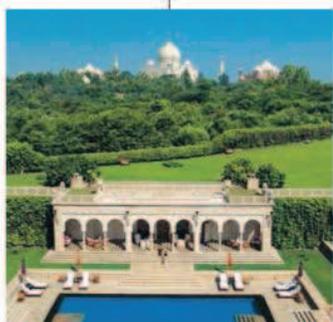
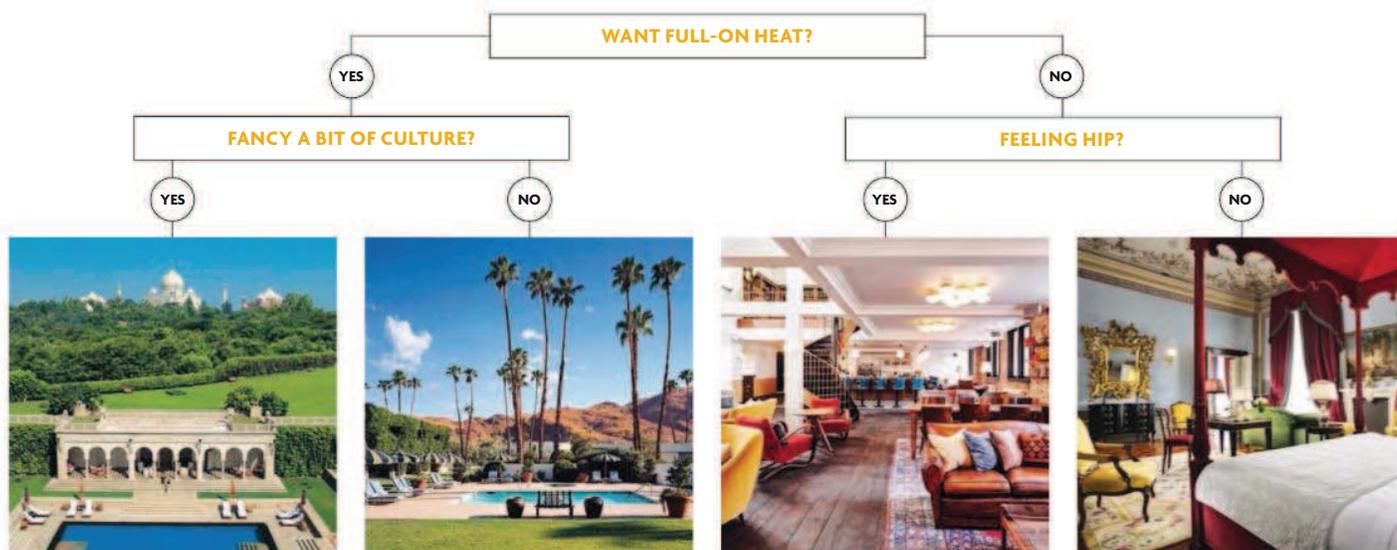


Where to go...

FOR THE FIRST HINT OF SPRING



**THE OBEROI
AMARVILAS** Agra

With its silky rugs and honeycomb lattices, Amarvilas has stood the test of time – though not quite as much as the place opposite: the Taj Mahal is why you'll stop in Agra, and the unobstructed views of it from 650 yards are why you'll stay here. There's not a bad room; each one faces this worldly wonder. So you can keep watch from the pavilion during your morning vinyasa, and make out that familiar dome through the steam in your (epic) all-glass octagonal shower. You can sip Darjeeling on your balcony, or work your way through a thali (small dishes of prawn curry, dhal and cardamom-spiked yogurt) on the terrace by night, the air thick with jasmine, dancers swirling to the plinky-plonk of the sitar... and it's still there, its tiny, mirrored windows winking from across the Yamuna river. On Fridays, when the Taj Mahal isn't open, the spa is a popular spot. And the view is pretty damn good from there too.

BOOK IT Abercrombie & Kent (abercrombiekent.co.uk) offers one night on a seven-night trip, from £2,515, incl flights and sightseeing.



PARKER
Palm Springs

Palm Springs is a major draw for the cool (and the kitsch) – and nowhere sums up this aesthetic more than the Parker Palm Springs, an original 1959 Holiday Inn that has been spruced up and preened by Jonathan Adler.

Sunkissed pool attendants bring icy lemonade to your candy-stripped sunlounger while perky jet-setters Instagram photos of themselves in Kate Spade bikinis beneath the palms. Leave your English reserve at the airport, because this place is social. Whether you're being gently poached in the hot tub or kicking back by the firepit, conversation is key – and fellow guests might include a Facebook exec or HBO showrunner, which keeps things interesting. Handy, really, because in between Coachella and the BNP Paribas Open there isn't a huge amount to do, although the wonderful concierge Chris will try her damned best to draft you a brilliant itinerary if you would like one.

BOOK IT Double, from £245 (parkerpalmsprings.com).



THE HOXTON
Amsterdam

Trendy? Of course it's trendy. The latest outpost of Shoreditch's Hoxton hotel – and their first outside London – has the same freewheelin', beards-and-bicycles vibe. They've knocked together five gorgeous merchants' houses on a quiet canal and turned the lower ground floor into a brasserie and bar run by Soho House. This is where EVERYONE hangs out, eating mac 'n' cheese and sipping negronis. Dark herringbone wood floors and painted panelled walls extend to the 111 bedrooms, most of which have pretty canal views. Room categories include Shoebox, Cosy, Roomy and Concept (with a jazzy, gilded ceiling); Ercol armchairs and retro phones add a tongue-in-cheek Seventies vibe; and quirky touches include Roberts radios and copies of Marx's *Manifesto*. And if you can't wait for breakfast, they leave a banana and a yogurt in a bag on your door handle. Hoxton lovers will feel right at home.

BOOK IT Double, from £97, incl breakfast (thehoxtton.com). SNCF travels to Amsterdam from £113 return (voyages-sncf.com).



VILLA CORA
Florence

If you like your Italian hotels with a big fat dollop of baroque splendour, then Villa Cora is just the ticket. Squirrelled away down quiet, leafy roads in the southern reaches of Florence, it's just far enough from the tourist hullabaloo to feel like a proper holiday. So you can forget about the sightseeing mania as you sit by the tree-sheltered pool sipping Aperol spritzes, or sprawl on your enormous four-poster under a frescoed ceiling. Feel smug about avoiding the hubbub as you eat breakfast – those figs! – on the sunny terrace overlooking bubbling fountains and sculpted hedges, then stay on to get sozzled on prosecco (they operate a 'help yourself' policy, which is exceedingly happy-making). Whatever you do, make sure you're around for the legendary weekly barbecue, which has the most gargantuan cheese table you've ever clapped eyes on. Who needs the Ponte Vecchio when you can have Taleggio?

BOOK IT Double, from £226 (villacora.it).