

↳ indoor Jacuzzi, an outdoor tub and a sauna. Decor is appropriately Heidi-marries-Swiss-banker luxe: sturdy wooden farmhouse construction, a vast and handsome reception room, an open fire, leather sofas that swallow you and your post-ski-day champagne flute whole and beds you won't want to get out of – until the sun streams into your room, you clock the soaring Aiguille du Midi peak in the distance and hear the gentle rustle of the chef preparing your scrambled eggs, that is.

After a couple of flat whites, a morning dip and a fresh juice, you pull on your Patagonia, climb in Amazon Creek's Mercedes bus and head off for the most sublimely thrilling adventure in the Alps – the Vallée Blanche.

This world-famous and truly spectacular 20km-long run with a vertical descent of 2,700m is, officially, an off-piste run, which means that even the *voie normale* (regular route) is an ungrouted, unpatrolled wilderness bereft of markers to steer you away from its chasm-deep crevasses. (Just the route's start at the top of the Aiguille du Midi – a precarious ridge edge with a 50-degree pitch on both sides, tackled with skis slung on shoulders and gloved hands death-gripping a guide rope – can be a bit of a test for the faint-hearted.)

So, while the views are staggering and the ride utterly exhilarating, you are definitely going to need a guide. Good job then that Amazon Creek has Michel Fauquet of ENSA (L'École Nationale de Ski et d'Alpinisme) on its books. *GG's* advice is to stop halfway down the glacier for a baguette and beer lunch at the rocks they call La Salle à Manger ("the dining room"). As you munch your *jambon et gruyère sandwich mixte*, admire the amphitheatrical splendour of the surroundings, then point your skis downhill and follow your guide home. If you avoid the crevasses, there'll be a cake, a pot of tea, a roaring fire and massage waiting for you back at your chalet. **Simon Mills**



Chalet Amazon Creek (sleeps ten), from £14,320. Includes transfers, resort driver service, private chef, food, wine, beer and soft drinks, chalet host and concierge service. amazoncreek.co.uk. BA flies to Geneva from London Heathrow from £75. britishairways.com



The reign in Spain (clockwise from main): The imposing Principal Madrid hotel; the capital's artisan Mercado de San Miguel, outside and in; panoramic views of the city from the hotel's top-storey Terraza



AFTER-HOURS MADRID

The one time you can guarantee the city will truly stir is after 10pm, so if you can retune your body clock, the **Mercado de San Miguel** is lively, young and stylish, with a wide range of superb seafood, meat and snack stalls, plus bars, sherry and cocktail sellers.

Hotel of the month: The Principal Madrid



WHEN you are next in Madrid, look up and you'll notice something strange. It's a five-storey city. The Spanish capital sits in its own charming space, neither ancient nor modern, not overwhelming but no shrinking violet. It must be a candidate for Europe's most relaxed metropolis.

A city that generally stops climbing at five gives the six-storey Principal (seven, if you count La Terraza) a distinct advantage. This beautiful boutique hotel is a sublime expression of Madrid itself: elegant, grand in an unassuming way and, though it's relatively new, already feeling comfortably lived-in.

The almost-secret entrance off a corner of the Gran Via gives a clue to its particular qualities. A doorman directs you to the lift, in which you ascend to the sixth floor that hosts the reception, dining area, lounge and *Ático* restaurant, all drenched in natural light by day and stellar panoramas of the city by night. These distinct elements hug the circular floor plan, which surrounds the staircase and atrium. The real trick of this curious layout and the atmosphere it generates is to give the hotel the feel of a private members club, in which discerning visitors or *Madridenians* will feel both at home and in exclusive company.

The *Ático* is overseen by Ramón Freixa (whose two-Michelin-starred *Único* is just around the corner in the



BA flies from London Heathrow to **Madrid** from £114. britishairways.com

well-heeled Salamanca district) and offers top-end Spanish/bistro fare, such as croquettes of baby squid in black ink, monkfish with chicory and herb mustard, and cheesecake with candied pine nuts and honey.

It is wise to copy the *Madridenians'* love of long lunches, and food halls provide an atmosphere that restaurants and tourist traps may lack, while still serving the very best tapas and traditional Spanish food. Otherwise, tucked away in the Platea food hall – a converted cinema in the edge of Salamanca – dishes such as the deconstructed flounder and the veal tartare ensure that *Arriba* is packed for lunch from 2pm.

As any boutique hotel with ambition would, the Principal has a spa, sauna, gym and welcoming and discreet staff, but the real joy comes from that feeling of relaxed exclusivity on the sixth floor. So when you've had your fill of Madrid's nocturnal buzz, take your bucket-sized gin and tonic in hand and make the trip up to La Terraza for 360-degree views of the city from its (slowly) beating heart. **George Chesterton Rooms start from £170 a night. The Principal Madrid, Marqués de Valdeiglesias, Gran Via 2, 28004 Madrid. +31 91 521 87 43, thepincipalmadridhotel.com**

Photographs: Alamy; Blasius Erlinger



Sunshine estate: Blue Charlotte, The Moorings' largest villa, was featured as the central characters' family home in Netflix's *Bloodline*



GET READY FOR A KEY-NAISSANCE ...Or how Netflix show *Bloodline* put the Florida boondocks back on the map

Tucked away behind a hot, humid tangle of orchid-filled mangroves, an unexpected celebrity hideaway has been left undiscovered for years.

Models, fashion photographers and Hollywood A-listers have been quietly meandering down US Route 1 to the heart of the Florida Keys for The Moorings Village experience since the Nineties – as the framed thank-you notes covering the walls of the hotel's subterranean games room attest. From Kate Moss and Billy Joel to George W Bush and Heidi Klum, this little-known hotel boasts quite a visitors' book.

Now the secret is out. Thanks to a Netflix summer hit, The Moorings has a not-so-quiet cult following. And visitor numbers to the long overlooked Florida peninsula were up 20 per cent in 2015 as fans flocked to the sleepy fishing community of

Islamorada – the location of the Emmy award-nominated drama *Bloodline*, starring Sissy Spacek and Sam Shepard.

The original plan had been to film the show in the buzzy Key West – a four-hour drive further down to the state's southernmost tip. But when the production team came across The Moorings on their way to scout locations, there was only one thing for it: rewrite the script.

It is easy to see why the decision was made. The 18 individual Keys-style villas that make up the sprawling 18-acre hotel look out onto a picture-perfect white-sand beach and one of the most photographed jetties in the world – used as a location for everything from Victoria's Secret calendar shoots to Charlize Theron's June 2014 US *Vogue* cover.

Blue Charlotte, the largest of the villas and the one used in

Bloodline as the central characters' family home, has now become something of a Florida Keys icon thanks to its striking white wrap-around verandas and blue shutters.

The property's swimming pool, private cinema and, in particular, that games room are all great add-ons. But it takes some hotel to maintain an 80 per cent renewal rate on bookings when there is no bar or restaurant on site. Instead, The Moorings is twinned with Pierre's at Morada Bay, a laid-back restaurant within walking distance where tables are set up on the beach.

If a long overdue renaissance of the entire Keys region comes to fruition, thank *Bloodline* – and then the real star of the show, The Moorings. **Emily Wright** From £236 a night in low season to £1,683 a night for the biggest property (sleeps eight). themooringsvillage.com. BA flies from London Heathrow to Miami from £412 return. britishairways.com