

the world's 100 BEST HOTELS

BEACHFRONT BOLTHOLES

THE FORTRESS Sri Lanka Prepare yourself for a dramatic arrival at this beachside retreat: as you pull up outside colossal, keep-out walls, a lowering wooden gate creaks open to reveal a flash of cobalt, glimpsed through colonnaded courtyards bursting with bougainvillea. The Fortress has a plum position on Sri Lanka's south coast – a string of pink-gold bays wreathed in fine, salty spray. The place has a colonial feel, with whitewashed walls and ochre-tiled roofs. By contrast, rooms are slick, with gadgetry aplenty (including a jet bath with glowing lights that change colour) and designer trimmings. But it's the view beyond that steals the show: mile upon mile of perfect sands, backed by palms that curve towards the hazy horizon. Doubles from £197, B&B (00 94 91 438 0909, www.thefortress.lk).



HOTEL DU PALAIS Biarritz

Glide past the gates, through the gardens and up to the stately ochre-red pile: immediately, you are whisked back to an era of grand living. Napoleon III built the palace on a headland above the ocean – and the 19th-century summer court followed him in, if still could. The vast marble and gilt lobby, bars and restaurants are of imperial scale. Bedrooms have the same old-school wow factor, with princely beds and sumptuous drapes – the drama of the Atlantic is just beyond. Doubles from £313, room only (00 33 559 416400, www.hotel-du-palais.com).

AZURA Mozambique Benguema Island combines the beauty of a Maldivian beach with the vibrancy of an African village, and Azura adds sexy sophistication to the mix. Rooms are beachfront, with a striking seascape decor, artisan ornaments, alfresco bathrooms and a lounge in your private infinity pool so you can wallow while watching the sun set over the sand dunes. The spa specialises in African-infused treatments (of course!), and the chef trained under Heston Blumenthal at the Fat Duck, Yum. Doubles from £575, all inclusive (00 27 11 258 0180, www.azura-retreats.com).

FRANGIPANI Bequia

If you want a grand, Sandy Lane-style Caribbean experience, you've come to the wrong place. But if your idea of paradise is a cool breeze through wooden shutters rather than air-con, you've hit gold at Frangipani, in the Caribbean-island cluster of St Vincent and the Grenadines. There are idyllic bays reachable only by a put-put motorboat from the pier, and the evening's entertainment centres on rum punches served as you traipse your feet in the sea, watching the sun melt on the horizon. Bequia is glossy-mag heaven at package prices – so whereas on west-coast Barbados your wallet will be flat in seconds, here it'll stay plump in your pocket. Doubles from £32, room only; Garden Room (recommended) from £65, room only (00 1 784 458 3255, www.frangipanibequia.com).

MAIA Seychelles

If Tahitian beaches are known for their Crusoe-esque stilted houses, and Caribbean coastlines recognisable thanks to coconut-



Clockwise from top left: the clear waters and jungle view from Maia, Seychelles; a fiery night sky in Sal Salis, Western Australia; poolside at Hotel du Palais, Biarritz; the white-hot Farol Design Hotel, Portugal

heavy palms, a Seychellois swathe is defined by those smooth boulders – as tall as a townhouse and lapped by water so clear you can see fish darting about your feet. Maia has such a beach: its own, used only by those lucky enough to be staying in one of its 30 villas. It's the sort of shore that looks much as explorers must have found it centuries ago, with dense jungle right up to the sands' edge (and only the odd guest in a yoga position to give it modern context). One-bedroom villas from £1,266, B&B, with Butler service (00 248 390000, www.maia.com.sc).

ST MORITZ Cornwall

Phew – what a breath of fresh sea air. All rooms at the (unchintzy) St Moritz are light and breezy with a luxury beach-hut look, while suites are the stars of the show, showing off views of the Camel Estuary from plump armchairs. By day, a short amble takes you to a perfect rock-pooling cove; you're also a hop, skip and jump from Padstow and Polzeath. Beach days wind up with lemon sole (the chef is from Soho House in New York), and dry skin is scrubbed back to life in the Cowshed spa. Doubles from £95, B&B (01208 862242, www.stmoritzhotel.co.uk).

FAROL DESIGN HOTEL Nr Lisbon, Portugal

Clinging like a limpet to a rocky outcrop in the Atlantic, Farol is part 19th-century mansion, part glassy extension. All of it, though, is slanted to overlook the ocean; from the outdoor bar and four-poster-framed pool, to the daybeds on terraces and the summer-time massage sessions on the rocks. Nine individual 'designer rooms' are superglam; designer Ana Salazar's corner-bound effort has two walls of glass overhanging the ocean. Next stop America. Doubles from £103, B&B (00 351 214 853490, www.farol.com.pt).

FOUR SEASONS SHARM EL SHEIKH Egypt

Sharm is one of the best cures for winter blues – and the views from the Four Seasons don't let you forget it. Pick either a balcony suite with views of the Red Sea, or a ground-floor pad – they open to the ocean, so that you can be on the beach double-quick. And what a beach. A curl of soft, clay-red sand, with loungers planted about between Egyptian urns and preened paths. It's an unusual but perfect look: as if you're staying in an African prince's home. Doubles from £233, B&B (00 20 69 360 3555, www.fourseasons.com/sharmelshikh).

SAL SALIS Western Australia

It's camping – canvas tents, open-air showers, nights under the stars – but not as you know it. Cheese platters, luxury linens, and designer toiletries – this is Sal Salis on Australia's western coast, a collection of five top-end tents moments from the shore. The beach leaves you breathless: chalk-white, squishy sand; clear waters; rainbow-coloured fish below the surface; and jumping kangaroos on the beach above. Beds for two from £646 per night full board, including guided kayak and snorkel tours (00 61 2 9571 6399, www.salalis.com.au).

FAZENDA SAO FRANCISCO Bahia, Brazil

Corumbau is a Brazilian beach that outshines even the foxy, string-bikinied girls who saunter along it. Fifteen kilometres of blush-inducing beauty – two of them belonging to Fazenda Sao Francisco, a converted farm that's now a stylish beach-side lodge with private bungalows. The only major problem is how best to enjoy the beach: lying beneath one of the sexy gazebos dotted along the shore, or from the black slate pool which has prime views (and, mercifully, no chance of sand in your sunscreen). Doubles from £270, full board (00 11 3078 4411, www.corumbau.com.br).

Bargain bed

ST MORITZ

Cornwall

Phew – what a breath of fresh sea air. All

rooms at the (unchintzy) St Moritz are light and breezy with a luxury beach-hut look, while suites are the stars of the show, showing off views of the Camel Estuary from plump armchairs. By day, a short amble takes you to a perfect rock-pooling cove; you're also a hop, skip and jump from Padstow and Polzeath. Beach days wind up with lemon sole (the chef is from Soho House in New York), and dry skin is scrubbed back to life in the Cowshed spa. Doubles from £95, B&B (01208 862242, www.stmoritzhotel.co.uk).