

## ESSENTIAL SELECTION

# BEST KEPT SECRETS

Seeking a slice of paradise? **Laura Binder** uncovers to-die-for digs in remote locations...

*For an African adventure...*

## Fundu Lagoon, Tanzania

If you have to be stranded somewhere, few places will serve you quite so well as Fundu Lagoon: helplessly remote, the only way to reach it is by boat. Once there, sink your toes into its cotton-white beach and pad your way to one of just 18 tented rooms, each styled by fashion designer Ellis Flyte (think 'shabby chic'). Stays bring

chances to relax by the bucketload – its al fresco eatery is a good place to start, with a plate of fish fresh from the Indian Ocean. And if you do want to leave the island, the sea is the only way: enjoy a dhow cruise under a pink sky (a dreamy way to discover the neighbouring islets), or row a canoe to the nearby mangroves... [fundulagoon.com](http://fundulagoon.com)





*For style and seclusion...*

**Pousada Maravilha, Brazil**

Stay at Pousada Maravilha (pictured) and you'll be outnumbered not by other guests but dolphins and sea turtles – best spied from your bungalow-in-the-hills. Here, the secluded island of Fernando de Noronha (just 10km long and 1.5km wide) sets the secretive scene for rest and relaxation (Naomi Campbell sought refuge here after Sao Paulo Fashion Week). Suites are a show of soothing neutral hues and native beams, while an adjoining wooden deck means you can admire the sea-lashed cliffs and horseshoe-shaped Baia do Sueste. While the hotel blends seamlessly with the creamy beaches below, each of its rooms is brimming with mod cons (we love the Japanese hot tubs) while, outside, you can step into a glass-walled sauna before diving into an infinity pool. [kiwicollection.com](http://kiwicollection.com)

*For Jungle Book environs...*

**Pacuare Lodge, Costa Rica**

Set deep in the rainforest, you'll have to set foot aboard a raft (and keep your balance while you're at it) and paddle your way to this jungle-shrouded lodge. Globetrotters will be wide-eyed from the off; emerald green fauna and near-neon-hued birds pass by as you glide along the river beneath hanging creepers. It's the perfect prelude to Pacuare Lodge, where treehouse-style abodes poke out of thickets of green and peer over flower-dense gardens (best admired from your rope-swing bridge). Whether you're honeymooning or not, the Honeymoon Suite is our pick for luxury – its turquoise plunge pool, four-poster bed and terrace-based hammock all serve as admirable spots in which to relax to the sound of hummingbirds and sight of swinging monkeys. [pacuarelodge.com](http://pacuarelodge.com)



*For Downton Abbey-style digs...*

**Ballyfin, Ireland**

One look at Ballyfin and you'll give up the busy streets of Dublin for far-flung Laois in a heartbeat. Tucked away on 600 acres of pea-green landscape, the lavish Regency mansion has long enamoured visitors (among the first, Lady Kildare in 1759). But, nine years on from its tender transformation, Ballyfin now serves as a 15-room hotel. Inside, opulence caresses every crevice: sneak to the 80-foot library to steal some quiet time; retire to the French-inspired Drawing Room; or bask in the sun-licked Conservatory and paw over a too-good-to-be-true afternoon tea. While you're here, be a sport and try your hand at falconry, tennis and croquet on the grounds (not to mention gourmet picnics) – just make sure to pick up a pair of Hunter wellies which line the lobby on your way out... [ballyfin.com](http://ballyfin.com)





*For country charm...*

#### **Cley Windmill, UK**

If the English countryside beckons, make for the Norfolk coast and seek out the reed-shrouded Cley Windmill (pictured). Once the property of 18th century milling families, today its aptly-named rooms (the Wheat Chamber, Barley Bin...) serve as a unique getaway. For the best views in the house, request The Wheel Room – its four windows each bestow a different vista, from the chocolate box local village to the salt marshes and Blakeney Harbour. Though, you'll have to be nimble to get to it – a steep ladder is the only way to reach the room's dizzying heights (but its oak four-poster bed makes the effort well worth it). Elsewhere, make the most of good old-fashioned British cuisine in the windmill's restaurant, where you can gobble up homemade pies by a roaring log fire. [oneoffplaces.com](#)

*For tropics off the tourist trail...*

#### **Maya Villa, Sri Lanka**

Untouched by tourists, a stroll through the sleepy fishing village of Tangalle will lead you to lush paddy fields – and the century-old Maya Villa. The bolthole serves as a charming base from which to discover twee villages, as well as creatures great and small – make for the UdaWalawe wild elephant park for the greater of the species, or to nearby beaches where you could spot anything from sperm whales to tiny turtles. That's if you can peel yourself off the villa's garden hammock, or part with its glistening pool (keep eyes peeled for tropical birds as you dip, from the red-backed woodpecker to the Paradise flycatcher). The food is good enough to keep you villa-bound too, with a private chef who whisks up delectable local dishes, best eaten in the garden pavilion. [mayatangallesrilanka.com](#)

*For a seaside idyll...*

#### **L'Hôtel de Toiras, France**

A tiny island off the coast of western France, Île de Ré is the essence of seaside charm: hop on a bicycle and breeze past quaint ports filled with bobbing fishing boats, stopping off for just-caught seafood in the sun. Once here, few abodes are more pleasing to the eye than L'Hôtel de Toiras (we love its butter-coloured walls and white shutters), nor so well-placed for people-watching (its linen-clad, olive-skinned locals inject a south-of-France-style dose of glamour). Drop your bags in one of its nine suites (expect pinks, greens and soft blue hues, claw-footed baths and floral finishes), before a jaunt about the port. Or make for a local market with a hotel basket on your arm, fill it with whatever you desire and pass it on to the hotel chef who'll cook you a custom-made meal. [relaischateaux.com](#)

*For cowboy country...*

#### **Amangiri, Utah**

You'll need your wits about you to spot Amangiri. Submerged in the deep southwest, it takes a drive through a sand-blanketed valley (and an eagle eye) to make it out, camouflaged against soaring rock formations and at the foot of towering plateaus. Step a sand-dusted foot through its stony entrance and you'll find every surface comes in a light honey hue, while dramatic floor-to-ceiling windows serve as picture frames to the awesome canyon country. And no more so than in the Amangiri Suite – make a beeline to its private sky terrace where a sink-straight-in day bed is a glorious base for desert star-gazing. But, if you ask us, it's the pool that is the resort's crowning glory – find its turquoise sun-soaked waters snaking their way round a huge rust-coloured rock formation. [amangiri.com](#)



*For an alpine escape...*

### **Blanket Bay, New Zealand**

Break the still of the alpine air with a helicopter descent into Blanket Bay, which sits by Lake Wakatipu amid frost-tipped meadows and snow-dipped mountains. While the lodge has made the history books as a former gold-rush settlement, today the timber and stone bolthole is a well-hidden stop-off for jet setters. With the wilderness at your feet, make the most of outdoor pursuits, from the heart-racing (skimming Mount Earnslaw Glacier by helicopter) to the demure (casting a rod in The Greenstone Valley's trout-thick rivers) and simply jaw-dropping (delving into the pre-historic rainforests of Fiordland National Park). When night falls, warm your cockles by the Lake View Dining Room's log fire (try the broccoli veloute with kikorangi blue foam), or slip into the spa's lake-facing Jacuzzi and let the crisp air rush over you... [blanketbay.com](http://blanketbay.com)

