

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

CONDÉ NAST

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# Traveler

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READERS' CHOICE  
AWARDS





Looking down at the Pacific near McWay Falls in Big Sur.

## ROARING LYON THE REVITALIZED CITY GETS A SAVVY NEW DESIGN HOTEL

Each fall, Lyon—once overlooked by travelers speeding through from Paris en route to the south—hosts a biennale that toggles between world-class art one year and modern dance the next. La Confluence, a former industrial neighborhood, is now a starchitect's playground with a massive Jean Nouvel project joining other mixed-use spaces, and young chefs are energizing the restaurant scene with lighter cooking that honors and advances the city's gastronomic traditions. Now, with the opening of Villa Maia, there's a hotel that feels right in a reinvigorated Lyon. The designers—a French dream team that included architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte (who updated the Louvre), interior designer Jacques Grange (he did Karl Lagerfeld's home), and garden guru Louis Benech (he redesigned the Tuileries)—have created a sophisticated space that soothes rather than wows with hackneyed design trends. The minimalist spa with an arched arcade is modeled after ancient Roman baths. Its 37 guest rooms (which look out on meditation gardens or over the red-roofed city) have neutral textured walls, wood trim, and sliding panel doors leading to bathrooms done in Carrara marble and heavy nickel, creating a sort of *ryokan*-meets-Art Moderne feel. Design aside, the real key to understanding Villa Maia may be, well, the room key. It's an actual key attached to a heavy leather fob. It doesn't demagnetize or remind you of a credit card. You leave it at the front desk when you head out and retrieve it when you return. It's a welcome moment of hospitality in an increasingly automated world. HUGH GARVEY

- ▶ Perhaps the only good to come from California's biblical rains and the ensuing road closures that left Big Sur inaccessible for months earlier this year was that the area's top resorts had a little downtime. The seven tree-house rooms at Post Ranch Inn now have reimagined interiors with artist-designed custom beds that you don't have to leave to stargaze, thanks to the skylights above. And the beloved Ventana Big Sur reopened last month as America's first resort by Alila, the high-end brand known for its dreamy retreats in Bali. Now those Silicon Valley titans who make the 100-mile dash south will enjoy abalone with smoked potato alongside a crisp Yountville sauvignon blanc in Ventana's just-added outdoor bar, possibly after a restorative quartz-bowl sound bath in the revamped spa. Plus, the resort's 15 new safari-style canvas tents set among the redwoods have individual stone fire pits from which to watch the fogs and mists that drift through the forest and cascade down to the ocean. JOHN WOGAN

## Back to Big Sur