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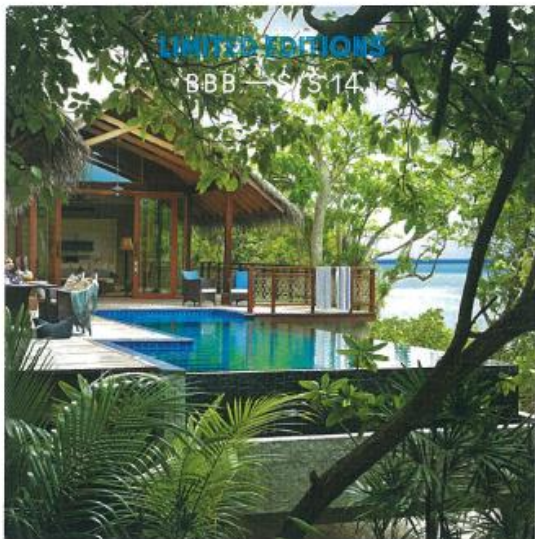
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**Height of luxury:**  
Shangri-La Villingili;  
Post Ranch Inn;  
Chewton Glen

BY  
SIMON  
BROOKE

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## LIMITED EDITIONS N°5 THE ESCAPE.

The soaring popularity of tree-house holidays

Call it the latest incarnation of the barefoot-luxury trend, but suddenly the penthouse suite is not just about floor-to-ceiling windows and supersonic private lifts. Instead, some of the most sought-after places to stay are up in the trees.

Chewton Glen, the five-star hotel near the New Forest, recently created six tree-house suites with views of the surrounding woodland. Treetop gangways lead you to your room and each suite is positioned to make the most of the sunsets. Eco-luxe is high on the agenda – the suites have been designed to have as little impact as possible on their idyllic surroundings. Working with Blue Forest, a company that specialises in sustainable buildings and tree houses, the hotel has rainwater harvesting, air-source heat pumps, solar panels, low-energy lighting and roofs with grass growing on them. If that all sounds a bit worthy, there's also a spa bath on each deck and food hampers to order.

The villas at the Aqua Wellness Resort in Gigante, Nicaragua, part of the Preferred Hotel Group, have also been built at tree level to minimise the effect on the delicate eco-system of the forest floor. The aim, as with other treetop homes, is to allow visitors to make a better connection with their natural surroundings than they would in a normal hotel suite – there are features such as outdoor showers amid the branches and treatments on the balconies that use organic products sourced from the surrounding forests.

Meanwhile, the treetop suites at the Post Ranch Inn on the cliffs of Big Sur, California, are situated in

forests 1,200ft above the Pacific, and offer direct views of the ocean, the Santa Lucia Mountains and the nearby forest. Sit in your tree-level hot tub to enjoy the view and then, when you hit the sack, there's a skylight above each bed so that you can watch the stars as you drift off.

"There's definitely something about staying in a tree house that makes you feel a bit of a kid again, they're inherently playful," says James Lohan, CEO of travel company Mr & Mrs Smith. "Luxury travellers love something memorable they can talk about afterwards."

Does height matter? The eight tree-house villas of the Shangri-La Villingili Resort and Spa in the Maldives are situated among only the lowest branches of the tropical vegetation but, hidden under a canopy of thick branches, they offer views over Villingili Island and the lakes and coconut palms of Addu Atoll. Perhaps more important than altitude is the sense of space and close connection with nature that a luxury tree house offers, including an infinity plunge pool on the veranda that will allow you to feel as if you're floating amid the trees – but without the risk of vertigo. 🌳  
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