



Food as art: cod with quinoa and pickled cabbage at *Restaurant MAKI*, Alesund / PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER

## New and Noteworthy

### Four Seasons in the Maldives

I have long recommended the Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa, located around 10 miles northeast of the international airport at Malé. The group also offers a second property at Landaa Giraavaru, 90 miles north of Malé (a 30-minute transfer by seaplane), and the *Four Seasons Explorer*, a three-deck catamaran that cruises between the two resorts. Last December, **Maldives Private Island at Voavah** became the latest addition to the Four Seasons portfolio. The five-acre, seven-bedroom exclusive hideaway comes with its own 62-foot motor yacht, plus a private dive center and spa. From June to November, the surrounding waters are one of the best places in the world to swim with manta rays.

### Capella Comes to Shanghai

Most of Shanghai's best hotels are clustered along the Bund, the city's famous waterfront, or just across the Huangpu River in Pudong. However, March will see the opening of **Capella Shanghai, Jian Ye Li** in the Xuhui District, a cultural preservation zone formerly part of the French Concession. This all-villa resort will be housed within a number of *shikumun* buildings. Usually, shikumens are two- or three-story structures that resemble Western terrace houses or townhouses, distinguished by high brick walls enclosing a narrow front yard. Those on the Jian Ye Li estate were built in the 1930s for the French real estate company Foncière et Immobilière de Chine. In addition to the 55 villas (and 40 residences), the resort will offer a French brasserie, a library, an Auriga spa and a retail gallery of niche brands.

### New Spa at Belize Favorite

I've long had a soft spot for **Victoria House** on Ambergris Caye. True, the Casita accommodations are average — I only recommend the Infinity Suites, the Rainforest Suite and the deluxe units in three beachfront villas — and because of the closeness of the Belize Barrier Reef, the shoreline is choked with turtlegrass. But the resort's gardens are so tranquil, the view of the Caribbean is so hypnotic and the staff are so friendly that I have returned on numerous occasions. What the place lacked most conspicuously was a spa. Now this omission has been remedied with the recent debut of a 3,500-square-foot facility. Three of the rooms have private patios for outdoor massages, and the menu features 36 different treatments, which employ Belizean essential oils and natural products whenever possible.

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## TIME TRAVEL

The world's great museums provide one of the enduring pleasures of travel. However, the scale of their holdings can be intimidating. And nowadays the most celebrated institutions, such as the Louvre or the Uffizi, are often so crowded that the experience is severely compromised. Increasingly, I tend to seek out smaller museums, especially those on which the tourist hordes are unlikely to descend. One of my favorites is the Sir John Soane's Museum in London, which saw the completion of a seven-year restoration project last September. Soane was a neoclassical architect who rose from humble origins as a bricklayer to become Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts and the designer of the Bank of England. The museum comprises three houses (Nos. 12, 13 and 14) in Lincoln's Inn Fields, located at the western edge of the City of London's financial district. Soane himself lived in No. 13, surrounded by an astonishing private collection. This still includes classical bronzes, mosaics and vases; paintings by Canaletto, Watteau, Hogarth, Turner and Reynolds; drawings by Piranesi, Wren and Robert Adam; and, improbably, the sarcophagus of Egyptian pharaoh Seti I. Soane pursued a lifelong feud with his son George, whom he considered to be a hopeless wastrel, and left his houses to the nation to prevent him from inheriting them. George's loss is our gain. Soane died in 1837 at the age of 83, with the terms of his will stipulating that his properties be preserved in their original state. Today they form an enthralling time capsule. Best of all, the number of visitors is restricted to 90 at any one time.

*Andrew Harper*

I have recently updated two of my personal travel guides. **Italy** and **Spain, Portugal & Mediterranean**, which feature my hotel recommendations, personal notebooks, touring maps and favorite restaurants. Books are available at [andrewharper.com/store/harper-collection](http://andrewharper.com/store/harper-collection).



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PICTURESQUE CITIES, SENSATIONAL SCENERY, STELLAR SEAFOOD

## Norway: Oslo, Bergen and the Fjords

Norway is one of the most peaceful and hospitable countries in the world. There are two primary travel experiences: The first is a cruise along its island-dotted, fjord-indented coastline. The second is the one that I made last summer: a two-week mix of land- and sea-based adventures. The trip allowed us to take our time and to chat with the friendly locals — almost all of whom speak perfect English — as well as to get off the beaten track to view landscapes of unique and unmarred beauty. We also stayed in some well-run and spectacularly located hotels and made delicious discoveries while sampling the inventive restaurant scene. Norway is not only a very wealthy country — due to its massive oil reserves — but also an extremely sophisticated one. Since the

beginning of the oil boom in the 1970s, the Norwegians have developed a discerning taste for luxury and comfort, which is complemented by the purity and simplicity of Scandinavian design.

We began our journey in Oslo, the country's capital and largest city, then traveled to Bergen by train, visited that city and the surrounding region, continued north from Bergen to Alesund via an overnight voyage on the famous Hurtigruten shipping and cruise line and then explored Alesund and its environs by car and ship for several days. Though this itinerary may sound ambitious, it is very easy and comfortable to travel in Norway since excellent roads, a small but impressive rail network and an excellent system of coastal steamers and ferries link the country together.

### COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Seven Sisters Waterfall on Geirangerfjord, Norway

### THIS MONTH

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Andrew Harper travels anonymously and pays full rate for all lodging, meals and related travel expenses. Since the inception of this newsletter in 1979, the featured hotels and restaurants have been selected on a completely independent basis.

Full-service travel planning is available to members at (800) 375-4685 or [reservations@AndrewHarper.com](mailto:reservations@AndrewHarper.com).

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