



### Otahuna Lodge South Island, New Zealand

There's something of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* about this 120-year-old lodge in 30 acres of formal gardens, woodland and lawns, its lake and meadows brilliant with golden daffodils in spring. Surrounded by farmland and just 25 minutes' drive from Christchurch, New Zealand's largest privately owned, heritage-listed house is back to its beautiful old self after the February 2011 earthquake. It's a wood-panelled country pile built in Queen Anne style at the end of a long, winding driveway shaded by oaks, with seven lavish suites, hushed corridors and roaring fires, secret nooks hung with serious artwork and stout doors that occasionally, mysteriously, lead nowhere. In the evenings, staff glide around fielding trays of Aoraki salmon canapés and Pegasus Bay Pinot Noir in the silk-carpeted, wallpapered sitting room with its baby grand, high-back armchairs and deep chesterfields. After which there's chef Jimmy McIntyre's five-course tasting menu, which makes the most of the hotel's vast kitchen gardens and tip-top local suppliers (rack and shoulder of lamb with black-olive salsa; rhubarb vacherin with lemon curd, strawberries and raspberry sorbet), matched with superb wines from the Marlborough, Gladstone and Gisborne regions, among others. The whole experience is utterly world-class. 00 64 3 329 6333; [www.otahuna.co.nz](http://www.otahuna.co.nz). Doubles from NZ\$1,553 (about £800)

### Hambleton Hall Rutland, England

Of all the smart British country-house hotels to have opened in the past half century, just one, Hambleton Hall, has remained impervious to fortune and is as fresh and magical as the day owners Tim and Stefa Hart first welcomed guests, more than 30 years ago. Contented but never complacent, it has sophisticated yet deeply comfortable classic English interiors, brilliant seasonal cooking in chef Aaron Patterson's Michelin-starred restaurant (salad of Cornish crab with brown-meat ice cream; loin of fallow venison with caramelised endive and a cocoa-flavoured sauce) and a joyous wine list from revered sommelier Dominique Baduel. There's a swimming pool, a tennis court, a fine kitchen garden, and views across Hambleton's south-facing terrace and gardens that take your breath away – but no flashy extras. 'Why would we want a spa when we've got Rutland Water?' says Tim. The late-Victorian house surveys the largest man-made lake in Western Europe, wonderful for boating, fishing or cycling around its perimeter. After an afternoon in the fresh air, Hambleton's many aficionados return to their haven, where the chef, sommelier and restaurant director have notched up 60 years of service between them, and which continues to purr along, a healing sanctuary from the stresses of life. 01572 756991; [www.hambletonhall.com](http://www.hambletonhall.com). Doubles from £255



### Miyamasou Kyoto Prefecture Japan

One of those rare, otherworldly places that both relax and inspire, this small, four-room ryokan is high up in the misty Japanese cedar forests, an hour's drive from Kyoto. The only neighbour is a Shinto monk along a mountain path. From the moment your English-speaking personal assistant greets you at the low wooden door, you are immersed in the gentle ritual of Japanese hospitality. Shoes are shed, magnolia tea and sweetmeats offered, and guidance is given about etiquette, such as the pleasurable custom of taking several piping-hot dips in the communal cypress bath. It overlooks a mossy, bubbling stream and is filled for your chosen bathing time before dinner,

after dinner and before breakfast. Once scrubbed and wrapped in a cotton yukata (light kimono), you can linger in your traditional tatami-matted room. There's no TV or Wi-Fi, only the simple Zen aesthetics of a delicate painting and an exquisite view of wild maple and lichen-clad cherry trees. A sublime Michelin-starred *kaiseki* meal awaits you across the courtyard. The rustle of your assistant's kimono and the slide of the screen door herald the arrival of each jewel-like course (delicate dumplings and salt-baked bamboo shoots). Later, snuggle down in a freshly laid-out, fluffy futon in your perfect room. 00 81 75 746 0231; [www.miyamasou.jp](http://www.miyamasou.jp). Doubles from ¥84,000 (about £665)