

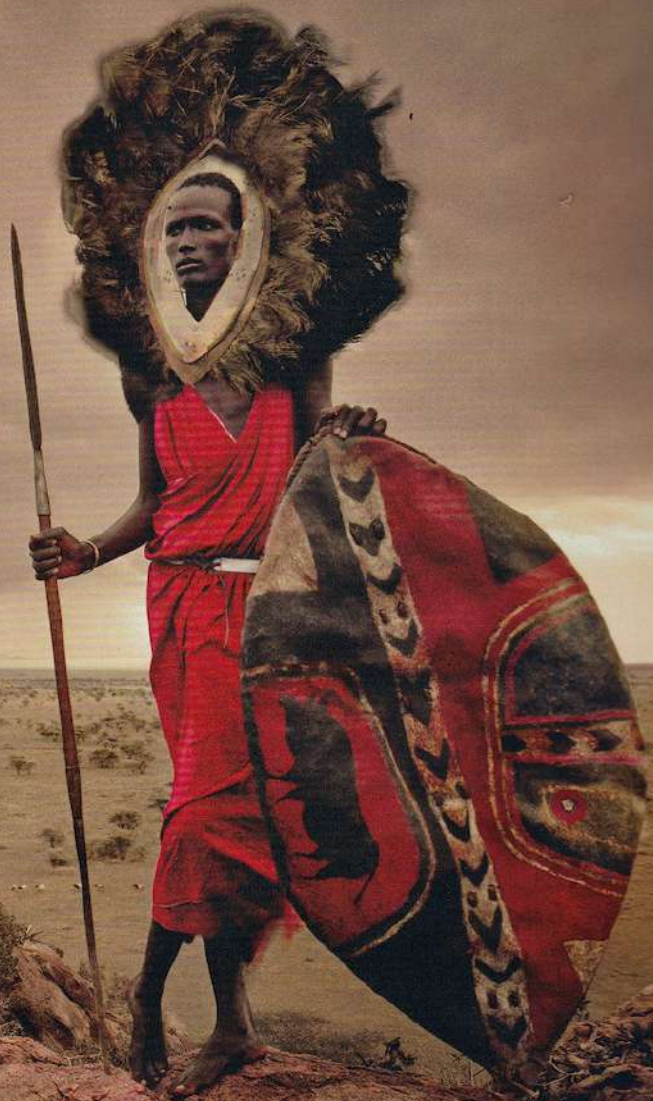
SPECIAL
DOUBLE
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THE GOLD LIST 2018

THE WORLD'S
MOST EXTRAORDINARY
EXPERIENCES



PLUS OUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE PLACES TO STAY



THE GOLD LIST 2018

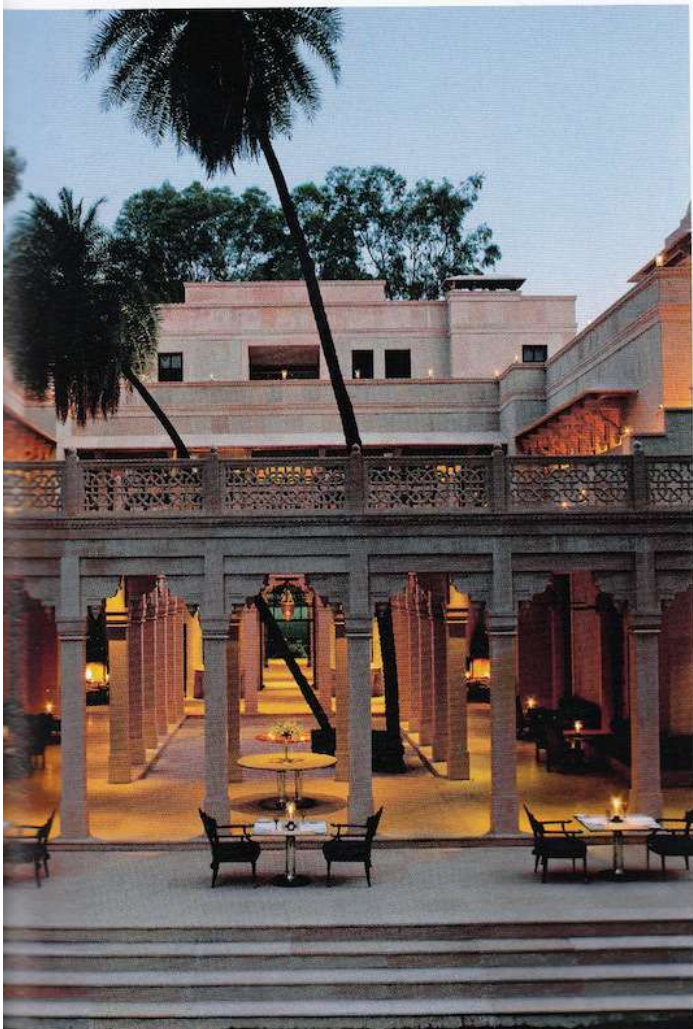
OUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE HOTELS, RESTAURANTS,
COCKTAIL BARS & BEACH CLUBS

EDITED BY PETER BROWNE

AMANBAGH, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

TIGER TOPS THARU LODGE NEPAL

This retreat, which opened in 1980 in the buffer zone outside Chitwan National Park in southern Nepal, continues, in its modest and low-key way, not only to draw travellers to the greatest tiger habitat on the face of the earth but also to open minds. Outwardly, the place has changed little over the years. The low-slung, white-washed bungalows are still here, spartan and unfussy; drinks and dinner are still served in a communal mess; the Planter's Punch is still as moreish as ever (Nepali rum plus three kinds of fruit juice, so sweet and innocent you will want to decant it into Tetra Paks and drink it through a bendy straw as you admire elephants bathing in the river at sunset). What Tiger Tops lacks in frills and fripperies it makes up for in charm and serious know-how. The guides are superb, led by the general manager DB Chaudhary, a noted bird expert and, despite his boyish appearance, a firebrand on the conservation scene. Of additional note is Tiger Tops Elephant Camp, just around the corner, where guests share the property with trained elephants and their mahouts. The simplicity of Elephant Camp makes Tharu Lodge look like the George V, Paris. More bracing, however, is the commendable honesty with which it reveals the moving but often uncomfortable nature of man's working relationship with these glorious animals. What a privilege. +977 7 869 0721; tigertops.com. From about £160 per person per night, including all meals and safari activities



AMANBAGH INDIA

There is something wildly decadent about the low-slung, modern-day Mughal palace slinking amid the rough and tumble, tangly scrub of rural Rajasthan. It is completely removed from India's usual hullabaloo, a blushing pleasuredome set against a palm and eucalyptus backdrop with an undergrowth that fidgets with life: peacocks scratching, monkeys twitching, a gathering of sambar deer meek as mist. Back it takes you, Tardis-like in time. Here you are, feasting like a gathering of royalty, spread out on cushions on the floor in the ruins of an old fort surrounded by lanterns, listening to the strains of the sitar player, and in the distant hills the peculiar grunt of antelope being hunted down by tiger. Feasting happens everywhere, outside the library, quietly in your room, in your waiter's home with all his relatives gathered round. The hotel understands the curiosity of guests here, and organically encourages everyone to go beyond its walls and get stuck in. Just because your bedroom at the hotel is serene and spacious beyond words, with sunken baths and private pools, doesn't mean you can't hang out in town on the terrace of someone's house that's festooned with loose electrical wires. Hold their babies, peek in their kitchens, try your hand at walking with a jug on your head like the local ladies do – expertly, without hands, in saris the colour of sunshine and mangos. Carts drawn by camels, farmworkers cutting wheat with scythes: there is a mesmerising, medieval quality to life here. Like all of India's great hotels, Amanbagh is an astonishing celebration of ritual and craftsmanship and splendour. Plus, it has quite probably the most delicious pool in all the land, green as jungle, refreshing as mint. +91 1465 223 333; aman.com. Doubles from about £630