hours from Bangkok by car, it brings a blast of the beach that little bit closer. **Website** hoteldelapaixhh.com **Book it** Double from £200, including breakfast. EVA Air (evaair.com) flies to Bangkok daily, from £760. ▷

