

SPEAR'S

TOP FIVE COUNTRY HOTELS & RESORTS

CASTLE REAGH LAKE, SUMMERVILLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIE, TEA TRAILS

Palé Hall Hotel
Wales

La Bastide de Gordes
Luberon, France

Auberge de Soleil
Rutherford, Napa Valley, California

The Inn at Little Washington
Virginia, USA

Alila Fort Bishangarh
near Jaipur, India



The Inn at Little Washington Virginia, USA

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The tiny Virginia village of Washington — population 130 — that predates its giant namesake 70 miles away has been home to one of America's most treasured rural retreats, and a centre of gastronomic pilgrimage for four decades. Not so much a restaurant with rooms, as a restaurant with half a hamlet attached. Chef Patrick O'Connell, president of Relais & Chateaux North America and an acknowledged pioneer of contemporary American cuisine, holds sway over a bucolic backwoods empire whose uncertain beginnings took a chance with a lease on an old gas station in 1978, and never looked back. As the man grandly christened 'the Pope of American cuisine' approaches a fifth decade in his picture-perfect redoubt on the edge of the Blue Ridge mountains, the gas station has become a restaurant with a mile-long list of accolades including two Michelin stars. Together with surrounding properties, there are now 24 rooms and suites, all meticulously and somewhat theatrically restored and named after the personalities associated with America's gastronomic evolution over the last half a century. Alan Greenspan, one of an apparently unending list of celebrities to visit the Inn, commandeered the entire place for his wedding in 1997. With a street named after O'Connell, a farmer in residence to tend the market garden, and the old post office earmarked for a bakery, though the casual observer wouldn't know it, the stamp of his success is all over town. There's plenty to do if you can tear yourself away from the Inn, too: Thomas Jefferson's prized home Monticello is nearby, as are the Luray Caverns.

Palé Hall Hotel Wales

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This is the only five-star hotel in North Wales. Owners Alan and Angela Harper took ten months to restore the yellow sandstone, Gothic Revival-style country home (1871), which is a Grade II-listed property on a 50-acre estate. It reopened as a family-run hotel in September 2016. There are only 18 rooms, but you don't have to go far to eat very well. Head chef Gareth Stevenson will be cooking under the supervision of renowned British chef Michael Caines, who won two Michelin stars at another country house hotel, Gidleigh Park in Devon. If you prefer, you can book a more intimate dinner in the library. Palé Hall has had some illustrious guests: Queen Victoria stayed there for ten days in 1889, while Winston Churchill was a visitor in the 1950s, when it was owned by the then Duke of Westminster. In the Victoria suite you can use the original bath and basin used by the monarch. The bathroom in the Churchill suite is marble-lined, with a copper and zinc bath. Some of the spacious rooms have large baths within the bedrooms themselves. The decor is not exclusively Welsh or English: Angela Harper has chosen to wallpaper the breakfast room with scenes of Venetian canals and gondoliers (inspired by her favourite Venice hotel, the Gritti Palace). Although this hotel is remote — located beneath the Berwyn Mountains, just outside Snowdonia National Park — there are plenty of country activities available in the vicinity. You can fish on the River Dee, sail on Bala Lake, walk the Denbigh Moors and Snowdon's trails, and watch or participate in the classic-car rallies Alan Harper intends to organise in the 'Evo Triangle', a network of local roads famous for testing new cars. The hotel is a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World group, and it is also dog-friendly.



Churchill Suite
Palé Hall Hotel

'Palé Hall has hosted Queen Victoria — guests can use the original bath and basin used by the monarch'

Palé Hall
North Wales