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Five Best: Colonial Hideaways

By Sarah Barrell

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1. Palmiet Valley Wine & Country Estate, South Africa

Palmiet Valley Estate is just half an hour from Cape Town in the heart of South Africa's wine country. This grand Cape Dutch homestead, built in 1692, has been restored to host just 16 guests in individually decorated suites, complete with bathrooms ranging in style from Victorian to Turkish. Dinner, complemented by a huge variety of wines from the estate's cellar, is taken either in the 18th-century dining room or, on summer nights, on the Herb Garden Terrace overlooking the elegant stone swimming pool, Drakenstein Mountain Reserve and surrounding wine lands.

Palmiet Country Estate, PO Box 9085, Klein Drakenstein, 7628 Paarl, South Africa (00 27 021 862 7741, www.palmiet.co.za). Doubles from R950 (£68) including breakfast, based on two sharing

2. Ceylon Tea Trails Resort, Sri Lanka

The highlands of the Bogawantalawa Valley, located some 4,000m above sea level, is home to the Ceylon Tea Trails Resort, a luxury retreat and working tea plantation recently opened by the Dilmah tea company. Four colonial bungalows, built for 19th-century British tea estate managers, have been restored and individually decorated, served by a butler, chef and houseboys, and linked by long winding trails through the plantation. Take excursions through the tea fields, watch the leaves make their way down the production line and taste the day's production of Broken Orange Pekoe. Other activities include mountain biking, kayaking, and white-water rafting on Castlereagh Lake.

Ceylon Tea Trails Resort (00 94 11 230 3888, www.teatrails.com). Double rooms from US\$178 (£94) per person, per night, all-inclusive, based on two sharing

3. The House of Jasmines, Argentina

In the tradition of great plantation houses, a grand avenue of trees brings guests to this 120-year-old estancia, in Argentina's northwest province of Salta. A seven-suite Spanish colonial inn sits at the heart of this 300-acre ranch at the foot of the Andes. Its owners, the actor Robert Duvall and his wife Luciana Pedraza, have decorated with subtle cream furnishings and contrasting colourful local art and antiques. The grounds, planted with a heady mix of orchids, roses and jasmine can be explored on foot or horseback. A pool and spa are on hand, as is a restaurant serving regional food and wine.

House of Jasmines, Ruta Nacional No 51, Km 11, La Merced Chica, Salta (00 54 0387 497 2002, www.houseofjasmines.com). Doubles from \$125 (£71), based on two sharing, including breakfast

4. Hacienda Temozon, Mexico

The Yucatan capital of Merida in northwestern Mexico is home to a growing number of old henequen (sisal) hacendados converted into chic hotels. Hacienda Temozon began life as a cattle ranch in the 16th century. During the sisal boom of the 1800s, mansions and gardens were rebuilt on a palatial scale, only to fall into disrepair after land reforms in the early 1900s. This striking cochineal red hacienda was restored to its former opulence in 1997, retaining many original architectural features,

plus plenty of 21st-century bells and whistles for the discerning traveller, including a top-notch spa, a gourmet restaurant and vast jungle-fringed pool.

Hacienda Temozon (00 52 999 923 8089; www.haciendasmexico.com) US\$426 + taxes (\$22) per day, double room only

5. Wharekauhau Lodge, New Zealand

Pronounced "forry-ko-ho", this secluded retreat on New Zealand's North Island is set on a 5,000-acre working sheep station overlooking the ocean. The tall, mullioned windows of this 19th-century estate, which features huge fireplaces, look out over rugged Palliser Bay. Guests can choose from a wide variety of outdoor activities - golf, four-wheel driving, trekking, climbing, farm tours, fishing, diving, bushcraft and wine trails. For more slothful souls, each of the 12 private cottages comes with dramatic ocean views and the estate's cellar is stocked with local wine. The lodge is connected by a 10-minute helicopter journey to New Zealand's capital city, Wellington.

Wharekauhau Lodge, Western Lake Road, Palliser Bay, RD3 Featherston, Wairarapa, NZ (00 64 6 307 7581, www.wharekauhau.co.nz). NZ\$1,086 (£383) per person, per night, based on two sharing, full board. Transfers extra

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