

On the Horizon

Next up on your travel list: three off-the-beaten-path destinations that have gotten the hotels they deserve.



The Domaine des Etangs chateau in Massignac, France.
Below left: The property's family salon.



Domaine des Etangs *Massignac, France*

At daybreak, the birdsong is almost comically cacophonous: skylarks shrilling, moorhens cooing, a woodpecker rut-tut-tutting. Their habitat—and mine, for the weekend at least—is the bucolic landscape of forests and valleys surrounding the Domaine des Etangs, a turreted 11th-century castle now repurposed as one of France's most intriguing hotels.

The Domaine des Etangs is in Massignac, between the towns of Cognac

and Limoges—an underexplored and overlooked part of the country. Yet the region, with its rolling, romantic countryside, unspoiled towns and villages, and centuries-old artisan culture, is spectacular. Now this remarkable property is inviting visitors to discover an entirely new part of France.

At first glance, the Domaine looks like a regular, albeit regal, French chateau. There are manicured gardens bursting with lavender, espaliered cherry trees overlooking a working water mill, and aproned staff ferrying herbs from the kitchen garden. Look a little closer, however, and you'll



Right: The entrance hall at the Domaine des Etangs château. Below: The hotel's spiral vegetable garden.



start to notice how the ancient has been fused with the modern at every turn.

On the grassland next to the hotel is an enormous gold ring—a sculpture named *The Sun*, by Italian artist Ugo Rondinone. (Soon it will be joined in the garden by *To Whom It May Concern*, a piece by the conceptual-art duo Elmgreen & Dragset.) Inside, Regency chairs are upholstered in Hermès silk in burnt tangerine, and an original *Star Wars* poster hangs alongside antique tarot cards and framed Rimbaud musings. Suites—some almost 500 square feet—feel more like art galleries than hotel rooms. A chintz and fleur-de-lis extravaganza this isn't.

The hotel owner, Garance Primat, is the scion of one of France's wealthiest dynasties and spared no expense. In a bathroom off the lobby, I spotted a Fazioli grand piano worth around \$200,000; a few minutes later, I noticed another one in the drawing room. There are original Matisse paintings hanging in the bedrooms and high-design details like Fabien Cappello light fixtures everywhere you look. Primat inherited the 2,500-acre estate when her father, Didier, who made his fortune in the oil industry, died in 2008. After a seven-year renovation, she launched the

property as a 29-room hotel—and an homage to her father's love of nature. (A clear horizon reveals no utility poles: Primat senior had the power lines buried, so as not to ruin the vista.) There are few high-tech distractions here; instead, guests are encouraged to hike, cycle, or drive one of the property's electric cars around the sprawling grounds, or to fish, row boats, and ride horses.

Etangs means “ponds,” and the estate has seven, along with six farmhouses—each of which can be booked as family accommodation. A remarkable 35 species of dragonflies thrive in this Arcadia, so the dragonfly is the omnipresent symbol of the hotel. Keen-eyed guests will spot them etched in flagstones, embroidered on the Slabbinck linens, and printed on the holders of the custom rose-and-myrtle-scented candles stocked in every room.

Primat's aesthetic ambitions are what make the hotel so singular. She wanted to construct an artwork-cum-library, so she enlisted the help of London antiquarian bookseller Heywood Hill and Paris-based designer Raphael Navot to create two mezzanine-level libraries that face each other in La Laiterie, the former dairy that now serves as the hotel's art gallery. One collection is entitled “Of the Past”—think leather books and blotters—the other, “Of the Future,” with tomes on metaphysics arranged on curved, space-age shelves.

There is also much to discover beyond the hotel. Limoges has been a center of porcelain-making for more than 300 years, and the industry continues to thrive. At the Bernardaud factory store I picked up a gilt-edged coffee cup at half price, and some stunning white flatware at Porcelaines de la Fabrique, which makes



Lekkerwater Lodge in South Africa sits only a few hundred feet from the Indian Ocean.

all the porcelain for a certain very famous French luxury-goods company. Afterward I stopped for a lunch of white asparagus and spelt risotto at the exquisite restaurant La Cuisine du Cloître before heading back to the hotel.

A visit to this part of France wouldn't be complete without sampling some Cognac. So the following morning, I drove to the Bourgoin *maison* in nearby St.-Saturnin, where I met Frédéric Bourgoin, the dashing fourth-generation Cognac maker now heading up the business. The young Bourgoin gave me a tour of the estate in what used to be his grandfather's 1960s Peugeot D4B, tearing around the vineyards at breakneck speed. Bourgoin is part of a new wave of Cognac producers bringing a *soigné* effortlessness to the region's heritage brands. Larger houses, such as Rémy Martin and Château de Cognac, are also within striking distance.

On my last morning I sat outside on the lawn and recorded the avian symphony that had come to define my stay at the Domaine. The greatest testament to the hotel? I've listened to that soundtrack every day since I got home. *Rooms from \$391; domainedesetangs.com.*

—Jemima Sissons

Lekkerwater Beach Lodge

South Africa

Lekkerwater is Afrikaans for “nice water,” not something typically associated with the southernmost tip of Africa, an area known for treacherous seas and roiling currents. The name was inherited by Lekkerwater Beach Lodge, an unusual new property on an isolated stretch of coastline east of Cape Town. Formerly a local farmer's rustic beach house, Lekkerwater was constructed in 1939 about 350 feet from the crashing waves of the Indian Ocean, closer to the water than any building would be allowed today. In the 1980s the South African military expropriated the cottage, along with 37 miles of adjacent coast, to create a missile-testing range. Later it would become the weekend home of F. W. de Klerk, when he was South Africa's president, and a portion of the missile range was eventually turned into De Hoop Nature Reserve.

De Hoop covers about the same area as New York City, but it holds more plant species than the United Kingdom.

Considered the jewel of the Cape Floral Region, a UNESCO World Heritage site extending along the South African coastal escarpment, it shelters twice as many plant species per square mile as the Amazon, plus zebra herds, baboon colonies, and the occasional leopard. Environmental regulations prevent almost any new construction in the area, so Natural Selection, a leading South African safari operator, jumped at the chance when the former presidential home went on the market. Those regulations also prevented it from building anything larger than the cottage's footprint even after a wildfire tore through the area just weeks after the sale closed in 2015.

Rebuild it they did, though, and the result is a sleek, modern lodge with room for only 14 guests at a time, divided among seven detached cabins. Those cabins are stylish but simple, with wood-burning stoves and ocean views that offer the chance to wake up, look past your feet, and see what most people will come to see: whales.

Between June and October, De Hoop offers the best land-based whale-watching in Africa, if not the world, with thousands of southern right whales migrating here to calve in what is essentially an aquatic game reserve. Humpback and Bryde's whales visit as well, in addition to dolphins and seals. The cabins offer verandas for endless hours of observation where it is unlikely you will ever hear other guests, thanks to the surf.

Lekkerwater's staff-to-guest ratio is small (out of necessity because of the lodge's size) but attentive. Its restaurant features an excellent hyper-local menu. Guest stays are limited to two days, which makes a visit to Lekkerwater the perfect complement to staying at one of Natural Selection's safari camps in Botswana or Namibia, with a helicopter transfer that the operator can arrange. **Rooms from \$268 per person, all-inclusive; naturalselection.travel.**

—Jane Broughton



Grand Anse Bay viewed from the Silversands Grenada resort. *Below:* The property's double-Olympic-length pool.

Silversands Grenada *Grenada*

One of the richest women in the world, a not uncontroversial former leader of a developing country, was staying in a villa just below my balcony at the Silversands resort in Grenada, but I preferred to spy on her neighbor, Mr. Smith, as I'd come to call him. Mr. Smith was not among the guests at the sleek new 43-suite, nine-villa Silversands; he was the owner of a single-room house on stilts next door, with a rooster clucking in the yard.

Much like Silversands, Mr. Smith's appealing home was well-built and

perfectly located, a mango's throw from Grand Anse, Grenada's best beach. An English-speaking country of seven compact islands at the southern end of the Lesser Antilles, Grenada has a developing tourism industry, and Silversands is its first ultra-luxury resort. Its owner, Egyptian tele-tycoon Naguib Sawiris, hopes to make Grenada into a high-end destination, but for now agricultural products like nutmeg and cinnamon (Grenada is one of the world's largest spice producers) are more central to the country's identity.

The resort calls to mind a modern art museum, with long, horizontal lines, creamy stone walls, and sexily blank surfaces. (French firm AW², the team behind

Six Senses Con Dao in Vietnam and Phum Baitang in Cambodia, designed the property, which features an extensive spa and a fleet of Teslas.) Its dominant feature is a catwalk of a pool, double-Olympic length, that has made a splash on social media since the hotel opened. Whether you're taking in the view from your beige-on-beige room, sampling the hotel's collection of small-batch rums at its cigar lounge, or sipping cream of callaloo at its beach-club-style restaurant, the pool always manages to be the center of attention. People tend to stand next to it and stare, as if plumbing its depths for meaning, or waiting for a seaplane full of models to swoop in and skid to a landing.

At one end, the pool directs your eye toward the horizon of Grand Anse Bay, but for me the best view was the other way around—back toward Grenada. The inland view reveals a colorful, irregular landscape dotted by vibrantly painted houses clinging to an exuberantly forested hillside. St. George's was nearly destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, and long, straight lines are not its *métier*, nor are blank façades.

It is a tribute to the resort that it embraces rather than shuns island life. Grand Anse Beach is public, like all of Grenada's waterfront. Nonguests can get a lot closer to the Silversands pool than they could were it in, say, South Beach. Mr. Smith may have been out there cooling his feet in the water, I don't know. I only glimpsed him once during the time I spent looking into his yard, admiring the sturdy simplicity of his elevated home. It was late at night, and a party with a DJ was taking place at the villa of the woman under my balcony. The bass thumped. Winds rocked the palm trees. Mr. Smith swung in a hammock out in his yard, enjoying the music, peeling a mango. *Rooms from \$800; silversandsgrenada.com.* — Ben Ryder Howe

