

Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report[®]

DECEMBER 2015 | OUR 37TH YEAR

andrewharper.com

TRAVELING THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF TRULY ENCHANTING PLACES

THIS MONTH

THE SKELETON COAST AND THE NAMIBRAND

Viewing desert-adapted lion and elephant amid a breathtaking wilderness landscape

AMAN TOKYO

The Japanese capital finally gets the refined boutique hotel it has long deserved

WEB EXCLUSIVES

Look for these symbols, then visit the *Hideaway Report* at andrewharper.com.

📄 = additional related article

📷 = slideshow 🎥 = video

IN THE NEWS

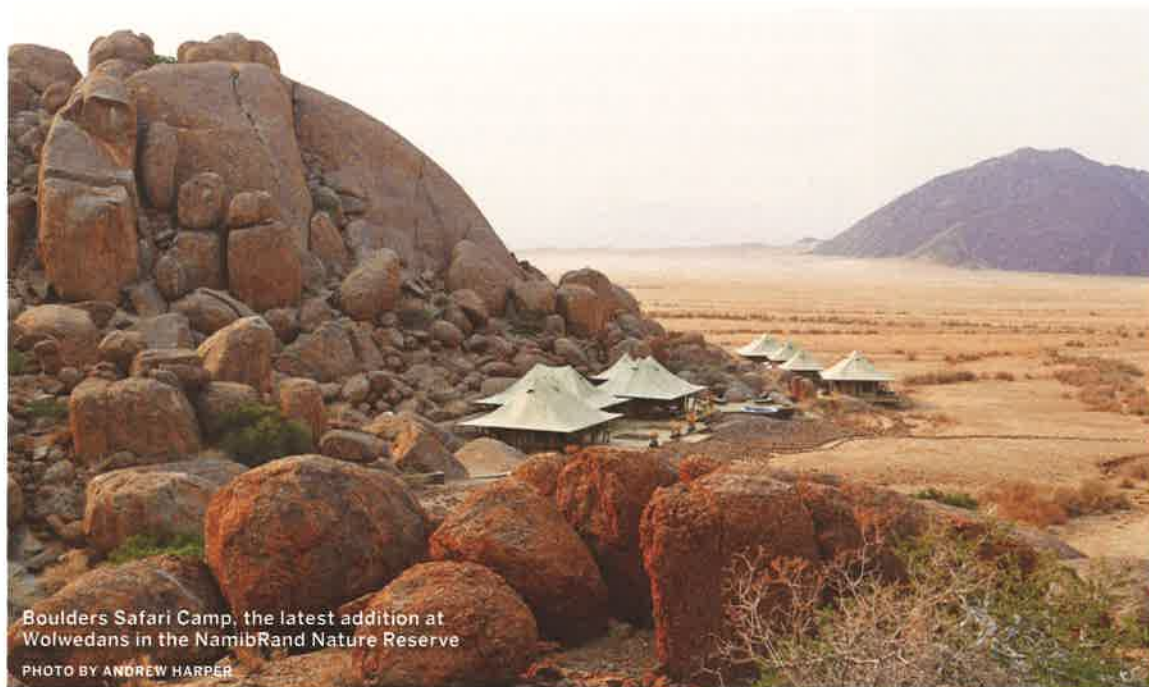
Ashford Castle Makeover

PARTS OF Ashford

Castle in Ireland's County Mayo date from the 13th century, but much of the huge turreted structure was added in the 1850s when the estate was purchased by a member of the Guinness family. A hotel since 1939, the property reopened in April following a two-year restoration. It now boasts a spectacular new spa with an indoor resistance pool, a hammam, a relaxation suite and a terrace with views across the serene waters of Lough Corrib. Guests can choose from product lines that include VOYA, based on seaweed from nearby County Sligo. Ashford Castle has always had a loyal American following — former guests include President Reagan, Sen. Ted Kennedy and John Wayne — and their number seems destined to increase.

STYLISH NEW CAMPS, EPIC SCENERY, FASCINATING WILDLIFE

Namibia: A Spellbinding Desert Safari



Boulders Safari Camp, the latest addition at Wolwedans in the NamibRand Nature Reserve

PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER

NAMIBIA FEELS LIKE A COUNTRY WHOSE TIME HAS COME. TUCKED AWAY IN THE SOUTHWEST corner of Africa, it is safe, well-organized and relatively prosperous, thanks to its deposits of gold and diamonds. Since independence in 1990, multiparty democracy has endured, and with a population of just over 2 million in a land roughly twice the size of California, Namibia has few of the social ills that afflict so many other African nations.

Of course, the lack of inhabitants is chiefly because most of Namibia is inhospitable desert. The Bushmen hunter-gatherers, a few of whom still roam its arid plains, dubbed it “the land God made in anger.” Ridge upon jagged ridge of ancient rock and oceans of drifting orange sand make up one of the most spectacular landscapes on earth. For much of the year, the sky is cloudless and the dry air has an uncanny clarity. From a light airplane, you can see for 100 miles. And in the evening when the wind drops, the silence is absolute.

Despite being mostly desert, Namibia is far from lifeless. The 8,784-square-mile Etosha National

Park, established around the huge Etosha salt pan — visible from space — is one of Africa's great wildlife sanctuaries, with a wide range of mammal species that includes lion, leopard and rhino. And even in the middle of an apparently empty landscape, you will suddenly encounter a herd of oryx (a ubiquitous desert-adapted antelope with lethal rapier-like horns), a family of giraffe or, if you are very fortunate, a pair of strolling cheetah.

Namibia is generally regarded as suitable for a second trip to Southern Africa. First-time visitors invariably head to South Africa or Botswana. However, its stark and dramatic terrain provides an

For personalized trip-planning assistance, call (800) 375-4685 or email reservations@andrewharper.com.

andrewharper.com | For comments and inquiries concerning the *Hideaway Report*, please email aharper@andrewharper.com.

LAST LOOK



These oryx preferred our plunge pool to the local water hole at Wolwedans Private Camp, Namibia

PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER

LAST WORD

Travel Plans for 2016

IN THESE TURBULENT TIMES, some countries that once were fixtures on the bucket lists of affluent Americans have been summarily deleted. The most obvious example is Egypt, and in a dozen other once-popular places, war, terrorism and Ebola have conspired to shrink the planet. For me, this is a matter of special concern at the end of the year, when I consider where to go in the next 12 months. Judging by my emails, the overriding concern of *Hideaway Report* subscribers is security. This explains the ever-growing interest in Australia and New Zealand. In South America, Chile is undoubtedly the country of the moment, in part because it is perceived to be more politically and economically stable than either Argentina or Brazil. In Africa, the countries that have weathered the Ebola crisis and returned to prosperity are preeminently Botswana and Namibia. They are also viewed as tranquil and safe. Obeying the contents of my mailbox, 2016 will almost certainly see me make an extended trip to Scandinavia, as well as to Japan, which has witnessed a dramatic increase in Western visitors. Fortunately, people's desire to travel seems to be virtually unquenchable, and one country's problems tend to become another's opportunity. It has long been my credo that travel is the one area of human life where spending money makes you richer. And I'm certain that the first boarding pass of 2016 will bring me exactly the same thrill as in every previous year.

From My Notebook

Perth Opening

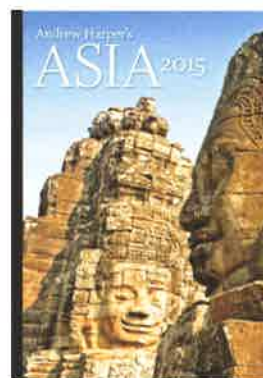
Given its status as Australia's boomtown, Perth has had a surprisingly limited selection of upscale hotels. This has now been rectified to some extent by the debut of **COMO The Treasury**, a 48-room property housed within the 140-year-old State Buildings in the revitalized historic center of the city. The hotel was designed by noted Australian architect Kerry Hill — responsible for projects as diverse as The Sukhothai hotel in Bangkok and the State Theatre Centre of Western Australia — and its rooms are intended to create an atmosphere of serenity in keeping with the brand's emphasis on "wellness" and a refined contemporary lifestyle. The *Wildflower* rooftop restaurant will offer views across the Swan River and a menu showcasing regional produce. COMO is noted for its standout spas, and the Perth property is likely to be no exception.

St. Kitts Surprise

St. Kitts has long had a reputation as a sleepy Caribbean island dominated by its 3,792-foot volcano, Mount Liamuiga, with a few small inns and mostly black-sand beaches. Things began to change with the advent in December 2014 of Belle Mont Farm, an imaginative boutique hotel in the ambitious Kittitian Hill development. Now comes the news that **Park Hyatt St. Kitts** will open in 2016 overlooking The Narrows, the strait that separates St. Kitts from neighboring Nevis. The 125 accommodations will feature both contemporary and colonial design elements, while many suites will boast private rooftop pools. The resort will offer three restaurants and a spa with 12 treatment rooms, and guests will have access to a beach club, a huge super-yacht marina, and the nearby Christophe Harbour golf course, designed by Tom Fazio.

Galápagos Debut

Personally, I am keen on boats of all kinds, but I concede that not everyone shares my enthusiasm, especially not for relatively small ones bobbing up and down in the mid-Pacific. For aquaphobes, or more specifically, ochrophobes (those in fear of vehicles), the Galápagos Islands have always represented a quandary. Their dilemma was partially solved by the opening of the Galapagos Safari Camp on the island of Santa Cruz. The new **Pikaia Lodge**, also on Santa Cruz, now meets the unresolved needs of tisantaphobes (those in fear of tents). Spectacularly located at an elevation of 1,500 feet, the lodge provides all the comforts of home, plus a restaurant for Ecuadorian and Peruvian cuisine, and an infinity pool. Guides take guests on hikes and lengthier "expeditions." And for landlubbers who pluck up their courage, the lodge even has two yachts for day trips.



Harper Collection Latest Updates

December brings two more of my personal travel guides: **Asia** and **Central & Eastern Europe**. Updates feature my latest hotel discoveries, regional notebooks, touring maps, restaurants and, of course, a complete list of my recommended hotels with numerical ratings and detailed descriptions. *The Andrew Harper Collection* books are now available for individual purchase at andrewharper.com/store/harper-collection. They are also mailed bimonthly to Premier subscribers. To upgrade your subscription, contact clientrelations@andrewharper.com.

Free of hotel advertising since its inception in June 1979, *Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report*® (ISSN 0884-7622) is a private publication for sophisticated travelers. The selection of hotels and restaurants for inclusion is made on a completely independent basis, with Andrew Harper, LLC paying full rate for all meals, lodging and related travel expenses. The *Hideaway Report* is published monthly by Andrew Harper at 1501 Rio Grande St., Suite 410, Austin, TX 78701. Periodicals Postage is paid at Austin, TX, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Andrew Harper, P.O. Box 684368, Austin, TX 78758. Tel. (855) 831-4314 or (512) 904-7342. Fax (512) 904-7350. Copyright 2015 Andrew Harper, LLC. CST #2110806-40; IST #1096; WST #609248672. All rights reserved. Quotation, reproduction or transmission by any means is prohibited without written permission from the publisher.

Editor-in-Chief Andrew Harper Art Director Kristina Mitchell Research Editor Adrienne Jany Photo Editor Kelly Zhu