

THE VICTORIA AT HOLKHAM

NORFOLK, UK

£ Blimey, talk about sand castles in the air. Add a dash of Enid Blyton, nip in a piquant flavouring of the Raj and give the dogs a bone. How this gastro-pub has hit the front, with 11 louche bedrooms, a country-house vibe and the now the extreme sport of kite-buggying on the seven-mile Holkham beach, where the final scene of *Shakespeare in Love* was filmed and the Queen has a beach hut. Viscount and Viscountess Coke have restored the Victoria with the exotic flair of India-goes-Norfolk. The chef makes the best fish cakes east of the Ivy and breakfasts are as robust as country-house breakfasts should be (too much of a fag to prepare when you're exhausted by actually owning a country house). Guests are solving the M11 problem – where is it? – by returning to the Victoria by helicopter. It's a star in the firmament of the 21st-century generation of funky rural hotels.

Tel 01328 711008 Fax 01328 711009

Website victoriaatholkham.co.uk

Rates Double, from £100

ADA HOTEL

TURKEY

The only hotel in which to stay in rural Turkey. Otherwise, you're better off on a boat – Westminster Classic Tours (tel: 01225 835488) is very good, with comfortable *gulets* and splendid lecturers so one can sail the sights. The Ada is near Bodrum (but not too near), and has real charm. The staff – 50 to just 14 rooms – are warm and friendly. The pool is too cold? They will turn up the heating. You don't want to see people thinner than you in the hammam? The whole marble palace can be reserved, and you can lie alone, palely steaming on a circular dais overlooking the bay of Turkbuku. A movie? There is a private cinema. (There are also DVD and CD players in the rooms.) Take a pile of books and laze at the beach club – smart decking stretches out into the

crystal sea – or on your terrace, on a vast daybed covered in white cushions. The executive suites have big living rooms and four-posters and smell of roses (the hotel is cleaned with rosewater – how Scheherazade is that?). The food is much improved: wonderful meze, home-made noodles, crushed roasted walnuts and mini koftas, and special chicken wrapped with aubergine and tomatoes, eaten on a gorgeous terrace overlooking the pool. Ideally, spend a couple of days in Istanbul at the boutique Four Seasons in the old writers' prison, then chill out at the Ada.

Tel 00 90 252 377 5915

Fax 00 90 252 377 5379

Website adahotel.com

UK reservations ITC Classics (tel: 01244 355527)

Rates Double, from £115; suite, from £140



Ada Hotel, Turkey

PARROT CAY

TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS, CARIBBEAN

When Parrot Cay opened in a billow of white colonial muslin and movie stars, it signalled the arrival of the new Caribbean. Suddenly, all the tropical-print establishments with sloppy service looked fly-blown and second-rate. Bruce Willis breezed into Parrot Cay, and now has his villa there. Donatella Versace had open-sided tents by the edge of the turquoise water for herself, her daughter and her bodyguards. Michael Winner said it was like a scene from a Fellini movie. The water in the spa is scented with ginger; there's 88 feet of pashmina-soft sand for each guest. The thatched beach cottages are divine, and it's on a private island. Nothing is as inspiring as arriving in paradise by plane.

Tel 001 649 946 7788 Fax 001 649 946 7789

Website parrot-cay.com

UK reservations Abercrombie & Kent (tel: 0845 070 0614)

Rates Double, from £210; suite, from £355

COUR DES LOGES

RUE DE BOEUF, LYON

£ The must-go-to stop on the way to skiing in the French Alps. The Cour des Loges, an intensely romantic Renaissance hotel with stone galleries, beamed ceilings, winding staircases and nine courtyards, is what you get when you drive to the Alps, or the Riviera, a point. It is the latest creation of the accomplished, stylish and imaginative hotelier Jocelyne Sibuet and her husband Jean-Louis. Together they revived Megève with Les Fermes de Mari and now have a petit palais with a challenging modern chef, Nicolas Le Bec, in the capital of French gastronomy. It is an elegant dream, contemporary but rich with taffeta and mirrored lighting. The bar was originally a dairy, and the drawing room was a laboratory for Philippe de Lyon, physician to the Tsar.

Tel 00 33 4 72 77 44 44 Fax 00 33 4 72 40 93 61

Website courdesloges.com

Rates Double, from £130; suite, from £245

VILLA DES ORANGERS

MARRAKESH

The only stylish place to stay in Marrakesh, the nearest exotic place in winter, where there is an intense romance about the all-pervading scent of roses and the heady colours of the souks. It's not for everyone – the Moroccans are disconcertingly pushy and *tagines* of limited gastronomic appeal – but the Villa des Orangers is an utterly charming oasis. Small, with pretty courtyards planted with orange trees, and a swimming-pool on the roof (five of the rooms have direct access to it) overlooking the city to the Djem el-Fna square (most enticing at night, with twinkly lights and sweetmeat sellers rather than the sad snake-charmers of daytime). Bedrooms are peaceful and attractive. The hotel mixes the service of a hotel with the character of a *riad* (the Marrakesh B&B). Best combined with a few days at Amanjena, outside the city, or the new contemporary-hotel Kasbah Agafay: just four beautiful tents in which to chill with the mountains and the desert.

Tel 00 212 44 38 46 38 Fax 00 212 44 38 51 23

Website villadesorangers.com

UK reservations Abercrombie & Kent (tel: 0845 070 0612)

Rates Double, from £180; suite, from £240