

MATAKAURI LODGE

Lake Wakatipu, New Zealand

This will blow you over; it's one of those rare places that exist because big-money billionaires sometimes have hobbies. It's owned by the septuagenarian king of Wall Street Julian Robertson, with his all-seeing Tiger fund and a passion for Kiwi everything. Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers are also in his stable, but it's this new colt that has got everyone buzzing. On the icy-cold shores of Lake Wakatipu, the countryside here is epic. Go heli-skiing and heli-hiking and you will barely be able to spot the chopper flying away against the vast visage of the mountainsides – snowcapped, brooding behemoths. And then, amid all the rugged and the rough, is this sanctuary, where everything is light and feel-good, low-key but saturated with a jumble of colours and complete comfort. This is where the great and the good stay in New Zealand, and you can see why. While lots of other lodges in the country look to American style, Robertson sources the best local talent and lets them run with it. Raging fires, windows flung open to the pine forest, only 11 rooms, a spa you wander to past a snow flurry, and a knockout restaurant that'll make you squeak: the home-cured Aoraki salmon with beet essence, tartare and sashimi is worth the 10,000 miles alone. Superior pedigree, timeless style, faultless. **Website** matakauri.co.nz **Tel** 00 64 3 441 1008 **Book it** Air New Zealand (tel: 0800 028 4149) flies from London Heathrow to Queenstown via Auckland 12 times a week, from £1,130.



PERA PALACE

Istanbul, Turkey

This city is irresistible – which is partly why you love this hotel. It doesn't even hit you straight away, but when it does... It's a proper injection of authentic Ottoman grandeur, relatively unadorned, which is not to say it isn't completely over the top. What they've done here is restore the palace's 1892 splendour without making it feel like a museum (wi-fi that works, baths as deep as Proust). This was the most dazzling hotel in Constantinople, which received passengers off the Orient-Express and hadn't been updated until this year. Garbo, Greene and Agatha Christie adored the Pera and its fading Byzantine glory. The room in which Christie wrote *Murder on the Orient Express*, No. 411, is still available, but better to book the lilac Greta Garbo or one of the high-ceilinged bedrooms on the second or third floor. A pianist plays as all of Istanbul (some in the shortest skirts in Turkey) take tea in the Kubbeli Saloon beneath gargantuan domes. And probably take home the exquisite Turkish cakes from the hotel's own patisserie. With the American consulate close by, the spies and secret policemen are already back in the Orient Bar, eavesdropping on each other and drinking raki. To live dangerously, ride in the original 118-year-old lift, the first in Turkey and the last word in social elevation here. Might there be concubines gazing down from the harem? Ah, the atmosphere of the place. May not work in Notting Hill, though. **Website** perapalace.com **Book it** Cox & Kings (tel: 020 7873 5000) offers three nights from £685, including flights, transfers and breakfast.▷

OBEROI UDAIVILAS

Udaipur, India

Of all the bustling beauty found in Rajasthan, it's Udaipur that is unmissable. It is, hand on beating heart, one of the most glamorous places in the world, with swirling dancers in the eaves of ruined forts, fireworks over the water and twinkling wooden boats quietly making their way across to shore in the dark. (On a Monday.) Not only is the definitive Taj Lake Palace hotel here, but so too is the new, incredibly sparkling Leela. Udaivilas, however, is the ultimate dreadnought of decadence, a modern construction that is feudally commanding – its wonderful domes and fountains, its bold mosaics, its bright and bristling turquoise private pools that drift excessively into one another. The cocoon of Oberoi: the Oreo cookies in the fridge, salad practically washed in Evian, the vast armies of people sweeping in ADD-like fashion. It's both brave and playful and yet entirely serious. Just stuff your face with neon-pink crazy cake and go Mughal-mad. **Website** oberoihotels.com **Book it** Greaves India (tel: 020 7487 9120) offers four nights from £2,000, including flights, transfers and private guide.

