

Spending it

Four trips of a lifetime

by Ruth Jackson

Best for adventure

There's something magical about Bhutan, says Francesca Syz in *Condé Nast Traveller*. The largely Buddhist nation is "a pristine wilderness of soaring mountains, plunging gorges and piercingly green forests, all dusted with tiny villages aflutter with prayer flags". Stay at Uma by Como, Punakha, a collection of villas where "the thundering Mo Chhu ('mother river') rushes past to meet Pho Chhu ('father river') further upstream". The villas are "suffused with natural light and an earthy colour palette runs through the décor", says *Luxury-insider.com*, and a "chic open-plan restaurant" serves local delicacies. You can go white-water rafting, hiking and cycling, while the 'Shambhala Retreat' features a traditional Bhutanese hot stone bath as well as "a plethora of massage and body therapy plans to indulge in".

Doubles from £315 a night.
Contact: 00 975 827 1597, www.umasbycomo.com

Best for wildlife

If you're lucky, you might spot black rhinos, elephants or black-maned lions during your stay at North Camp,



Uma by Como is set in the pristine wilderness of Punakha in Bhutan

Ngorongoro Crater Lodge, in Tanzania. But one spectacular sight you definitely won't miss is the world's largest intact caldera – a cauldron-like collapsed volcano, which is host to one of the densest populations of wildlife in the world. The lodge sits right on the crater's rim, says Francesca Syz, and is split into three camps. North Camp is modelled on a traditional mud-and-thatch Maasai homestead, with the huts blending into the landscape. Inside these huts are "wonderfully ornate", with chandeliers, teak panelling, raw silk curtains, Persian

carpets, and gilt mirrors, says *Frommers.com*. A private butler "will light the fire before you return to your room at night, or surprise you with a bubble bath after a game drive".

Suites from £1,240 a night.
Contact: 00 27 11 809 4300,
www.andbeyondafrica.com,
comohotels.com/umapunakha.

Best for diving

Belize offers some of the world's best scuba diving. It's home to "a barrier reef second only to that of Australia", says Ben Ross in *The Independent*. You can swim with "huge rays, parrot fish and lugubrious loggerhead turtles". At Turtle Inn you can enjoy the sort of luxury Hollywood stars are used to – director Francis Ford Coppola is the owner.

The resort consists of 25 "Balinese-style one- and two-bedroom thatched villas, all strung along a narrow strip of beach". It's luxurious, but without fussy mod-cons: "ceiling fans creak overhead; candles are lit for you as night falls, as if using electricity were a teeny bit gauche". Dining options include fresh seafood, Italian, beachside barbecue or Auntie Luba's Kitchen, a shack serving local dishes such as rice and beans and coconut shrimp.

Cottages, sleeping two, from £199 a night with breakfast. Contact: 00 501 523 3244, www.coppolaresorts.com.

Best for those who have seen it all

Savvy travellers have been visiting Uruguay, "the safest of the South American countries", for years, says *Stylist* magazine. But if you haven't been yet, the opening of "modernist retreat" Playa Vik gives you the perfect excuse. It "could be the most stunning hotel" you will ever encounter. It is made up of six *casas*, a central 'sculpture' building, which houses four further suites, an underground playroom, a spa and wine cellar, as well as an elevated infinity pool.

The magazine "loved the mix of ultra-modern design crossed with an eco conscience". Each *casa* is individually designed, but all have "amazing 'living roofs' strewn with hot-pink bougainvillea, retractable glass walls and wooden terraces". In the evening, enjoy a low-key meal, then have drinks by the fire pit, admiring the majestic coastline, watching "what is considered the best sunset in the world".

Casas from £490 per night, with breakfast.
Contact: 00 59 89 460 5212,
www.playavik.com.

