

# TRAVEL + LEISURE

AUGUST 2006

## WORLD'S BEST AWARDS

hotels islands cruises airlines cities

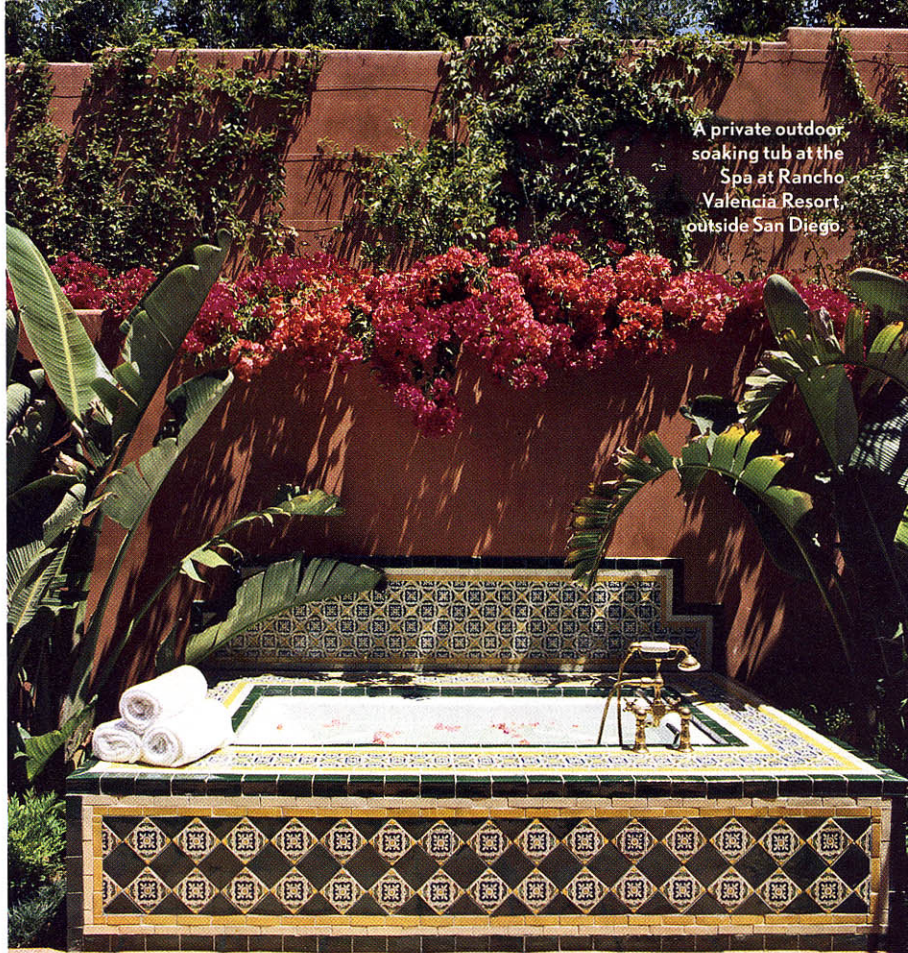
(Our Readers  
Pick the Places  
They Love)



## CRUISE CONTROL

**TRAVEL** *If you find traveling with 700 other people exhausting, shrink the company you keep to a fraction of that with Regent Seven Seas Cruises' recently launched Circle of Interest tours (877/505-5370; [www.rssc.com](http://www.rssc.com); from \$3,298 per person, double; Circle of Interest tours from \$160 per person), designed to introduce passengers with similar passions while sailing through Europe. During the food and wine tour on the Mediterranean, for example, take a culinary walk through the romantic Greek village of Pyrgos, and have private meals and tastings at three Côtés du Rhône vineyards. Only 40 participants are accepted for each session, making these circles tight-knit, indeed.*

—Sarah Kantrowitz



A private outdoor soaking tub at the Spa at Rancho Valencia Resort, outside San Diego.

## so-cal for sybarites

**SPA** What's the latest place for a dose of pure pampering? The newly opened 16,000-square-foot **Spa at Rancho Valencia Resort** (5921 Valencia Circle, Rancho Santa Fe; 800/548-3664; [www.ranchovalencia.com](http://www.ranchovalencia.com); treatments from \$140), located in a bougainvillea-and-hibiscus-filled canyon 25 miles north of San Diego. Designed in partnership with Auberge Resorts, the \$12 million facility consists of 10 treatment suites housed in four terra-cotta-and-adobe *casitas*. Guests can relax over grapefruit-infused raspberry tea and the chef's fresh-baked zucchini bread before heading in for a signature scrub or facial—most of which incorporate just-picked ingredients (avocados, lemons, and tangerines) from the hillside behind the spa. Take some time to sweat it out in the posh fitness room (cardio machines are outfitted with DVD players)—or at least think about doing so as you kick back, banana smoothie in hand, on your treatment room's private outdoor patio. —E.W.



## NEW YORK'S SWEET SPOT

**FOOD** Calling all Augustus Gloopers: there's a new chocolatier in town. At Manhattan's Max Brenner, **Chocolate by the Bald Man** (841 Broadway; 212/388-0030)—Brenner's first American outpost—decorative glass pipes “pump” chocolate from white vats, and giant confections are chopped on a butcher block. Brenner even designed vessels from which his clients can eat and drink: the cappuccino cup has a “slide” on the rim (left), where solid chocolate gently melts its way into the coffee. Just stay away from those pipes, or you might end up in the Fudge Room. —Clark Mitchell

TOP: UNDINE PROHL; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF MAX BRENNER. CHOCOLATE BY THE BALD MAN