

AUSTRALIAN

GOURMET

TRAVELLER

50

**YEARS OF GOURMET
TRAVELLER**
The anniversary issue

Ginger whisky cake with
burnt white chocolate cream



Bhutan's royal flush

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When your brother-in-law is king and you decide to build a circuit of hotels in Bhutan, they need to be exceptional to earn the royal seal of approval. That's the challenge facing Dasho Sangay Wangchuk as he oversees the construction of five new lodges in the Dragon Kingdom scheduled to open in April next year. Royal connections and his family's own landholdings secured the five spectacular sites in the kingdom's major valleys of Thimphu, Punakha, Paro, Gangtey and Bumthang. In the capital, Thimphu, Wangchuk is conjuring "a palace in the sky" facing the city's newly completed 52-metre golden Buddha.

The lofty setting, formerly part of his own family's apple orchard, will feature a private dining area with cocktail bar ("This I have done mainly for His Majesty," says Wangchuk), a 100-metre pool built to reflect sky and mountains, and views across the roof of the Himalayas to infinity – or at least to Tibet. Travel between the lodges will be by helicopter or luxury four-wheel drive.

Wangchuk, a Columbia University graduate and one of the country's leading entrepreneurs, had no shortage of suitors to partner with in the ventures. He chose the Bangkok-based hotel group Six Senses because, he says, its ethos best aligned with Bhutan's own vision for a sustainable future.

OVER THE MOON

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The 21st-century space race is well and truly under way. Some of the world's most ambitious entrepreneurs – among them Paypal and Tesla Motors founder Elon Musk, Amazon pioneer Jeff Bezos and irrepressible Virgin founder Richard Branson – are vying to launch civilians into space. Bezos and Branson are racing to realise suborbital flights (more than 100 kilometres above sea level) by the end of the decade, while Musk's Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (SpaceX) has its sights set on Mars. Yet another company, US-based space tourism outfit Space Adventures, is shooting for the moon, with seats on lunar circumnavigations priced at an astronomical \$130 million.

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OFFSHORE COLOMBIA

Jetsetters alternate days spent wandering in Cartagena's splendid Old City and the emerging barrio of Getsemani with daytrips to nearby Caribbean islands. We'll be making a beeline for a new hangout on Tierra Bomba called Blue Apple Beach House, a private members' beach club (join for \$65 a day), restaurant and six-room guesthouse. Catch Blue Apple's speedboat from Cartagena for the 25-minute trip to a cabana-strewn beach and the promise of grilled catch of the day and Med-Colombian share plates.

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NEXT-GEN TRAVEL

How to inspire the next generation? Take them with you. Travel pushes boundaries and turns out global citizens. Seeing a place through their eyes may give you a new perspective as well, whether on safari in Rajasthan's Ranthambhore National Park to spot tigers (sujanluxury.com), on a road trip across the American West towing a classic Airstream (airstream2go.com), trekking across valleys between mountain lodges and Buddhist monasteries in Bhutan (aman.com, sixsenses.com), taking tango lessons with a master tanguero in Buenos Aires (carloscopello.com) or hula classes on the island of Oahu (royalhawaiiancenter.com).

The farther afield, the more their spiritual and intellectual universe expands. And then let's hope the next generation do the same when their turn comes.

SVATMA AT THANJAVUR,
TAMIL NADU



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TAMIL IMMERSION

Dedicated Indiaphiles have long been drawn south by the elaborate artistic traditions and festivals – and incendiary thalis and dosas – of Tamil Nadu. One of the state's richest cultural sites is the World Heritage-listed Great Living Chola Temples in the city of Thanjavur, now even more appealing for travellers with the opening of a boutique hotel. Designed and decorated by husband and wife Krithika and Sumanth Subrahmanian, the 38-room Svatma is built around a century-old family home and the experience is one of total Tamil immersion, from vegetarian cooking classes and Vedic chanting to specialist tours of the city's astounding 11th- and 12th-century temples.