

Condé Nast Traveler

CHICAGO
8 HOT NEW PLACES
TO EAT AND DRINK

FOCUS IN TRAVEL

JANUARY 2012

GOLD LIST

WORLD'S BEST

511

HOTELS, RESORTS, CRUISE LINES

19-PAGE SUPER-GUIDE

PLUS

ITALY

27 SUPERB FEASTS IN ROME

CARIBBEAN

2 TINY ISLANDS OF PERFECTION

THE BIG STORY

AFRICA

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY
TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF MAN—
AND A PEOPLE IN PERIL

NATURAL HIGH
12 MOST TRANQUIL SPOTS
ON EARTH

(See them while you can)

CONDENASTTRAVELER.COM
YOUR DAILY TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE

You take the elevator to the beach
at Il San Pietro di Positano, a Gold List
star on Italy's Amalfi Coast.



CHECK OUT OUR DIGITAL EDITION FOR A SLIDE SHOW OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE 214 PLATINUM CIRCLE HOTELS, RESORTS, AND CRUISE LINES (SEE BELOW), AS WELL AS FULL REVIEWS OF ALL 2012 GOLD LIST PROPERTIES.

2012 GOLD LIST

THE WORLD'S BEST PLACES TO STAY

511
TOP HOTELS, RESORTS
& CRUISE LINES

HERE IS TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE IN

its purest form: drawn from impartial personal experiences, sifted according to exacting standards, far-reaching in ambition, and, finally, tantalizing in what it delivers. The hotels, resorts, and cruise lines that made it onto this, our eighteenth annual Gold List, can't rest on their laurels. The contenders are tested afresh every year, in our Readers' Choice Survey, the collective result of some eight million votes cast by as savvy a group of travelers as you'll find on the planet. Many of those who do meet the gold standard hold their place year after year. But there is always somebody nipping at their heels. This year, for example, almost one-third of the list, a whopping 93 properties, is new. This reflects the acuity of our readers' radar—there are newcomers from the Czech Republic and Costa Rica, Saudi Arabia and South Korea, Tanzania and Turkey, and beyond. At this time of year, when thoughts turn to far horizons, here are more than 500 reasons to make your plans, find the dream.

▶ INTRODUCING
THE
PLATINUM
CIRCLE



What better way to mark 25 years of *Condé Nast Traveler* than by celebrating the superstars of the Gold List? Whenever you see the icon at left, it means that the hotel, resort, or cruise line has made the list every year for the past five years running. ♣ An impressive 214 Gold List properties and cruise lines can now call themselves Platinum Circle members, and the honor is a reminder of what we already know: that consistency, as much as excellence, is its own reward.

NEW **Capella Ixtapa, Ixtapa 94.8**
 \$96.9 \$93.8 \$100 \$90.6 \$93.8 \$93.8

At "this very private and romantic resort that cascades down a hill above the Pacific," all suites have private plunge pools and terraces—"it's like a fairy tale." The Mexican design mixes clay, stone, and marble. "These are the best-trained staff I've come across in a long time." Perfect-scoring dining includes upscale Mexican at A Mares.

Las Ventanas al Paraíso (Rosewood), Los Cabos 91.0
 \$93.8 \$90.0 \$90.0 \$90.8 \$92.4 \$89.1

NEW **Marquis Los Cabos, Los Cabos 91.0**
 \$100 \$94.4 \$85.2 \$92.6 \$90.7 \$83.0

This "jewel of Cabo" has perfect-scoring rooms with "fabulous ocean views," contemporary Mexican furniture, and marble bathrooms. "Staff know your name and preferred drink by the second day, sometimes by the end of the first." Canto del Mar, the French restaurant, serves dinner on an outdoor terrace.

NEW **Pueblo Bonito Emerald Bay Resort & Spa, Nuevo Mazatlán 91.6**
 \$98.0 \$96.7 \$84.7 \$84.0 \$96.7 \$89.5

This 20-acre beachfront resort comprises freestanding villas scattered around a grove of 150-year-old mangroves and vibrant gardens. "It's a relaxing place to stay." Rooms have private, fully furnished terraces. La Cordeliere serves international and French cuisine. "Staff are delightful."

Grand Velas Riviera Nayarit, Nuevo Vallarta 92.0
 \$100 \$95.5 \$84.1 \$88.6 \$93.2 \$90.5

NEW **Grand Velas Riviera Maya, Playa del Carmen 90.4**
 \$97.6 \$90.5 \$90.5 \$88.1 \$88.1 \$87.5

At this "modern, beautifully designed beachfront all-inclusive," the light-blue and turquoise exterior reflects the waterfront setting. Rooms are "gorgeously appointed" with local artwork and travertine floors. "Staff pamper you." "Five-star cuisine" includes Mexican at Frida.

Secrets Capri Riviera Cancun, Playa del Carmen 89.1
 \$92.0 \$94.7 \$84.0 \$86.7 \$93.3 \$84.0

Four Seasons, Punta Mita 93.0
 \$94.3 \$94.3 \$93.4 \$91.5 \$92.5 \$92.3

NEW **St. Regis, Punta Mita 88.9**
 \$91.7 \$88.9 \$88.9 \$88.9 \$94.4 \$80.6

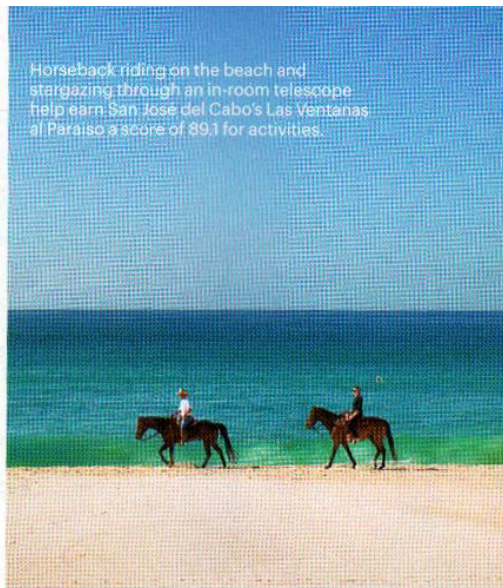
The three-year-old resort is in a private gated community along the Pacific. Inside tile-roofed Mexican casitas, rooms exhibit Mediterranean-Mexican style, with lime-green and fuchsia accents. Las Marietas serves regional specialties poolside. "The staff are among the world's best."

Excellence Playa Mujeres, Quintana Roo 90.1
 \$98.0 \$91.8 \$85.7 \$81.6 \$93.9 \$89.6

NEW **Banyan Tree Mayakoba, Riviera Maya 91.8**
 \$97.0 \$93.9 \$84.8 \$90.9 \$93.9 \$90.3

Set amid dunes, mangroves, and freshwater lagoons, freestanding villas are decorated with handcrafted Mayan furnishings and come with private pools; they are "nirvana on earth." Dishes at Tamarind are Mediterranean influenced. "Staff are attentive without hovering."

Ceiba del Mar Beach & Spa Resort, Riviera Maya 92.0
 \$95.7 \$95.7 \$83.3 \$95.7 \$100 \$87.0



2012 GOLD LIST

GOLD STANDARD

MOST ASTONISHING DELIVERY, OCEAN EDITION
 We'd thought we'd heard every story there was to hear about superlative service. Then a reader told us that at the Four Seasons Punta Mita, "we had a server who walked chest-high into the ocean, in his uniform, to bring us the drink we ordered. Enough said." Um, we think so, too.

CLOSEST APPROXIMATION OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN
 Not only is Belize's Kanantik Reef and Jungle Resort in Dangriga tucked into 300 acres of jungle, but it's also a mere four miles from a jaguar preserve. And a short boat trip from the world's second-largest barrier reef.

Fairmont Mayakoba, Riviera Maya 89.5
 \$94.4 \$89.7 \$83.2 \$86.9 \$90.7 \$92.4

Maroma Resort & Spa, Riviera Maya 94.6
 \$96.8 \$96.8 \$82.3 \$98.4 \$98.4 \$95.2

NEW **Rosewood Mayakoba, Riviera Maya 94.6**
 \$97.6 \$96.4 \$92.9 \$92.9 \$94.0 \$94.0

Upon arriving at this ecological enclave, guests are "immediately transported into relaxation mode." "The architecture is stunning": Yucatán limestone and renewable woods make rooms "warm and gorgeous." The Agave Azul Bar & Tequila Library serves tequila and traditional bites.

The Tides, Riviera Maya 95.9
 \$97.3 \$97.3 \$91.9 \$91.9 \$100 \$97.3

Valentin Imperial Maya, Riviera Maya 90.9
 \$93.8 \$93.8 \$91.7 \$87.5 \$91.7 \$86.7

Zoetry Paraiso de la Bonita, Riviera Maya 94.7
 \$96.0 \$92.0 \$92.0 \$96.0 \$100 \$92.0

NEW **Vallarta Palace, Riviera Nayarit 89.0**
 \$94.1 \$94.3 \$77.1 \$91.4 \$91.4 \$85.7

This all-inclusive has "great food, a beautiful beach, and plenty of activities," including a newly renovated kids' club. All rooms have double whirlpools, wood floors, and Farouk Systems amenities. Many have balconies with private hammocks. "Great restaurants" include Asian and Brazilian.

One & Only Palmilla, San Jose del Cabo 96.8
 \$98.3 \$96.6 \$94.1 \$96.6 \$97.5 \$97.4

La Casa Que Canta, Zihuatanejo 91.6
 \$94.0 \$92.5 \$86.6 \$92.5 \$92.5

CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

Alvear Palace, Buenos Aires 94.6
 \$95.0 \$96.7 \$90.9 \$98.4 \$91.7

Four Seasons, Buenos Aires 94.0
 \$94.9 \$94.9 \$91.6 \$93.9 \$94.8

Palacio Duhau - Park Hyatt, Buenos Aires 94.4
 \$95.0 \$91.8 \$91.8 \$96.7 \$96.7

NEW **Casas Wine Lodge, Lujan de Cuyo 89.5**
 \$92.0 \$88.0 \$88.0 \$88.0 \$91.7

Casas lies in a 50-acre vineyard in Mendoza Province, the 900-winery heart of Argentine viticulture: It's "a very special place in a very special place." The Spanish-style lodge is named for its underground cellar, or *cava*. "Staff will do anything to accommodate you." Gaudí-style adobe casitas, called Vignettes because they're inside the vineyard, have terraces with wood-burning fireplaces, and Andes views.

BELIZE

Kanantik Reef & Jungle Resort, Dangriga 92.9
 \$95.2 \$90.5 \$85.7 \$95.2 \$95.2 \$95.2

BRAZIL

Hotel Fasano, São Paulo 96.6
 \$91.7 \$95.8 \$95.8 \$100 \$100

CHILE

Hotel Salto Chico, Torres del Paine National Park 90.4
 \$85.7 \$96.4 \$82.1 \$92.9 \$89.3 \$96.3

COLOMBIA

Sofitel Santa Clara, Cartagena 92.5
 \$87.5 \$90.0 \$87.5 \$100 \$97.5

COSTA RICA

Xandari Resort & Spa, Alajuela 93.0
 \$96.8 \$96.8 \$83.9 \$90.3 \$100 \$90.3

NEW **El Silencio Lodge & Spa, Bajos del Toro 90.1**
 \$100 \$90.9 \$86.4 \$86.4 \$95.2 \$81.8

This eco-resort in "the thickest tropical cloud forest you can imagine" spreads across 500 acres. "Rustic Zen cottage suites" are arranged in tiers, and each has a private deck. The rate includes all meals, and "the food is organic and delicious."

Four Seasons Costa Rica at Peninsula Papagayo, Guanacaste 89.7
 \$92.2 \$91.3 \$82.5 \$92.3 \$89.4 \$90.2

Lapa Rios Ecological and Wildlife Refuge, Osa Peninsula 92.7
 \$92.0 \$88.0 \$96.0 \$92.0 \$95.8

GUATEMALA

Hotel Museo Casa Santo Domingo, Antigua 91.4
 \$88.7 \$93.1 \$88.9 \$91.7 \$94.4

PERU

Hotel Monasterio, Cuzco 91.9
 \$88.4 \$92.3 \$89.6 \$96.1 \$93.0

Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel, Cuzco 89.8
 \$89.4 \$87.5 \$82.5 \$95.2 \$94.2

NEW **Libertador Palacio del Inka, Cuzco 89.7**
 \$85.5 \$90.5 \$85.5 \$95.2 \$91.7

Across from the Koricancha (Temple of the Sun), this "old classic hotel" has an interior design that recalls Peru's colonial past. Rooms are simply decorated, with Incan motifs and carved wooden doors. "Breakfast at Inti Raymi can't be beat"; it also serves grilled trout, and duck with rice.

URUGUAY

Four Seasons, Carmelo 94.8
 \$96.2 \$92.3 \$92.3 \$88.5 \$100 \$100