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6 Gourmet GETAWAYS

Winsor Dobbin discovers a range of exciting holiday getaways in the Asia-Pacific region that combine fine food and wine with the chance to kick back and relax in style.



THE SAROJIN, KHAO LAK, THAILAND

If you love luxury and seclusion, it's hard to go past The Sarojin, a beachfront boutique hotel in Khao Lak, north of Phuket, that's been named the leading boutique hotel in Asia at the World Travel Awards no fewer than three times.

Owners Kate and Andrew Kemp have created a resort that gets all the little things right—but is delightfully unpretentious. There are enough staff to cater to every whim; with 56 rooms and around 250 employees.

The Sarojin is designed for couples looking to get away from it all—perhaps with a cruise on the Lady Sarojin motor yacht (the nearby marine park is rated among the top 10 dive spots in the world) or tours on traditional wooden river crafts ending with a Thai cooking lesson on the banks of the Takuapa River.

For those inclined to stay close to the resort, it has 10 acres of lush tropical gardens and access to 11 kilometres of white sand beach. Many of the suites, which come in three categories, have their own relaxation or plunge pools. All feature king-size beds, couples baths, rainfall showers, satellite TVs and DVDs, internet and wi-fi connections and their own mini-bar with snacks and drinks.

The gorgeous swimming pool with its private pavilions is a favourite spot to wind down, as is the Pathways Spa. Children under 12 are not allowed at the resort, giving parents the chance for some "me" time.

Dining options in the resort include Ficus restaurant, which serves international and Italian food of a high standard and is given shade by a magnificent old fig tree overlooking a delightful ever-filled pool. The Edge,

more relaxed with Andaman Sea views, serves tasty Thai dishes and seafood and is an excellent spot for a pre-dinner drink. There is also a top-notch wine list.

sarojin.com.

Where to play

Blue Canyon Country Club, Mission Hills, Tap Lamu and Thai Muang courses are all within an hour's drive.

BELLS AT KILLCARE, CENTRAL COAST, NSW

Bells, a 90-minute drive north of Sydney, is a traditional European-style country house hotel with the added bonus of housing Sydney celebrity chef Stefano Manfredi's latest venture—a superb restaurant that hosts regular gourmet dinners featuring top chefs and leading winemakers.

Accommodation is in well-equipped deluxe spa



villas or single-storey king spa suites and there are lovely grounds with a new 20-metre swimming pool and day spa. But it is the culinary artistry of Manfredi and Cameron Cansdell (ex De Bortoli Yarra Valley) that is the major drawcard.

Manfredi serves up imaginative Italian-inspired cuisine using local produce wherever possible. Herbs and vegetables come from his own kitchen garden, while the eggs come from the hotel's own chickens.

Think dishes like braised pork cheek and mushroom cabbage roll with cream of cannellini beans, or pan-fried veal and provolone involtini served with borlotti beans and slow-roasted tomato.

The regular themed dinners feature combinations like wines matched with cheeses selected by Will Studd, or Brokenwood vintages paired with Manjimup black truffles. The list highlights outstanding Australian and Italian wines. bellsatkillcare.com.au

Where to play

Everglades Country Club is at nearby Woy Woy with Tuggerah Lakes Golf Club at Shelly Beach 40 minutes north.

CASTAWAY ISLAND, FIJI

For anyone who has ever dreamt of spending time at a tropical island paradise, this is pretty much what you imagined. Set on 174 acres, privately-owned Castaway is surrounded by amazingly warm and clean waters teaming with multi-coloured fish and is covered in lush vegetation and palm trees, but it is the genuinely warm welcome from the locals that makes this an extremely special place.

It's one of the prettiest of the Mamanuca group



Get lost at Fiji's Castaway Island.

of islands situated 30 kilometres from Nadi International airport and reachable by boat, seaplane or helicopter.

There are just 66 bures, built well apart from each other, and made from local timbers with hand-painted vaulted lined ceilings and traditional grass-thatched roofs, which complement the comfortable air-conditioned interiors.

There are plenty of options when it comes to activities; from lazing in a hammock or enjoying a massage to snorkelling the coral reefs, windsurfing, kayaking, parasailing, catamaran sailing, waterskiing or diving. There is a kids club to keep younger visitors fully occupied.

Lance Seeto, the executive chef, is one of those lifting the standards of Fijian cuisine by using traditional Fijian foods alongside western techniques, using ingredients like spiny rock lobsters caught in an

underwater cave just off the resort. Look for dishes like wild goat curry, otta miti (local bush ferns) in fresh coconut salsa, or dishes using cassava, dalo (taro stems), breadfruit, sweet potato and other root vegetables, or even lomo lemongrass vuaka (suckling pig cooked in an oven pit with roasted kumara).

castawayfiji.com

Where to play

Sorry, you'll have to wait until you get back to the main island of Viti Levu to play a round.

QUAMBY ESTATE, TASMANIA

This historic homestead at Hagley offers luxury accommodation in a rural setting just 20 minutes drive from Launceston and has its own nine-hole golf course.

The historic heritage-listed homestead, part of which dates back to 1828, has been tastefully refurbished and is

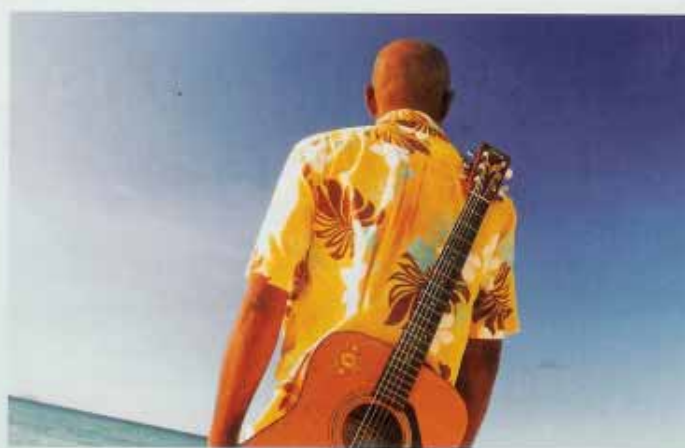
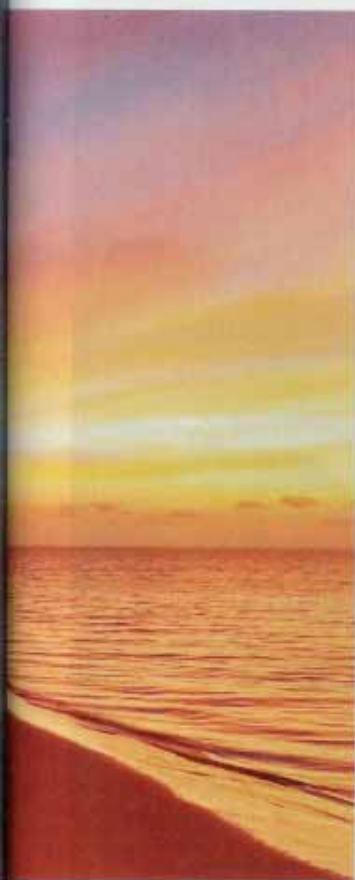
now a country lodge with 10 guest rooms in a range of styles.

Set in 64 hectares of countryside, Quamby Estate is a popular venue for weddings and small conferences but is also ideal for a romantic weekend. Owners the Anthology Group use it as the base for groups doing the Cradle Mountain Huts and Bay of Fires walks.

Quamby is beautifully situated for exploring Launceston and the Tamar and Meander valleys, which are home to boutique wineries and artisan food producers. The historic townships of Deloraine and Westbury—with their many art and craft shops—are both nearby.

Quamby, which has its own on-site restaurant, recently launched a series of gourmet weekends aimed at lovers of both fine wines and food.

The weekends, to be held regularly, include tutored tastings at some of the



The quaint Quamby Estate is a blissful escape.

best wineries in the Tamar (Three Wishes, Goaty Hill, Holyman), gourmet dinners matched with standout local wines and a farm gate tour of outstanding regional artisan food producers, including a truffle farm in season. Meals are enjoyed at restaurants including Launceston's iconic Stillwater and Strathlynn. quambyestate.com

Where to play

The scenic nine-hole course was built in the 1990s, while Launceston Golf Club and Country Club Tasmania are within half an hour.

PULLMAN KING POWER HOTEL, BANGKOK

Thailand has been in the headlines for all the wrong reasons recently and events in Bangkok have resulted in visitors staying away. The city is now doing its best to entice tourists back—and prices have seldom been lower.

This city centre hotel, just around the corner from Victory Monument, is one of my favourites in Asia—it's big and bustling but with tremendously helpful staff, excellent facilities and a huge range of places to eat and drink.

Stylishly decorated and with free tuk-tuk transportation to the nearby Sky Train station, the Pullman is an ideal base for exploring Bangkok and its many markets and temples. There are 386 rooms, distinctively Asian and very stylish, and it's adjacent to the massive King Power duty free shopping complex. But despite its central position the hotel is an oasis in a frenetic city.

Of the several restaurants, my favourite is the cosy Wine Pub, where the list ranges from a local syrah to names like Louis Latour, Howard Park, Felton Road, Zind Humbrecht and Fairview from South Africa. A bottle of Gosset NV Champagne will cost around \$120 and tapas plates

start from around \$3.50 each. All wines are sold at virtually cost price—a bonus in a country where the taxes on wine are high.

Also recommended are Chaan for authentic Thai cuisine and Deja Vu for traditional French cooking.

The rooms are spacious and feature marbled bathrooms with separate bath and a shower room with a rain showerhead. All are fully IT-equipped, and include a movable workstation and flat-screen TV, and room service is available 24 hours a day. There's a swimming pool and an excellent on site spa offering a range of treatments. pullmanbangkokkingpower.com

Where to play

Muang Kaew Golf Club is on the city fringes with the Bangkok Golf Club, Panya Hills and Thana City clubs also easily accessible. Floodlit golf is available at Panya Indra Golf Club.

SOFITEL RESORT AND SPA, DENARAU, FIJI

So you want to combine an island break with a stay at a sophisticated five-star resort with a top-class course on your doorstep? Look no further. The Sofitel is an international five-star resort with a comfortable meeting of French and Fijian cultures located on glitzy Denarau Island, just a short drive from Nadi Airport. The resort is right on the waterfront and boasts the Pacific's largest lagoon-style pool area. There are all the five-star touches you'd expect—a selection of restaurants, a top-class spa facility and a private beach. There are 296 rooms in a gated community, all with flat-screen TVs with satellite channels, mini bars, broadband access and Pure Fiji toiletries.

Chef Brendan Coffey says Fiji is now matching more sophisticated destinations with the quality of its cuisine. The Sofitel's restaurants feature dishes like stone-ground lamb with raita and naan bread, Nadi Bay prawns flamed in brandy and garlic, dill-seared paka paka snapper with mango/peach samosas, and Fiji vanilla-bean ice cream. There's also a global selection of fine wines.

At the signature V restaurant enjoy coconut and rice-crusted scampi, cucumber and tequila jelly or maybe feijoa and green tea iced soufflé with a berry compote. sofitelfiji.com.fj

Where to play

Guests have access and are offered special rates at the Denarau Golf and Racquet Club, a 7135-yard, 18-hole, par 72 championship course which is just 500 metres from the resort. ■