

## CHEAP BUT CHIC

Why bankrupt yourself to stay in lovely surrounds? Try one of these bargain beauties

**Miss Clara, Stockholm**

Miss Clara is the younger, hipper, cheaper offshoot of the luxury Nobis portfolio, and in an infamously pricey Scandi city it's your best bet for a central location on a shoestring. In a former girls' school, architect Gert Wingårdh has reimaged the original Art Nouveau decor with herringbone parquet flooring, swirly bentwood bedheads and arched windows. If you can stretch to it, the pricier corner rooms (from £130) are vast and give way more bang for your buck. Rates are room-only, but book through [designhotels.com](http://designhotels.com) and **get a superb, vast, filling Swedish breakfast (waffles, sausages, granola) for an extra tenner.** Doubles from £95, room only (00 46 8440 6700, [missclarahotel.com](http://missclarahotel.com)).

**Vander Urbani Resort, Ljubljana**

Amanda and Aleksander Vujadinović's design hotel in the Slovenian capital comes with the only rooftop swimming pool in the Old Town. It's a cut above the competition on style, too, with 16 idiosyncratic rooms featuring unusual bespoke furniture. Reserve a 'large' room as the 'small' ones can be too bijoux. Book direct on the website or

call for the best deals (they promise to beat third-party websites). Few guests realise they offer free yoga sessions in the rooftop studio, or that Benjamin Launay's unassuming dining room is worth staying in for. Doubles from £74, B&B (00 386 1200 9000, [vanderhotel.com](http://vanderhotel.com)).

**Kinsterna, Peloponnese**

It's off the beaten track but this immaculately restored Byzantine-Ottoman manor house serves up rural Greece at its most idyllic. Surrounded by ripples of vineyards, olives and cypresses, only a gurgling stream and bird song disturb the silence. A head-turning, L-shaped infinity pool runs along the citrus grove, and gardens supply fresh-plucked ingredients for the hotel restaurant. The spa special, with treatments based on local herbs, olive oil and honey — it's even got an Ottoman-style hammam. **Splurge on a suite (they cost only another £45 and come cheapest in April, May, September and October) — No. 39 has a fireplace and a balcony with superb views.** Doubles from £89, B&B (00 30 2732 066300, [kinsternahotel.gr](http://kinsternahotel.gr)).

Sweet dreams: below, clockwise from top left, rural idyll Kinsterna; carbon-neutral URBN; hip Miss Clara; design treat Vander Urbani

**URBN, Shanghai**

In stark contrast to Shanghai's energy-guzzling skyscraper hotels comes URBN, a carbon-neutral retreat. Concealed behind big wooden doors on the leafy outskirts of the former French Concession, each of the 26 rooms in this repurposed factory are deftly designed dens, with reclaimed hardwood floors and coconut-fibre mattresses. **Sunlight is at a premium, though, so try to book a garden-view room (only £30 more).** Breakfast is a meal worth idling over, in the bamboo-boxed courtyard restaurant, but dodge the pricey dinner menu and eat cheap wok-fried street food instead. Doubles from £145, B&B (00 86 215153 4600, [urbnhotels.com](http://urbnhotels.com)).

**Hotel Territorio, Patagonia**

On elevated ground outside Puerto Madryn, this Modernist masterpiece was conceived with Patagonia in mind. There is no fancy garden with exotic plants, since nothing grows in the arid steppe, and the corrugated iron exterior (designed after the inland *estancias*), hides large open-plan spaces with polished concrete floors and floor-to-ceiling windows. Book between July and November and you can watch pods of southern right whales in the gulf below. And, since even the standard rooms have sea views, there's no need to upgrade. **Pay cash in US dollars and get 10 per cent off.** Doubles from £150, B&B (00 54 280 488 3180, [hotelterritorio.com.ar](http://hotelterritorio.com.ar)).

**Posada del León de Oro, Madrid**

A 19th-century inn turned boutique hotel, this *posada* is a hit with locals, thanks to its upbeat tavern and location: on Cava Baja, Madrid's most famous *tapas* street. Head for said bar on arrival, where the emphasis is on locality, and the first few wines are on the house if your room isn't ready. **For the most authentic experience, reserve a balcony room (only £22 more than standard),** open your shutters and witness the revelry in the streets below. And book via the website — pay in full in advance and get 15 per cent off. Doubles from £89, room only (00 34 91 119 1494, [posadadelleondeoro.com](http://posadadelleondeoro.com)).

**Hotel 32, Las Vegas**

When a fire ripped through the penthouse floor of Sin City's Monte Carlo Resort in 2008, some clever

**Virgin Hotel, Chicago**

As one might expect from Richard Branson, a man who's pushed more envelopes than Basil Don Bond, the world's first Virgin Hotel is as innovative as it is luxurious. Even the basic rooms are mini-suites; there's a secret speakeasy behind the gym; and the hip Commons Club serves Prosecco on tap. But best of all is Virgin's 'what you see is what you get' policy: **minibar drinks sold at street prices, free high-speed internet, and no additional charge for late check-out or room service.** Empty Richard's envelope further at the free daily cocktail hour from 6pm-7pm. Doubles from £139 (00 1312 940 4400, [virginhotels.com](http://virginhotels.com)). >

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person decided to reclaim the once-grandiose space as a much cooler boutique hotel. Hotel 32 (on the 32nd floor of the Monte Carlo) is now 50 smaller suites in amorous degrees of chocolate, white and red. In a city where a bathtub with a view over the Strip will set you back at least £400, the value here is astonishing. Expect a minibar custom-stocked to your tastes, a **club lounge serving hot and cold snacks gratis throughout the day** and a free airport transfer in a stretch limo thrown in if you book one of the larger suites. Jackpot indeed. *Doubles from £91, B&B (00 1702 692 9487, hotel32lasvegas.com).*

#### Brody House, Budapest

Part private members' club, part B&B, Brody House melds faded grandeur — exposed brickwork, artfully peeling paint, vintage furniture — with modern flourishes such as industrial-chic steel chandeliers. Every room in this elegant, high-ceilinged 1850s townhouse is decorated by a local artist and they're all

barmy yet beautiful. Splash out on top-drawer Tinei (£90) and you get a sexy gold freestanding bath and a balcony. Ask the engaging concierge staff to sort theatre tickets at preferential rates (**we bagged royal box tickets at the National Ballet for £23 and you'll rack up even more savings.** *Doubles from £49, B&B (00 36 1266 1211, brodyhouse.com).*

#### FAMILY-FRIENDLY Las Casas del Rey de Baeza, Seville

In a city where temperatures hit the 20s in February, Las Casas del Rey keeps its cool with leafy courtyards, huge baskets of grab-me oranges, powder-blue balconies and shady, casually chic rooms. Good news if you're up against school hols: July and August are low season here. That's when temperatures push 40°C, so go out early (the Alcazar is 10 minutes away) and late (Seville's full of kid-friendly *tapas* bars — the oldest, El Rinconcillo, is steps away), and wallow the middle of the day away in the rooftop pool, with its

**Cool digs:** above from left, Las Casas del Rey de Baeza; lobby in Brody House; dining at the water's edge at Golden Rock Inn. **Opposite, sort mind and body at Papaya Playa**

cathedral views. Stay between Sunday and Thursday for cheaper rates; **book with the hotel and they'll throw in a massage and a glass of sangria.** You could add the £22 Iberian ham-tasting session, but you'll get unlimited *jamón* with the £13 brekkie. *Doubles from £70, room only (00 34 954 561496, hospes.com).*

#### Purity, Kerala, India

Teetering at the edge of silvery Lake Vembanad in the heart of Kerala's coconut-palm backwaters, Purity has a simple agenda: relaxation. With just 14 rooms, it feels exclusive, and lake-view suites with cavernous bathrooms reinforce the feel. But come at the right time of year (May, when it's quiet, but the monsoon rains haven't yet arrived) and low prices and solitude are on tap. **Check in before 5pm, so you can catch the complimentary boat trip with a local fisherman** out to empty his billowing Chinese-style nets. *Doubles from £92, B&B (00 91 484 2216666, malabarhouse.com).*

#### Golden Rock Inn, Nevis

Masked from view in the hills, Golden Rock is a foliage-wrapped old plantation hotel that's been given a hip, colour-charged makeover by two New York artists. There are enchanting gardens, a pool and a clued-up modern Caribbean restaurant serving fresh local fish and strong rum punches. Book early to get the Scarborough and Mt Pleasant cottages, which have **bamboo four-posters and a private terrace (but cost the same as other rooms in the category).** Save more by travelling in May and June, when flights to St Kitts are cheaper and room rates drop by up to a quarter — but the weather, while a little humid, is lovely. *Doubles from £144, room only (00 1 869 469 3346, goldenrocknevis.com).*

#### Mandarin Oriental, Kuala Lumpur

Liveried doormen, lashings of marble, slick rooftop pool — we would expect no less from the glamorous Mandarin Oriental hotel group. But, what does come as a surprise is the price: KL's low

cost of living means paying a fraction of what a Mandarin O in Hong Kong or London costs. The 10 restaurants and lounges in the hotel are affordable, too — afternoon tea on the terrace is £17 (in the London branch it's £45). All rooms are gold-hued cocoons, but £18 extra gets you a Twin Tower View Room — fall asleep staring at the white spikes of the 88-storey Petronas building. *Doubles from £122, B&B (00 60 323 808888, mandarinoriental.com).*

#### Papaya Playa, Tulum, Mexico

Perfectly set between the beach and the jungle fringes, Papaya Playa is a bohemian assortment of stylish stripped-wood thatched cabanas. Ask for an oceanfront one on the north side (away from the bar, which often has live music) to be sure of power sockets and your own bathroom, as garden cabanas are basic. The vibe is yogic, so **ask for an upgrade — they're always dealing with free-spirited types who have decided to 'stay on'**, so they're flexible. The rate includes breakfast, which is actually just

#### hotel tip 3

Join a big hotel-chain's loyalty scheme, even if you only plan to stay once. Enrolment alone can nab you free wi-fi, parking, room upgrades, local calls, spa access and newspapers

bread and jam, so take the free coffee and run... to nearby Mateo's Mexican Grill for tortillas and scrambled eggs (mateosmexicangrill.us). *Oceanfront cabanas from £120, B&B (00 52 984 182 7389, papayaplaya project.com).*

#### CELEB SPOT Thanyapura, Phuket

Sharapova, Venus Williams and Team GB's swimmers have all checked in at this souped-up sports hotel in the fecund heart of Phuket. The facilities are utterly remarkable: two Olympic-spec pools, indoor and outdoor tennis courts, an athletics track, a **mindfulness centre, martial arts, yoga and spinning studios — all of which guests can use for free.** Pros come for weeks at a time before big events, but we ordinary folk can benefit, too — either opting for a seven-day package, complete with blood tests and spa treatments, or simply for an energy-boosting day. *Doubles from £90, B&B (00 66 76 330000, thanyapura.com).* >