

WORD OF MOUTH

UPDATES ON EVERYTHING GROUND-BREAKING IN TRAVEL. EDITED BY OLIVIA SQUIRE



THE YEAR IN LIGHTS

26 REASONS TO TRAVEL IN 2026

New Mexico's Blue Swallow Motel on Route 66

PHOTOGRAPH: BLUE SWALLOW MOTEL, PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN FROM VINTAGE MOTELS BY ELLIE SEYMOUR, PUBLISHED BY LUSTER

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Photo of Trixie Motel from *Vintage Motels*, published by Luster

ON THE ROAD

Neon lights are burning a little brighter along Route 66, which celebrates its centenary this year. Vintage motel and diner signs have been restored to their mid-century brilliance at the new Route 66 Neon Park in St Robert, Missouri. Celebrations planned along the 2,448-mile road include those in Springfield, Missouri, host of the Route 66 Centennial National Kick-Off in April; the Capital Cruise in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in May, a world record attempt for the largest ever classic car parade; and Amarillo's Texas Route 66 Festival in June.

Recently spruced up roadside motels include Americana Motor Hotel in Flagstaff, Arizona, where Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper slept while filming *Easy Rider* in 1968. Inspiration for life on the road can be found in Ellie Seymour's recent book, *Vintage Motels*, which showcases 40 properties across the US that have been reborn as boutique boltholes. KG

FACE TO WATCH

Kulapat Yantrasast

With a design philosophy he likens to "cultural pad thai" thanks to his love of combining multiple ingredients to create something new, architect Kulapat Yantrasast is on a roll. Having wooed crowds and critics with his stunning renovation of the Met's Michael C Rockefeller Wing, and ahead of his overhaul of the Louvre, Yantrasast describes his designs for the recently opened Dib Bangkok museum in the hip neighbourhood of Phra Khanong as a "great homecoming". **He's excited about** "How the city's first centre for international contemporary art reflects the depth of Thailand's cultural heritage and offers a dynamic platform for exchange between the city's art scene and the global art world." XC



Clockwise from this picture: Denton Reserve; Jacob Elordi in *Wuthering Heights*; cast of *Pride and Prejudice*

WILY, WINDY MOORS

Bonnets and breeches at the ready: in 2026 set-jetting is going full period drama, with the UK's coastline and cliffs becoming the next pilgrimage sites. *Pride and Prejudice* is getting the Dolly Alderton treatment, with locations in Deal, Rye and the Peak District; Daisy Edgar-Jones leads a new iteration of *Sense and Sensibility*, shot on Dartmoor; and *Wuthering Heights* is revived by Emerald Fennell, with Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi starring in Emily Brönte's tortured love story amid the Yorkshire Dales. The centuries-old Denton Reserve estate is ready to welcome fans, having just opened six new Coach Houses, and with the four-bedroom Dunkirk Farm House, overlooking North Yorkshire's moorland, due in summer. OS



FIRST NATIONS FIRST

A slower and more soulful way to discover Australia's Uluru, through the footsteps of the land's traditional owners, the Anangu, is unfolding this April with the launch of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Signature Walk. The 33-mile trail will be punctuated with creative workshops and starlit dinners in the company of members of the Anangu community, as well as the first sleepover within the national park. New Indigenous-led walks are setting off in Queensland, where the Ngaro Track, created in partnership with the Ngaro people, will take hikers through the peaks and mangroves of the Whitsunday Islands. The Thorsborne Trail, developed with the Bandjin and Girramay, unspools across Hinchinbrook Island. OS

PHOTOGRAPHS: SEAN KNOTT; LUDOVIC ROBERT/NETFLIX; ALISTAIR TAYLOR-YOUNG; TRIXIE MOTEL; WARNER BROS./SUPPLIED BY LMK; WHY ARCHITECTURE/MANFREDI GIOACCHINI

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FACE TO WATCH

Sophie Galvagnon

Sophie is the CEO of polar expedition cruise company Selar, which is set to launch Captain Arctic, the first silent, solar-powered sailing vessel in the region. Its maiden voyage through the fjords of northern Norway will take place in December 2026 – with no set itinerary and no wi-fi. **She's excited about** “Our ship hitting the water and everything becoming real. I can picture our first guests on deck, crossing the pack ice under sail above 80 degrees north and discovering a new kind of expedition: more conscious, immersive and alive.” OS



A CRY FOR KELP

Coral might get all the attention, but humble seaweed is also desperate for protection. Found on more than a third of the world's coastlines, kelp forests are declining by 1.8 per cent annually, mainly because of climate change, so cultivating the crop is becoming the new flex for eco-minded hotels. Rosewood Miyakojima in Japan is planning to work with farmers to plant seaweed, an important part of the local economy; and at Norway's Lilløy Lindenberg, food scientist Antje de Vries runs a pop-up Kelp Club that starts with her daily dives for sugar kelp, sea oak and dulse, and ends in a nine-course dinner using the foraged finds. Other seaweed warriors include Karolina Martinson, who takes guests of Kajkanten Vrångö hotel on seaweed and tapas tours of Gothenburg's archipelago; and foraging expert Samuel Arnold Keane, who shares his passion for the plant in West Cork. “It's exciting times for foraging – not just in recovering our cultural heritage, but igniting an approach to using seaweed in a new way,” he says. OS

Karolina Martinson.
Above: dishes at
Lilløy Lindenberg



PHOTOGRAPHS: MATHIAS DEPARDON; JASON CHARLES HILL; KATJA RAGSTAM FOR ALIT OH MAT; ROBERT RIEGER; SELAR; VISION LODGE; MAYA VISNYEI

LIGHTS OUT

The growing fascination with sky watching peaks on 12 August when a total solar eclipse will be visible

from parts of Spain, Portugal, Iceland and Greenland. One of the best views should be around Scoresby Sund, East Greenland's remote and virtually uninhabited fjord system. Vision Lodge, a pair of plush geodesic cabins and a floating hut in a wild moonscape surrounded by unnamed mountains and whale-rich seas, will offer an encounter far from the crowds, led by glacier guides, when it opens in August. LH



Scoresby Sund.
Above right: Vision
Lodge's floating hut

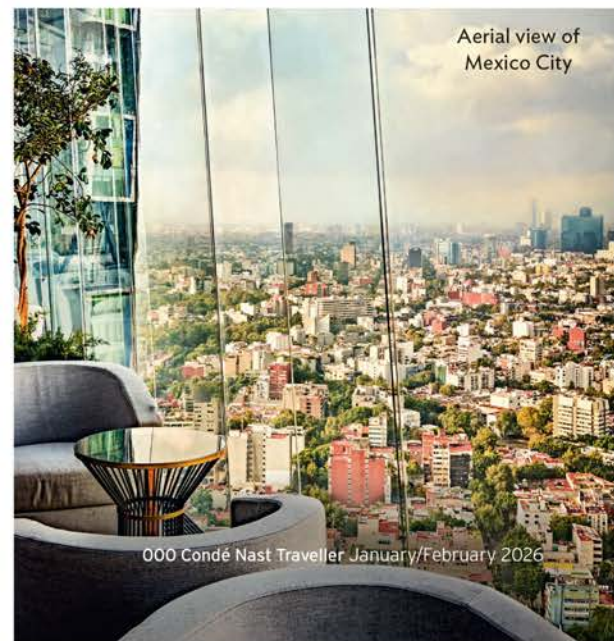
MEXICAN WAVE

With the Fifa World Cup partly kicking off in Mexico City in June, high-end hotel groups are racing to claim their corner of the capital.

The city was once a bastion of boutique boltholes – such as the forthcoming El Cortés, opening in Roma Norte in March in a 1915 art nouveau mansion – but the scene is shifting as the big names arrive. Pendry Mexico City will bring 114 rooms and suites, 20 residences and a rooftop pool to Roma Norte. On nearby Paseo de la Reforma, Miami-based Arquitectonica and designer Piero Lissoni are behind a new Thompson, and The Standard will open in Colonia Tabacalera with 210 rooms and multiple dining concepts. In Polanco, Sordo Madaleno Arquitectos leads the charge with the 155-room Park Hyatt Mexico City. MT

Aerial view of
Mexico City

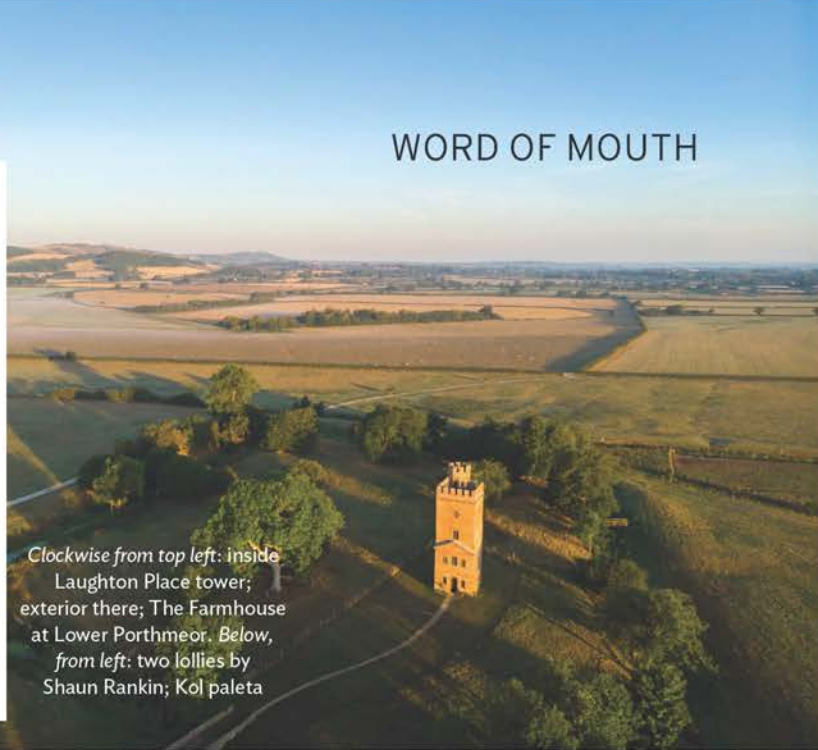
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CAPTURE THE CASTLE

It's set to be a golden year for charity The Landmark Trust, which opens the gates (and lowers the drawbridge) to several revamped heritage stays across the UK. Its Elizabethan-era Tixall Gatehouse in Staffordshire, Cornish farmstead at Lower Porthmeor and moated tower at Laughton Place near Lewes are all due to reopen after major upgrades – following Saddell Castle in Kintyre's refresh last summer – with new decor by head of furnishings and interiors, Rachel Allen. “My predecessor defined a look, which is important to preserve,” she says. “But I want to bring more warmth and comfort.” LJ



Clockwise from top left: inside Laughton Place tower; exterior there; The Farmhouse at Lower Porthmeor. Below, from left: two lollies by Shaun Rankin; Kol paleta

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PHOTOGRAPHS: DECLAN CORCORAN; JUSTIN DE SOUZA; GARETH EDWARDS; THE HOGGS; LUCY MACDONALD; JOHN MILLER/LANDMARK TRUST; ANTON RODRIGUEZ



POP A MAGNUM

The optimism of the 1990s will set the tone in 2026, especially when Tate's exhibition dedicated to the decade lands in October. The nostalgic, summer holiday feel of the Magnum ice cream – born in the '90s – nails the mood, and we're seeing fine dining twists popping up on dessert menus across the UK. Chef Shaun Rankin's version changes with the seasons, with previous incarnations including Jerusalem artichoke and bronze fennel. Kol's Mexican paletas sport rhubarb, jalapeño and wood ants for spring, or raspberry and pineapple weed in summer. Scully's ice-pop palate cleansers feature fregola grape and lemon verbena and are served with Tajin chilli sherbet. And BiBi's Indian-inspired coconut and coffee kulfis come dipped in chocolate. OS



HIGHLAND FLING

There's something perennially chic about a good kilt, whether it's worn by a true Scot or not – and now a new wave of makers from the Highlands are putting a sustainable spin on the region's wares. Bespoke kilt maker Andrea Chappell of Acme Atelier in Moray makes modern heirlooms with deadstock fabrics, using a traditional hand-stitching method now listed as an endangered craft. Lucy MacDonald of Arra Textiles in rural Banchory blends heritage weaving techniques with digital design, and Annabel Stewart's tartan pieces, custom-made in Glasgow, are inspired by Scotland's landscapes. Elsewhere traditional methods and a contemporary vision collide in Johnston of Elgin's androgynous collaboration with Le Kilt. And Edinburgh perfumery Jorum Studio's scents, which include Phloem and Pony Boy, are witty homages to the country's crags and concrete jungles. HE



Clockwise from far left: two outfits by Annabel Stewart; Acme Atelier skirt; Andrea Chappell; Arra Textiles; Lucy MacDonald

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CULTURAL CAPITALS

This year the art world continues to look further afield. Doha is hosting the inaugural Art Basel Qatar from 5 to 7 February, with Egyptian Wael Shawky as artistic director and a focus on art from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. In September the long-standing Alexandria Biennale returns after a 12-year break, showing work from the Mediterranean curated by Egyptian artist Moataz Nasr. And in March, coming after a successful first Bukhara Biennial, the Uzbek capital of Tashkent launches its Centre for Contemporary Arts in a tram depot reimagined by Studio KO, with Tadao Ando's National Museum of Uzbekistan to follow. LJ



Clockwise from above: works at Bukhara Biennial; Studio KO; building in Doha



From top: Boss Morris, Green Man festival; 42 Acres



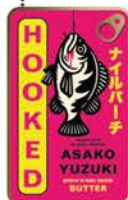
KINGDOM CALLING

Quick to seek Indigenous wisdom overseas, travellers often neglect ancestral knowledge on home turf. But now the tide is turning: female-led morris dancing troupe Boss Morris recently played Green Man festival,

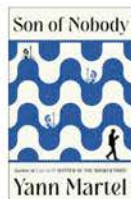
and witchy women are drawing on local mythology to reconnect with long-lost traditions. Author of *If Women Rose Rooted*, Dr Sharon Blackie, hosts a retreat at Broughton Sanctuary this February. Guests will spend five days exploring native British and Irish traditions and how to weave them into their daily lives. In March Irish energy practitioner Bríd Walsh cohosts a Listening to the Land Wild Weekend at 42 Acres estate in Somerset, with rewilding walks and a nourishing soil-to-gut menu. HT



NEW YEAR, NEW READS THE BOOKS WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2026



Hooked by Asako Yuzuki, for more transgressive tales of food and obsession in contemporary Japan.



Son of Nobody by Yann Martel, for interlocking the ancient and modern via a retelling of the Trojan War.

My Year in Paris With Gertrude Stein by Deborah Levy, for a fictional pilgrimage to the eponymous poet's Paris.



Land by Maggie O'Farrell, for the *Hamnet* author's epic portrait of a family in 19th-century Ireland.

Queenie Is Working on It by Candice Carty-Williams, to check in with the protagonist a decade on. OS



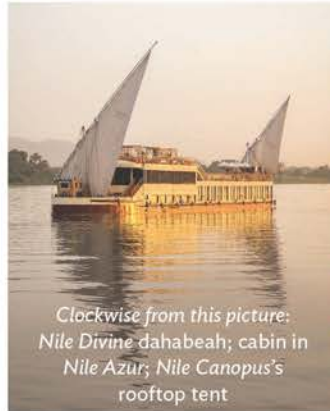
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Clockwise from below:
If Only If nightie;
sleepwear by Homebody;
Bocan slip; another
If Only If piece; Shleep
eye mask



SWEET DREAMS

Luxury materials and beauty tech are combining to make sleeping better than ever. Beverley Calvert and Susie Manning, founders of luxury nightwear brand Homebody, make sleep sets out of breathable Tencel, which helps regulate body temperature. Shleep's antimicrobial merino-knit eye masks not only block light but also promote skin health. Cult London nightie brand If Only If offers cotton options in wafty whites or cottagecore gingham; and Bocan's range of silk slips and robes in both demure and rich colours are handmade by artisans in the family's atelier in Bursa, Turkey. HE



Clockwise from this picture:
Nile Divine dahabeah; cabin in
Nile Azur; Nile Canopus's
rooftop tent



SAIL LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Gone are the days when cruising the Nile meant boarding a boat with a could-be-anywhere aesthetic: this year sees a number of design-forward launches with a deep sense of place. Interior designer Karine Hassoun called on Egyptian painters, professors and artisans to launch her eight-cabin dahabeah, *Nile Divine*, a celebration of contemporary craft rooted in ancient Egyptian traditions. *Nile Canopus*, a 180-foot dahabeah, sets sail with eight cabins, four suites with private balconies and a safari-style rooftop tent. The 62-cabin *Nile Azur* has been given a refresh

by design team Tuguy Studios, and is reborn as a showcase of Egyptian creative talent with a Wes Anderson-meets-the-Pharaohs look. International brands are shaking things up too: in late 2026 Oberoi Hotels & Resorts will launch two seven-suite dahabeahs featuring modern Egyptian interiors by designer Karim Mekhtigian, and Waldorf Astoria's new 29-suite Nile cruiser will bring all the luxe elements of its land-based hotels to the water, including its signature Peacock Alley brasserie. NC



THE BUZZWORDS

FLINGLES

Dating-app fatigue births a new travel mode: trips for solo globetrotters geared towards romance. Checked Out runs low-pressure but high-potential group sojourns at chichi hotels.

MYNDSTREAM

Those in the know are healing through sound, by mainlining the "functional music" (music designed to boost performance) playlist they heard in the Six Senses treatment room.

CYBER-TERRESTRIALS

Cyborg chic is in. Nike's motor-powered Project Amplify trainers, Apple's instant-translation AirPods and Hypershell's X Ultra exoskeleton are taking travellers further, faster. RH

FACE TO WATCH

Carissa Western

Carissa is the founder of Rōam, which organises excursions to some of the world's most remote places, including Yemen, Angola and Eritrea. She uses her experience working with communities in conflict zones to pioneer a more mindful kind of adventure tourism. **She's excited about** "Creating a new series of expeditions inspired by ancient trade routes and nomadic knowledge, with the Algerian Sahara and Mauritania at their heart. These journeys aren't just about movement across a map, but a deeper encounter with desert knowledge and the people who still carry it." OS



Arher Beach in
Socotra, Yemen

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FACE TO WATCH

Juana Williams

The artistic director of Detroit Salon, which launched globally at Art Basel Paris in October, Juana showcases creative talent from the city, including Elizabeth Salonen, with her plastic wall sculptures, and Jamea Richmond-Edwards, who makes music-inspired collages. In 2026 the salon will appear at Art Basel Switzerland and London's 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair.

She's excited about "Seeing how emerging galleries and artist-run spaces such as M Contemporary Art, Swords Into Plowshares and Irwin House evolve. Detroit has a strong DIY and collaborative spirit, and these venues play a big role in keeping its art scene authentic and accessible. That cross-pollination feels very Detroit." RJ



SEASTAINABILITY



"Interest in purposeful marine stewardship experiences has surged in the wake of the David Attenborough call-to-action film *Ocean*," says Julie Church, a Kenyan marine conservationist on a mission to build a sustainable blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean. After founding

Ocean Sole, which transforms discarded flip-flops into art, Church now runs Seas4Life, inspired, in part, by East Africa's land safari model and offering expertly guided sea safaris whose profits go towards working with communities to protect marine environments. Its 2026 calendar includes exploring Madagascar by boat, diving in Mozambique, an expedition to Socotra and a science-led sardine run and shark safari. LJ

Aerial view of Bazaruto Archipelago, Mozambique. Above: artist at Ocean Sole

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THE GENTLE AU REVOIRS

TARIFF-FLATION

Some American bargain hunters are dodging tariffs by flying transatlantic to their favourite high-end shops. A thrifty but woeful choice.

MINIBAR SNORES

Face masks and vitamins? So predictable. We'll plump for the next evolution of the beauty fridge à la The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles, with a light-therapy mask and a cryotherapy globe.

TRADER JOE'S TOTE

Grocery shop tourism is cute, but unless it's a cult joint such as Alison Roman's First Bloom in NY, best to leave the canvas at checkout. RH

CUTTING TRACKS

If luxury train travel in 2025 was dominated by European launches such as *La Dolce Vita Orient Express* and Belmond's *Britannic Explorer*, the next 12 months will roll through more tropical terrain. Thailand's boutique *Blue Jasmine* set off from Bangkok to Chiang Mai this November, and in September another Asian train, the *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express*, returns to the rails for the first time since 2019 with a new route between Beijing and Tashkent. Australia's *The Ghan* is adding two ultra-luxe suites, and the Middle East's first high-end sleeper, *Dream of the Desert*, departs from Riyadh in the autumn, with suitably opulent interiors by Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman. While trainspotters will have to wait until 2027 to catch the restored *Orient Express* route from Paris to Istanbul, the brand is set to make waves with its first foray into ships this June: the *Orient Express Corinthian*, a 54-suite yacht, will make maiden voyages in the Mediterranean and Caribbean. OS



From left: inside the Golden Eagle Silk Road Express; The Ghan; Dream of the Desert guest room

PHOTOGRAPHS: MIRIAM BLEEKER; BEN CURTIS/AP PHOTO/ALAMY; GOLDEN EAGLE LUXURY TRAINS: JOURNEY BEYOND; STEPHAN JULLIARD; BRE'ANN WHITE. ARTWORKS: TYREE GUYTON; JACKSON MBATHA

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TURNING THE PAGE

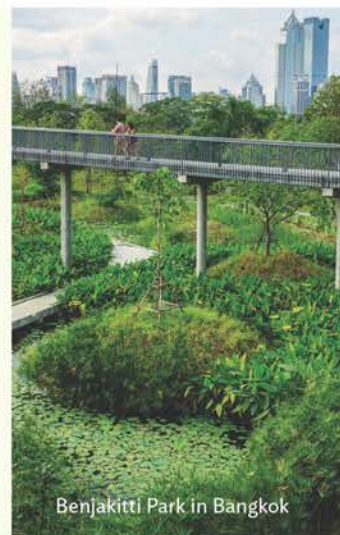
If writing a novel on holiday feels like too much work, 2026 is the year to bookmark a reading retreat. We've already seen a food-themed book club launch at Hampshire's Lime Wood hotel; Teranka host summer literary salons on Formentera; and in cahoots with Penguin Random House, Apple Vacations debut libraries and book carts at nine of Hyatt's Latin American and Caribbean resorts. This year page-turners can join one of Aweventurer's small-group women-only reading retreats in Zakynthos, Tuscany or Mallorca, each led by an expert "bibliotherapist". Canada-based Book Huddle will welcome readers in New Mexico and Ontario; and Silent Book Club starts a new chapter in Hawaii and the Italian Riviera. At the bibliophile's favourite, University Arms in Cambridge, a new programme includes a curated reading list, personal reading journal and consultation with a "book butler". RM



From far left: Lime Wood's library; hotel bookshelf; Emma Roberts at an Apple Vacations event

LEAF PEEPING

With the expansion of Benjakitti Park and the debut of Dusit Central Park's rooftop garden, Bangkok is greening up its act. But it's not the only Asian capital adding lushness to its urban core. This year, Seoul's Green Path – a sprawling network of connected green spaces – completes. And in 2027 Japa Valley Tokyo, a venture headlined by Pharrell Williams and Japanese streetwear designer Nigo, transforms a two-and-a-half-acre lot near Ginza into a cultural precinct with planted rooftops, pocket gardens and landscaped walkways. CH



Benjakitti Park in Bangkok



MINING CRAFT

In 2026 it's the 10th anniversary of Dior's "art bag" collaboration, in which the house invites 10 leading artists from around the world to reinvent the Lady Dior handbag by drawing on inspirations from their countries and artistic practices. The goal is to respect Dior's legacy as well as their own craft heritage. This year's artists include Lee Ufan from South Korea, New York City's Patrick Eugene and Beijing-based Ju Ting, whose take on the Lady Dior uses beading, 3D printing and optical illusions. HE



Clockwise from above left: artist Ju Ting; her Lady Dior art bag

A BUMPER CROP

The spring lambing season brings three interesting takes on the smart farmstays trend. Aman's Adrian Zecha launches the first property of the Azuma Farm brand in Japan's Iwate prefecture: 24 cottages on a 19th-century farm surrounded by forest. The Adjara Group, the force behind pioneering Georgian hotels Rooms and Stamba, parks up Udabno Caravan, a collection of minimalist Airstreams, on the regenerative farm in the Kakheti region that supplies its hotels and restaurants. And in May the land conservation project Wildland welcomes its newest retreat, Hope: a restored hotel, cottages and adventure centre in the lesser-explored reaches of the Scottish Highlands. OS

Udabno Caravan's Airstreams in situ



Additional reporting by: Nicola Chilton, Xerxes Cook, Harriet Elton, Karen Gardiner, Laura Hall, Christopher Hill, Robbie Hodges, Lisa Johnson, Rick Jordan, Richard Mellor, Michaela Trimble and Holly Tuppen