WANT TO BE LED ASTRAY?
REASONS TO GET AWAY IN 2019

If 15 years of bed-hopping has taught us anything it’s that, well, wanderlust never really fades. It’s still as much of a thrill to find that brand-new, ‘are you sure this is the way?’ spot as it is to see somewhere we thought we knew inside out in a whole new light. Which means we always get a little bit overexcited at the start of a new year as we try and bury those winter blues with thoughts of far-flung shores and hidden-corner hideaways.

As for this one, well, we’ve had our hearts stolen in Hampshire and our heads turned in Hong Kong; we’ve had wild nights in New York and spied wildlife in Sri Lanka — but we hope that’s just for starters.

Now it’s your turn to give in to travel temptation. We’re even throwing in a little something extra from our friends at Bang & Olufsen to sweeten the deal. And don’t forget, we’re here for you round the clock, so keep Smith24 on speed dial for when that inspiration strikes.

So, ready to be led astray?

James & Tamara
Founders, Mr & Mrs Smith
LED ASTRAY...

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Mr & Mrs Smith
WANT TO BE LED ASTRAY?
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Admit it: you need it, right? You’ve been promising yourself for ages now that you’ll take a ‘proper break’. Go somewhere warm and properly switch off. Spend some time. Soak it all up. Settle into a fascinating city, unwind on a paradise beach, hop around some idyllic islands... Go on, make this year the one where your leisure time lasts longer. You deserve it.

A gull’s-eye view of La Valise, Tulum, and its beachy neighbours
BAHAMA HOUSE
BAHAMAS

‘If lying horizontally for longer than 30 minutes makes you twitchy, there’s plenty to explore on this picture-perfect island filled with homes painted in a Hockney-esque palette.’

Caroline Tomkinson, illustrious illustrator

Spotify playlist
ISLAND TIME
How many times can you Google a hotel before you find yourself, feet finally and almost surreally planted (after such anticipation, can it be real?), in the cool reception of your paramour? When it comes to Casa San Agustín in Cartagena’s Centro Histórico, the answer is: infinite clicks.

“It is the best place to stay in Cartagena,” a portly Glaswegian fellow told us in the rainy city of Medellín, before Mr Smith and I embarked on our pilgrimage to the colourful, colonial town of eternal sunshine on the Caribbean coast. ‘Get a massage on top of the roof,’ another friend advised – duly noted and adhered to by myself (it was delicious. Firm, peaceful and invigorating all at once).

The hotel has been sympathetically built within the Centro Histórico’s colonial walls which afford protection from the hustle and bustle of the Mochila bag-sellers outside; the men selling mango in sticky plastic packets on street corners; the women in tiered, ruffled dresses proffering watermelon; the tourists on bicycles (Casa San Agustín has some adorable sets of wheels that you may borrow, though we were a little too hot); from the dry heat of a city going about its day in a salsa dance of colour and noise.

No noise can be heard from Casa San Agustín’s delicious, enormous white bed in our deluxe room, though. There is a quiet, leafy balcony; a bathroom with heavenly coloured tiles; a smart array of Ortigia shower miniatures. Is the sign of a great hotel the calibre of its miniatures? I’d warrant so. Just across from our room lies the drawing room, a chic and cool lounging space with an honestly bar that calls our name. Is it too early? ‘We are on holiday!’ we cry, pouring ourselves an amaretto for me; a whisky for him.

Fortified by the honesty bar and a strong Hendrick’s G&T (in a glass the size of a modest fishbowl), after a day spent steaming in the sun and a long refreshing shower, we embark on a game of Scrabble, which I frustratingly lose. I may be a journalist, but my husband is a wily fox. My words are trumped by his numbers—or his manipulation of them.

We have dinner in the hotel courtyard, where a medley of appetisers (lobster ceviche, ibérico ham and beef sliders) give way to traditional Colombian steak with chimichurri sauce. Before we move on (for drinks at El Barón or Café Havana; for people watching in the more robust area of Getsemaní) we take a minute to appreciate that we are staying in the best place in Cartagena. The pool’s warm lighting makes it shimmer, seemingly in agreement.

The turndown service in our room has been completed by the time we return; the crisp inviting sheets and the towelling slippers by our bed await. There is a new day dawning soon but, for now, we have today at Casa San Agustín.
We could go on and on about the opulent details, like the fact that there are 10 rooms each with an ensuite, an oversized infinity pool with views of a volcanic-sand beach, a library and private gym, an in-house butler (the perks of a private villa set in a larger resort). But, most excitingly, there’s a helipad. Which is noteworthy because if you’re staying in Bali, the Island of the Gods, shouldn’t there be an amenity worthy of a modern deity?

Sharing is overrated. When it comes to pools and all manner of dipping (skinny and otherwise), private is preferred. Fortunately, every room here has its own plunge pool. And ‘room’ is putting it lightly; each its own hideaway villa; some with ocean views, all with floor-to-ceiling windows to take in your jungle surroundings. Peace of mind comes in many forms, too – the resort (glass) bottles its own water, has its own solar panels for power, and devotes 3,700 square metres to an organic market farm – so you’ll be treading as lightly on the environment as you will after one of its reverie-inducing Khmer spa treatments.
This year we’ve looked to uncover hidden corners of the sun-soaked climes we’ve come to love in seasons past. Some fresh finds where you can enjoy old favourites: siestas, seafood, a spritz before lunch – the living really is easy in the summertime.

Photographed while seeking shade and souvlaki at all-suite retreat, Naxian on the Beach, Naxos
'Twice I had to retrieve my belongings from the front desk, after leaving them on lawn chairs and sofas in my utterly relaxed stupor. In fact, I’d be more than happy to be left behind here…'

Lizzie Fortunato, Jewellery queen
A n island cast adrift between the tides of Tunis and the shores of Sicily, which is claimed to have ‘the stars and silence of Africa, but the food of Palermo’. Even now, Giulia Gelmetti, a former professional basketball player turned boutique hotelier (free of her claim), often has to point out Pantelleria on a map. Even to some Italians, who can’t quite place its ellipsis-like location in the Mediterranean.

But Pantelleria’s obscurity is all part of its charm, especially to the well-known visitors who wash up on its shores. When the film A Bigger Splash was shooting here, actress Tilda Swinton would retreat each night to Giulia’s vineyard, Coste Ghirlanda, to drink wine on balmy evenings and play cards beneath a jewel-strewn sky.

Giorgio Armani also has a summer villa here. Indeed, the same architect who transformed the designer’s home also sculpted Giulia’s dramatic all-suite hotel. Because ‘sculpted’ is exactly the right word: a vision of whitewashed walls and contrasting volcanic stone, Sikelia spreads out over a hillside, with luxury suites carved into ancient stone dammusi, the centuries-old agricultural dwellings that grace olive groves and vineyards across the island.

As night falls, guests can choose to dine at the hotel’s Themà restaurant or head six minutes down the road to Giulia’s vineyard where, in summer, her pop-up wine laboratory serves glasses of sweet passito and unmissable island food.

But first, you’ll want to earn your supper, and Pantelleria has no shortage of attractions. A simmerring speck of volcanic sights, it has geothermal mud baths and hot springs at Lago di Venere, and a natural sauna at Bagno Asciutto, warmed by subterranean fumaroles. Or, you could just sit back and be warmed by the swirling sirocco…
Two octogenarian architects restored this 19th-century house so that you and up to 11 additional guests could be the metaphorical architects of your own Mallorquín fun. Draw up plans for elaborate meals cooked in the outdoor kitchen and served on a pine-shaded patio, or take the party to one of the wraparound porches with sea views and summon the villa’s namesake city with a rum-filled afternoon. Between feasts, swim in the saltwater pool, wander the fruit-tree-speckled grounds or head into Palma for, well, more food.

If a holiday happens in the forest and nobody is around to hear it, does raucous fun still abound? You and 10 of your closest can entertain this and other alluring thoughts at this seductively secluded villa. Set on a cove-view hilltop, there’s no need to worry about bothering the neighbours or competing with the crowds, though it’s only a five-minute drive to the buzzy bohemian bars and restaurants of Santa Gertrudis.
Nothing thrills the senses like emerging wide-eyed into a big new city, where scenic streets tempt, skylines glitter and energy abounds. These trips are a chance to satisfy that cultural curiosity in between, let’s be honest, distractions of the food and drink variety. Settle in, make yourself at home and live like it’s yours...

Shot before a restorative soaking at the Bowery, New York.
THE MURRAY
HONG KONG

‘The perfect place to hole up in Hong Kong: spacious and stylish rooms, invitingly green city views and four first-class restaurants to ensure your tastebuds never get bored.’

Tamara Lohan, The original Mrs Smith

Spotify playlist
METROPOLIS MIX
HOTEL

HOTEL

LED ASTRAF, IN THE CITY

HOLIDAY FOR LONGER

Had your fill of the city? Hop over to Bawah Reserve for pure shores and island luxury.

SIX SENSES DUXTON

SINGAPORE

Here, your sense of style is satisfied by the Anouska Hempel-designed interiors: ornate fans, calligraphed wallpaper, historic nods to the hotel’s trading-house past and plenty of moody opium-den chic. The equally attractive Yellow Pot restaurant takes care of your taste buds with creative takes on Chinese classics. Plus, arguably one of the most alluring food sites in the world, the Maxwell Food Centre, is just up the street. Head there for Hainanese chicken rice – described as the single dish worthy of a 15-hour flight.

SIR ADAM

AMSTERDAM

How’s this for next-level luxury? Each of the four elevators at Amsterdam’s skyscraper-set Sir Adam hotel is themed, with our favourite being ‘E’, the disco lift complete with lit floor, dance soundtrack and glitterball. And the celebrations don’t stop there: the gourmet burger joint in the atrium doubles as an all-night party pit stop, there’s a vinyl library and Gibson guitars in rooms, a nightclub in the basement and warehouse-cool aesthetics throughout. Turns out Sir Adam’s quite the man about town.

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So says the application form they rather cruelly insert in the room-service menu. You’re probably not going to get in. But you’re definitely going to want to join.

And, if you’re staying in one of the 20 rooms above the club, you’re granted temporary membership for the duration. It’s like suddenly being able to sing.

Who goes there? Well, you’re not supposed to say. And the staff certainly keep your secrets (right, Liam?). As I signed in I saw Her From That Big Netflix Thing and Him From The Guardian a few signatures above me. Over the desk is the artwork for Peter Blake’s 80th birthday party featuring hundreds of names including (at opposite ends of the same feathery spectrum) Shirley Bassey and Grayson Perry. You can barely see the walls for all the art. It started with the YBAs – Hirst, Turk, Emin – who made their names, and the Groucho’s reputation, with their creativity and decadence in the 1990s.

After staggering in from the Man Booker Prize I ran into two of the best, and brightest, visual artists working in London today. I also bumped into one of my favourite editors who was happily too drunk to ask after my latest column (on its way, promise).

We’re almost at the rooms. But first, the lift. I want membership of the lift. It’s lined with padded burgundy leather and has some mesmerising video art of clouds or something on the wall. It’s so dark and sexy I willed it to get stuck.

Right, the rooms. I opted for a Bigger Double. There are smaller ones and even singles and apparently also a whole flat. One entire wall of my room was windows so thank goodness for blinds. Pink was the leitmotif with shocking pink velvet armchairs and a vast canvas of candy splodges that could have been Howard Hodgkin on a sugar high. The bed was big enough for any combination of Smiths. The bathroom was a bit of a squeeze and the door is glass so forget privacy.

It’s noisy. You can hear the party downstairs (until 2am) and the unique symphony of 45 Dean Street – camera shutters from paps, lapdancers arguing outside Sunset Strip, the plaintive cry of the Big Issue seller and about a hundred tuk-tuks and cabs. There are ear-plugs by your bed but you’re not here to rest are you? That’s what brunch is for.

Dinner in the Italian restaurant at the back – some brilliant Shrigleys on the wall – was an endless parade of small but not meagre plates: unctuous Carbonara; sharp melty Roquefort with caramelized onions; some drunken cherries that were actually sozzled. All washed down with a bottle of white burgundy that didn’t make me feel ripped off for once. Flickering flames from the pizza oven cast a romantic/hellish glow depending on your mood. I dined with A Very Clever Famous Comedian who also happens to be vegetarian and she was as delighted by the fare as me.

Eventually you have to sign out. I stumbled on to Dean Street smiling. In a spirit of great optimism, I may have taken the membership form with me. Let’s hope there’s no CCTV in that lift.

“Membership to the Groucho Club is more exclusive than the SAS and nearly as tough to get into; more mysterious than the Masons, with an initiation ceremony that would make a ninja faint.”
You’ve just finished your kangaroo tartare, so you settle into your designer sofa to digest, but then you realise you’d like a glass of wine on your botanic-garden-view balcony. Then you remember you finished every last drop in a glorious fit of debauchery the previous evening, so you summon your butler for a new bottle. Wine in hand, you decide to sip and soak simultaneously – fortunately your bathtub also has verdant views. Such is life at this new Melbourne bolthole. We’ve already made ourselves at home, clearly…

Alexandre Dumas nearly bankrupted himself with his 19th-century soirées – allegedly keeping cash in a tobacco jar from which friends helped themselves. And although the Left Bank’s Hotel Monte Cristo Paris can’t promise that kind of generosity, it is a supremely welcoming place; one that successfully channels the author’s fine taste and wit. You’ll find velvet boudoirs inspired by his worldly travels, original tapestries and chinoiserie, and a distractingly decadent rum bar with an on-site distillery serving 40 seasonal tipples.
There’s no better Friday feeling than skipping out from a week of work with an overnight bag in tow. Whether you’re headed for a cozy country pile, a beachy break, an urban fix or a charming city stay, a change of scenery is what weekends were really made for. Those chores can wait.

Captured on a soft spring morning at Domaine des Étangs, Aquitaine.
HECKFIELD PLACE
HAMPSHIRE

’S My advice? Get in quick; this has all the trappings of a classic.’
James Lohan, The original Mr Smith
A river, quite literally, runs through it. Well, the Webatuck Creek does at any rate; its rushing waters pass as you turn off the Leedsville Road and into an enchanting estate. That no namesake trout leap out by way of greeting is my only gripe. Troutbeck is a true salve-from-the-city stay – stone bridges, sloping gardens, dense woodlands, squabbling squirrels – with a statuesque stone manor house at its heart. No need to knock, its door is open; a signature later and the house is yours. I mean, you only get one room to sleep in (and what a room: elegant, spacious, choice furnishings, Malin + Goetz-stocked bathroom) but the rest is to do what you will with.

Me? I put my feet up and read by the fire, shot some pool, sampled some Hudson Valley whiskies with the genial barman, put my feet up again by a different fire… As for the outdoors, there are 45 acres to stroll, a tennis court to try out, a centrepiece pool and some perfectly placed riverside perches to while away an afternoon. For higher-octane thrills, this is prime mountain-biking territory, there are horse-riding stables nearby and all manner of local water-based activities, including, yes, fishing. Hungry? You probably will be. Settle in to a smart banquette back in the dining room and savour some fresh-as-it-gets very local fare (ask for the crispy chicken, even if it’s not on the menu…)

Come by car and you can day trip to hip Hudson, cute Kent, the bucolic Berkshires. Hotfoot it on the Metro North from Grand Central (about two hours) and you’re certainly not stranded – nearby Millerton has a great antiques emporium, an inviting diner and a bookstore for stocking up on more fireside reads. Even if your stay doesn’t coincide with a snowstorm, as mine did, this is the kind of place you end up hoping you get stranded in nonetheless.
God seems fond of Spain’s Priorat region – particularly its wine. 12th-century monks cultivated vineyards here; when those ran dry, four friends replanted and won the gourmet affirmation of DOQ status. Then, glorious wine estate Terra Dominicata opened in the Montsant (holy mountain) Natural Park offering hermit-luring mod-rustic rooms and a kitchen serving ambrosial apricot and mascarpone gazpacho, hollandaise oysters and abundant 0km fruit and veg. A good day here is spent hiking the Fraguerau Gorge then trying moreish vintages onsite, or at restored abbey Scala Dei. We’re total converts.

Top up your whisky? Dram straight… Things get a wee bit hazy after a wild swim through Dunstane House’s 70-plus single, blended and rare malts – plus craft beers and gins from Berwick to Orkney, home of the Edinburgh-set hotel’s owners. Dining is a sozzly affair too, with whisky splashed into haggis bonbons and cranachan. After, quick march to your heritage tweed- and velvet-clad bower to wallow in a deep copper bath tub or take 40 winks on a fainting couch, or continue the revelry at the Edinburgh Gin Distillery close by.

**TELL YOUR FRIENDS**

Pair with a Barcelona break: you’re just over two hours by car from the city.
Here’s a 2019 resolution for you: say the word ‘wow’ less. Why? Well, because when you embark on one of these trips, you’ll be saying it a lot – and you’ll really mean it. Get set for off-roading, animal-spotting, sun-saluting, desert-spying, spa-bathing, star-gazing...

Snapped on a really wild puma-spotting drive at Awasi Patagonia, Chile
MIHIR GARH
JODHPUR, INDIA

‘Everything is bliss. This isn’t a typical hotel stay – it restores our faith in humankind.’
Lisa Goldapple, Latina bon vivant

HOTEL

IN THE WILD

Spotify playlist
At a wellness escape, isn’t it all gluten-free meals and yoga at dawn? Well, here the regimen is tailored to each guest, so while a less-is-more philosophy may be on the agenda for some, others may be calling out for full more-is-more body pampering. If it’s your head that needs clearing, exploring the 48 acres of this former tea plantation is an ideal antidote. As for your work-laze balance, you’ll want to keep that in check by lounging in your mountain-view chalet, floating in the infinity pool, and having a therapeutic sauvignon session by a bonfire.

The secret to eternal youth might be in Iceland, a country whose very surface is kept forever young by a nourishing balm of geothermal pools and regenerative lava flows. Humans, then, could do a lot worse than stay at the Retreat at Blue Lagoon, whose subterranean spa is hewn from volcanic rock that cooled here a mere 800 years ago (a babe, geologically speaking). Upstairs, slate-grey and moss-green furnishings evoke the surrounding alien landscape, and outside there’s private access to the mineral-rich waters of Iceland’s most-prized lagoon.

At one with the wilderness? Set your compass for Yala National Park to spot elephants, leopards and more.
HOTEL

AMANKORA
PUNAKHA LODGE
BHUTAN

You can’t judge a book by its cover, but you can judge a hotel by its check-in. Here you arrive on foot and cross a prayer-flag-covered suspension bridge across the Mo Chhu River. From there, staff will show you to your room in the former farmhouse of Bhutanese royalty. You will likely admire the stand-alone tub and wood-burning stove, then it’s time to decide: traditional face ritual in the spa or excursion to spy the rather resting 15th-century artwork in the nearby ‘fertility temple’? Whatever you choose, it’s clear from the get-go, you’ll be in for some thrills.

VILLA

MORUKURU
OCEAN HOUSE
SOUTH AFRICA

Fans of marine life, you’ve found your place. Step through the door of this just-for-you lodge in the wild and untamed De Hoop Nature Reserve and you’ll spy one thing: tail fins flicking from the water. From early July to mid October you’ll find the country’s best land-based whale-watching, when southern rights pause to nurse their young. But it’s not like dry land is lacking attractions, either. Staff will set up tables for you to dine on around the reserve – on a curlicue of beaches, beside a sand dune, in the fynbos-knotted plains. Spend days on marine walks or rattling around in 4x4s to glimpse antelope, zebras and rare Cape vultures. On return, hop into the coast-surveying Dutch hot tub and toast your new ocean friends with a glass of fizz.

HOLIDAY FOR LONGER

Where will the wind take you? Dine finely in Cape Town, see more whales in Hermanus or begin the Garden Route – they’re all within three hours’ drive.
SOUND TRAVELS

BOOK SEVEN NIGHTS OR MORE (IN ANY COMBINATION OF TRIPS) BY 28 FEBRUARY AND YOU’LL GET A SPECIAL EDITION BANG & OLUFSEN A1 PORTABLE BLUETOOTH SPEAKER WORTH £230.

This pocket-size party-starter plays at 2 x 140 watts, has 24 hours of battery life and can connect with other A1 speakers for surround sound. We’ve even put together a few travel-themed Spotify playlists to get you going…

FREE WHEN YOU BOOK SEVEN NIGHTS*