

THE AUSTRALIAN

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Travel + LUXURY

SUMBA RISING

Is this island
the next Bali?

AMERICAN DREAMS

10 emerging cities
you need to know

HOT PROPERTY

Capella Sydney's
smart new look

BACK TO BHUTAN

Untapped destinations to put on your radar

10 OF THE BEST

By Nikki Wallman

American cities

A host of smaller US cities are luring travellers away from the major stops with inventive food, noteworthy hotels and cultural attractions grounded in local stories.

TAKEN ENOUGH BITES of the Big Apple? Over the LA traffic? All Aspen-ed out? The US is almost overwhelming in its size and sense of possibility, its refusal to pigeonhole itself into one cultural behemoth. Its major destinations draw most attention, yet can also blind visitors to the wealth of incredible places to discover, and the passionate people who make them so. The following lesser-visited spots are trending for 2023 and span the breadth of the country both geographically and culturally, offering visitors a front-row ticket to everything from cutting-edge hotel design to emerging wine regions, food-focused towns and blooming artistic hubs.



NATURAL HABITAT
At the Edition, Tampa fine-diner Lilac occupies a space bursting with greenery. Right: San Luis Creek Lodge features soothing marine hues.

2 TAMPA, FLORIDA

New opening The Edition has set the scene for a surge in Tampa’s cool-factor, with the city joining an elite group of locations for the Ian Schrager hotel brand for Marriott. It’s part of Water Street Tampa, an ambitious mixed-use waterfront development with hotels, residences, wellness studios and a raft of drinking and dining venues (including soon-to-open Italian fine-diner Ash from chef Ferrell Alvarez, who’s also behind local institution Rooster & the Till). All eyes are on The Edition, though, as it brings its signature creative community vibe and dramatic design flourishes to its latest locale. Michelin-starred chef John Fraser – who’s behind restaurants at West Hollywood and New York Editions – brings his Mediterranean touch to fine-diner Lilac, a glowing gem of emerald greens and rich walnut tones, palm fronds and plush banquettes. Edition’s social tone runs through everything from a bougainvillea-dotted pool club complete with cabanas to lounge-style venue Punch Room, with Caribbean-inspired cocktails (think cane spirits and tropical fruits) and Arts Club, a series of spaces (one overloaded with mirror balls, one with a specially commissioned photo booth) hosting live entertainment.

1 SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

San Luis Obispo – both the city and, more broadly, the county – is having its moment in the sun, staking its claim on the West Coast scene with next-gen, cool-climate wineries and ambitious eateries. Last year saw the San Luis Obispo County wine region (or “SLO Coast”), encompassing more than 30 wineries producing drops from grapes such as pinot noir, chardonnay, riesling, albariño and zinfandel, become an official American Viticulture Area. Check in to Hotel Cerro downtown for laid-back, breezy style, complete with spa and rooftop pool to help you embrace the chill factor. San Luis Creek Lodge reopened in 2020 after a natty refurbishment by LA-based interiors maestro Nina Freudenberger, with Aesop amenities, fireplaces and soothing marine hues setting the scene for post-winery wind-downs. Head north to Paso Robles wine country and Tin City, the buzzing producers precinct where food, craft beer and wine flow freely along with live music and much more. It’s also home to Six Test Kitchen, an intimate chef’s counter experience that picked up a Michelin star in 2021. Close by, The Restaurant at Justin, with views over the estate’s vines, was last year awarded its first star.



3 NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

It may be the hometown of Yale University, but New Haven isn’t all about tradition. The city is also home to a flourishing arts community and an innovative design scene where sustainability is a starting point rather than an afterthought. The striking, Marcel Breuer-designed Brutalist behemoth and former Pirelli building has been transformed into Hotel Marcel, a triumph of upcycling if we’ve ever seen one. It now stands as a beacon of thoughtful hotel design; its roof clad in solar panels that power the entire building, which is also geared to meet Passive House (relating to insulation and efficiency) and LEED Platinum (relating to energy and environmental design) standards. Designed by Becker + Becker with interiors by Dutch East Design, the considered finishes and minimalist furnishings bring a soothing, spare comfort to the boxy building, which is gunning for net-zero status. Deepen your design immersion with a visit to dynamic new artist community and exhibition space Nxthvn (pronounced “Next Haven”), which acts as an incubator for young artists and aims to foster collaboration between artists, art professionals and local entrepreneurs – a testament to the spirit of creative collaboration in this city.

4 TELLURIDE, COLORADO

This small community in Colorado’s stupendously pretty San Juan Mountains has an outsized 2023 in store, with a number of anniversary celebrations, including its 50th ski season (bringing the new high-speed “Lift 9” chairlift with it) and the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in June, not to mention the 50th Telluride Film Festival, which draws celebrities and cineastes alike. Where to stay? The ski-in, ski-out Madeline Hotel & Residences is fresh from a comprehensive makeover courtesy of Miami’s Rose Ink Workshop, and the results are something special: modern chalet meets ultra-luxe holiday abode, with just enough sheepskins and mountain motifs to remind you of your surrounds. The freshly redone Timber Room bar and lounge dishes up the likes of lobster bisque for two and Rocky Mountain elk loin with huckleberry jus, within softly glowing, modern-rustic environs that extend outdoors. An avalanche of thrill-seeking experiences facilitated by the resort’s guides is on offer and, in keeping with Telluride’s reputation for down-to-earth creativity and fun, the hotel’s general manager heralds the afternoon après-ski hour with his Swiss horn each day, faithful Saint Bernard by his side.



COLORADO COOL
Views over the San Juan Mountains from a King Room balcony at the freshly renovated Madeline Hotel & Residences in Telluride.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA ALEXANDER (SAN LUIS CREEK LODGE), NOE DEWITT (MADELINE HOTEL) & NIKOLAS KOENIG (ULAC)

5 JERSEY SHORE, NEW JERSEY

The James Bradley is the design-led hotel of your coastal American dreams. That it's found along the Jersey Shore makes it all the more intriguing, given what it may signal about the region as it shakes off the last vestiges (for visitors, at least) of a certain reality TV show. The quietly gorgeous boutique hotel reimagines a 119-year-old residence just off Bradley Beach as a stylish seaside pad, with privileged beach access (and coveted Flamingo Estate bath goodies) part of the deal. Owner George DiStefano brought in Argentine-American interior designer Sebastian Zuchowicki to collaborate on the project, with Australian-born Lucas Willing of his eponymous studio adding beautiful limewash walls and Venetian plaster finishes, while paintings from another Australian, artist Pamela Tang, feature throughout the property. A private three-bed bungalow makes a luxe alternative for groups, and a bolstered spa-treatment offering only adds to the hotel's appeal. Those seeking to dial up the fun factor should head north to the new Asbury Hotel, which keeps the Shore's playful reputation alive with poolside parties, rooftop movies and Scandi-leaning design. A Nobu restaurant has also opened in Atlantic City, to be followed by a new signature hotel.



SHORE THING
The James Bradley offers Jersey Shore lodging in a restored residence. Below: the refreshed Sanctuary Camelback, Scottsdale.



9 SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

One of only two Unesco cities of gastronomy in the US, San Antonio is an intoxicating mix, with history-soaked architecture and inventive dining experiences taking centre stage. Fellow World Heritage site the San Antonio Missions features The Alamo, witness to the famed 1836 battle, which is set to unveil its new collections centre this month, displaying over 500 artifacts – many for the first time. Stay at the nearby Thompson San Antonio, with Texan design touches, original art from the likes of Jeff Koons, and sleek open-air pool deck. Landrace, one of the hotel's restaurants, is helmed by chef Steve McHugh of acclaimed local eatery Cured; here, he champions regional produce and offers dishes such as grilled Berkshire pork or banana pudding semifreddo. Pharm Table, the plant-forward “apothecary kitchen” featuring a spice library, botanical cocktails and low-intervention wines, moved to new premises in 2021, and hosts winemaker dinners and plant-forward cooking classes. And the vibrant Pearl District is home to new modern-Mediterranean grillhouse Ladino; stay close by at the ultra-stylish Hotel Emma, which has recently welcomed chef de cuisine Amaris Diaz and pastry chef Sofia Tejada to oversee the property's renowned dining.

SOUTHERN CHARM
Left: San Antonio's Hotel Emma. Below: Greenville's Grand Bohemian Lodge offers polished dining.

6 SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

With around 330 days of sunshine a year, Scottsdale certainly qualifies as a hotspot, but it's also sure to delight everyone from wellness devotees to design buffs. Arizona gained its second Unesco World Heritage listing in 2019 (alongside that little tourist drawcard the Grand Canyon) in Taliesin West, the winter home of legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright (one of eight of his designs to be listed). The sprawling dwelling demonstrates how he translated his famed Prairie style to blend into the Sonoran Desert surrounds (he called the home “a look over the rim of the world”). New for 2023 is a Nights in the Desert tour focused on outdoor spaces, alongside tours granting insider access to private living spaces. Scottsdale's Civic Center is also reopening following a revamp, ready to host festivals, public art, and concerts. Among the wealth of wellness-focused resorts, Sanctuary Camelback Mountain deserves a fresh look since its acquisition by resort group Gurney's for its guest-room refurb (further enhancements are planned) and a massive spa, among other bells and whistles.



8 GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Greenville combines scenic beauty, art galleries and a thriving food scene. At the newly opened Grand Bohemian Lodge, soak up the bucolic setting among waterfalls, parklands and a river before drifting down to the Poseidon Spa, perhaps taking in some of the hotel's nearly \$3 million-worth of art along the way. Work up an appetite at Greenville's new Unity Park, set on the town's beloved Swamp Rabbit Trail, or book a guided cycle along the trail including a chef's picnic with farm-to-table eatery Topsoil Kitchen & Market. At Camp, headed by former French Laundry chef Drew Erickson, the menu ties global influences to modern American sensibilities, with an element of fun. Think dumplings with salsa macha, pork buns with kimchi and desserts such as tangerine creamsicle semifreddo. Across town, The Anchorage is a Greenville staple celebrating the region's produce – as in ricotta gnocchi with braised local rabbit and crème fraîche – with a wine list roving from California to Tuscany; its chef Greg McPhee has also just opened modern seafood spot Mr Crisp, starring fish and chips, raw shellfish and natural wines. And don't miss newly opened Lewis Barbecue, the latest from the Charleston institution.



10 KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

A brand-new terminal at Kansas City International Airport invites a fresh look at the city that's making global hot lists owing to its dashing hotels, headline-grabbing cuisine and hosting duties for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The Hotel Kansas City is elegantly housed in the storied Kansas City Club, frequented by the likes of Truman and Eisenhower, while new openings are designed to make visitors feel right at home. The Truitt, for example, is nestled within the historic Country Club District and is minutes' walk from the city's outstanding Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. The hotel's handsome colonial brick façade gives few clues to the gorgeous eclecticism within, where you'll find a haven of plush, thoughtful design with the occasional theatrical flourish. The owners have also just opened Aida Hotel nearby, which carries over this successful formula. On the food front, Baba's Pantry – a new, family-run Palestinian-American café and deli – has garnered national acclaim. The mint-green entrance leads to a warm, joyful burst of colour and flavour inside, with Baba's hummus, kebabs and shawarma, baklava and hilibah (signature house-made fenugreek and semolina pastry infused with rosewater syrup, perfect with Turkish coffee) on high rotation. **T**

7 MACON, GEORGIA

It's easy to step back in time in Macon: first stop, the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park, which lays claim to more than 12,000 years of continuous human habitation and is home to the fascinating mounds (which the people built for their élite) that give it its name. The park also features many hiking trails, the Earth Lodge – a reconstructed council chamber of the Mississippian culture, with its original floor dated to 1015 – and a museum displaying more than 2000 artifacts, and continues to expand the land under its protection. For a dose of more recent history, check in to the new Hotel Forty Five; the rooftop bar of this beautifully restored historic building offers a unique angle to view the city below after a day's exploring. The considered Woodward Hotel is another smart new lodging, with just nine individually kitted-out rooms, a devotion to Southern literature (illustrated in atmospheric craft cocktail bar, Quill) and laneway access to four lively restaurants and a couple of bars. The city also celebrates its 200th anniversary this year, with a new 10,000-seat amphitheatre set to open a new chapter in its musical history.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM LAIRD (THE JAMES BRADLEY) & READ MCKENDREE (SANCTUARY)

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRANDON BARRÉ (GRAND BOHEMIAN) & NICOLE FRANZEN (HOTEL EMMA)

UP ON HIGH

The rooftop bar of Hotel Forty Five offers a unique view of the city.

