

SECRET GEMS

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The Beach House, Barbuda

BARBUDA

You can live out your castaway fantasies—minus the cheesy clichés—at the gorgeously appointed Beach House, nestled on the southern shore of Antigua's sister isle, a place where donkeys outnumber residents. The property lives up to its name with dramatic, wave-filled panoramas (it faces the frothy merging of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea) and whitewashed casitas that look more like mini villas than hotel rooms. The digs, all kitted out with navy blue Italian furniture, Spanish-tiled floors, and espresso machines, do present couples with one wee problem: summoning the will to emerge from "the marshmallow," the name that guests here use to describe the deliciously overstuffed pillow of down, Italian linen, and gauzy white curtains that's technically referred to as a bed. When you do finally emerge, it might be for a complimentary welcome massage arranged by your private service ambassador, or for sunset canapés and cocktails in the pavilion, or for pumpkin ravioli served beside the twinkling lights of the saltwater pool. And for dessert, there's always the marshmallow. Doubles from \$615, including breakfast, January through April and October through November; 888-776-0333 or thebeachhousebarbuda.com. —Sallie Brody

Château du Sureau

OAKHURST, CALIFORNIA

A destination as enchanting as Yosemite National Park deserves to have its very own fairy-tale castle. Complete with a stone turret, bocce court, and gardens designed for surreptitious rendezvous, the 10-room Château du Sureau, located just south of the park, is such an embodiment of Old World elegance, you'd almost expect a troupe of knights to burst out of the crest-embossed gate.

Heroes of another sort dwell inside: black-and-white-clad chambermaids who appear, as if by magic, every time your

teacup needs refilling or you have a question about the collection of 19th-century paintings hanging overhead. And then there is the inn itself, as replete with antiques and silky tapestries as it is with the dreamy feeling of a bygone era. The accommodations—Lavender, Mint, Saffron, Thyme, Chamomile, and Sweet Geranium, among them—are named for the herbs that are grown on the grounds and infused into the Estate

TRIP TIP To keep hotel staff from barging in on you when you're in flagrante delicto—trust us, it happens more often than you'd think—always make sure you flip the sign to Do Not Disturb upon entering your room.

by the Elderberries restaurant's delectable fare. (Dishes include chorizo-black-trumpet and Peruvian-potato goulash, acorn-squash soup, and tomato-basil risotto.) You'll want to sample each and every one of these culinary concoctions over the course of your stay, so kick-start your appetite by asking the attentive concierge to arrange an excursion from her activities list—perhaps rock climbing in Yosemite, horseback riding through the Sierra Nevada mountains, panning for precious metals in Gold Country, or fly fishing on the inn's private trout pond. After a day of California adventures, you'll return to your quarters, so lavishly swathed in chintz and mahogany, you'll feel like king and queen of the world—or, at the very least, of this castle. Doubles from \$350, year-round; 559-683-6860 or chateaudusureau.com. —L. E

Lajitas

LAJITAS, TEXAS

Starry nights have always been conducive to romance, and skies don't get any starrier than those above Lajitas, set

smack on the border of Mexico, and a five-hour drive from El Paso's airport. That's because there's nothing near these 25,000 desert acres except miles of ranch land, the jagged Chisos Mountains, two glorious Big Bend parks, and the mystique of the wild Old West.

But don't confuse remote with rudimentary. Although it's parked where Pancho Villa once roamed (and coyotes still do), the cowboy-town-turned-posh-resort is an oasis of civility. Rooms are sumptuous refuges with a sophisticated western motif and showerheads almost as big as the Lone Star State itself. Any stress that the stark, cactus-pricked beauty of the surrounding landscape doesn't diminish can be melted away in a bath of Rio Grande mud at the Agavita Spa, or through the doors of the Thirsty Goat Saloon. At the Ocotillo Restaurant, sip wine while watching the sinking sun throw a crimson glow across a horizon already bright with russet peaks. (The eatery specializes in grilled beef and game and delicately spiced Southwestern fare you won't find anywhere else, like diamondback rattlesnake cakes, hot and crunchy trout with mango-jalapeño aioli, and duck confit quesadillas.) And it's not only deer and antelope that play out this way. Fill your non-lolling hours with hiking, rafting, bullwhipping lessons (!), tennis, and golf—on the "19th hole," you'll hit the ball o'er the Rio Grande to Mexico. You promised to follow him to the ends of the earth; here's your chance to go there in style. Doubles from \$215, January through April; 877-525-4827 or lajitas.com. —Jeannie Rolston

Punta Caracol Acqua-Lodge

ISLA COLÓN, PANAMA

No roads lead to this discreet retreat, tucked away in Panama's famously pristine Bocas del Toro archipelago. Honeymooners must first fly into the town of Bocas on Isla Colón, then travel to the overwater lodge via a 15-minute motorboat ride. But the difficulty of getting there is balanced by the ease of life in your private two-story cabin, one of six solar-powered beauties that sit on stilts above a mile-long stretch of exquisite