

SPRING/SUMMER 2017

# SUNDOWNER

A close-up photograph of a koala clinging to a thick, textured tree branch. The koala has greyish-brown fur with lighter patches on its chest and belly. It has large, fluffy ears and a prominent black nose. Its eyes are looking directly at the camera. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting foliage.

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COLONIAL INDIA

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BALLOONING

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ALL THE FAMILY

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JOHN SIMPSON HEADS  
DOWN UNDER

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VERDURA RESORT **SICILY** HOTEL ASTORIA **ST PETERSBURG** FUTURE OPENINGS **JEDDAH, ROME & SHANGHAI**





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## DEAR TRAVELLER

Happy New Year! Thanks to you all for your continued support of A&K. We know how precious holiday time is and never underestimate the importance of planning and delivering holidays which wow, or the trust you put in us to craft them: rest assured, we never take this vote of confidence lightly. As ever, our travel consultants and teams on the ground have been trawling the globe looking for the new, the noteworthy and the interesting, and we share some of their experiences and finds with you in this edition of Sundowner.

Flick through the following pages and you'll discover there's far more to Thailand than beautiful beaches, that Venice is a great destination for a family break (yes, really!), and the five most spectacular hot air ballooning destinations on the planet. We also give you insider track on the hot to trot destinations for 2017, and the new kids on the block property wise. John Simpson recently took a family trip to Australia with A&K, and we're delighted to share with you his first timer experience of travel down under...and that's just a taster!

Wherever you decide to travel this year, happy travelling!



*Geoffrey Kent*

Founder, Chairman and CEO  
Abercrombie & Kent Group  
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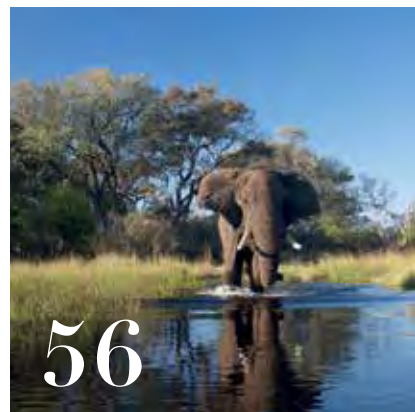
World reader - teaching the world to read



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# Bush TELEGRAPH

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## A&K WINS TOP WILDLIFE PROMOTION COMPANY AWARD



A&K were delighted to be awarded the prestigious "Top Wildlife Promotion Company of the Year 2016" by Travel Operators for Tigers (TOFT), for our pioneering support and inspiring wildlife conservation. These awards are an industry-supported initiative intended to highlight and reward the very best in the nature wilderness tourism destinations, and we were delighted to be recognised for our commitment to conservation.



## IF IT'S WORTH CELEBRATING, IT'S WORTH CELEBRATING IN STYLE!

More and more people are looking for a special way of marking landmark birthdays, anniversaries or events with their nearest and dearest, and A&K's dedicated 'celebration travel' team are now on hand to help you create an occasion to remember. We'll take time to understand exactly what you want and then go behind the scenes to curate your perfect trip .... whether it's for two, or for 200 guests.

Call our celebrations team on **01242 547 775** to find out more.

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## A&K OPENS OFFICE IN RIO

The latest addition to the A&K family, our Rio office is now open. We've been helping clients get under the skin of Brazil for years, and now have a dedicated team on the ground ensuring we continue to deliver the best possible experience for clients travelling to the country.



## JORDAN CONTINUES TO INVEST IN ITS TOURIST INDUSTRY

Ibrahim from A&K's Jordan office reports continuing growth in tourism, with St Regis and Fairmont investing in property in Amman, and The Hilton Dead Sea Resort & Spa scheduled to open in 2017. In Aqaba, Ayla Oasis and Saraya Al-Aqaba are scheduled to be open in 2017, with the Saraya Al-Aqaba due to have a Westin resort open in 2018.



## NEW ROUTES & ADDITIONAL FLIGHTS

With effect from 26 March 2017, **Air France** will offer year-round flights between Paris and Cape Town.

From 27 March 2017, **British Airways** will fly four times a week to New Orleans, USA, from London Heathrow.

**BA** now offer a non-stop service to Muscat.

**Oman Air** Manchester to Muscat flights to start from May 2017, with twice daily flights now operating from Heathrow.



## SOCIAL MEDIA #EscapeExplore

Few things in life are as emotive as travel. How often have you found yourself in an incredible location, or having one of those once in a lifetime moments that come with exploring new horizons, cultures, people, landscapes, and experiences? We'd love you to share images from your travels over the coming months. Follow us on Instagram ([abercrombiekent](#)) and Twitter ([@AKTravel\\_UK](#)) and take us on your adventures using **#EscapeExplore**.

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ON TRAVEL

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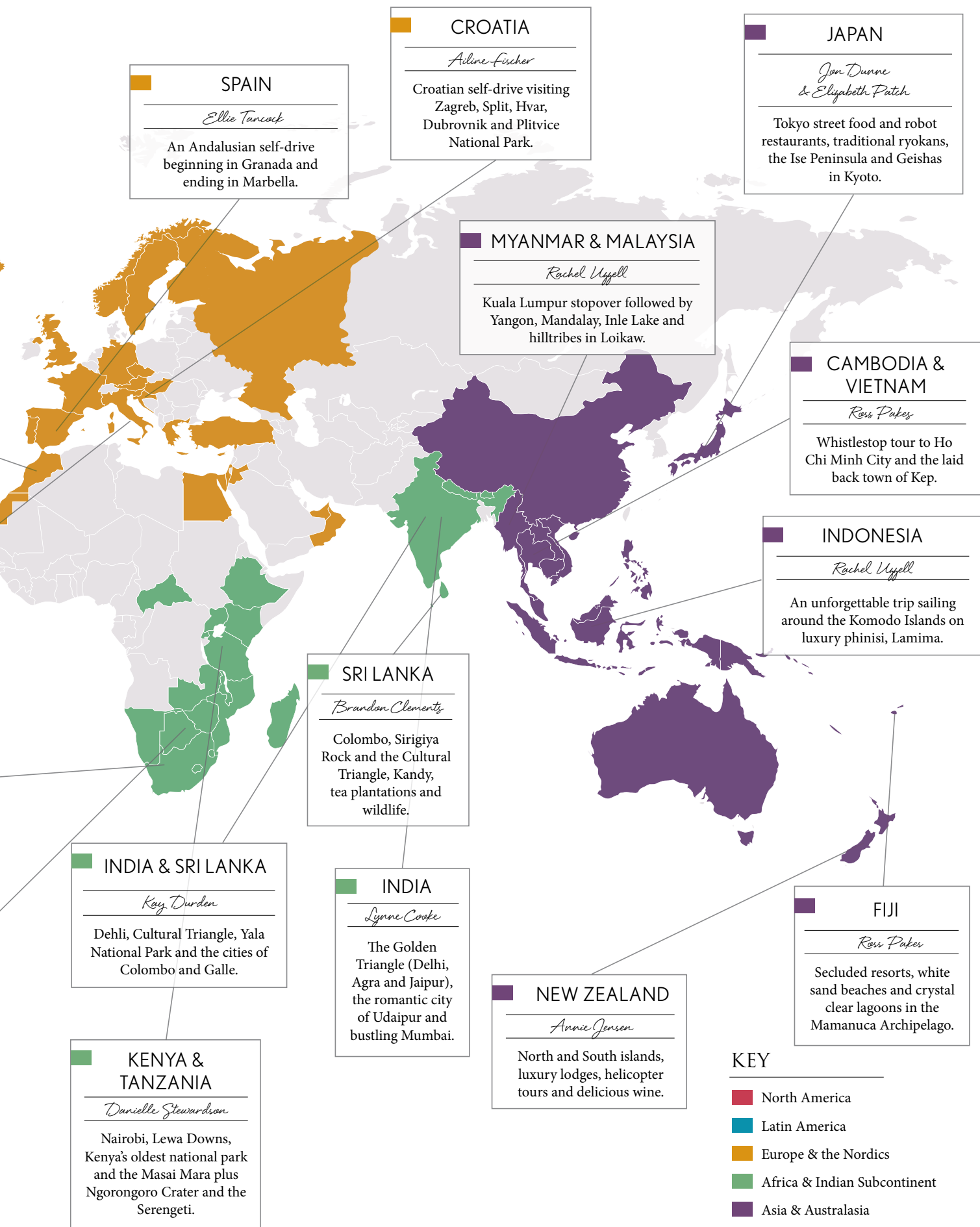




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# HOT FOR 2017



## CHILE

**Why it's hot...** It's all happening up in the air

Chile, the furthest Latin destination from the UK, gets more accessible in January 2017. BA's new London-Santiago route – the first direct connection between the two – means you can take off from Heathrow and be sipping a local merlot in sight of the Andes in less than 15 hours. This isn't the only development in the Chilean skies. Balloons Over Atacama has just launched sunrise hot-air balloon flights in the world's driest desert. Now, you can drift above the Valley of the Moon, gaining a bird's-eye view of the strange and spectacular rock formations and the distant snow-frosted volcanoes, before landing for a champagne breakfast. This is the perfect add-on to a stay at the freshly spruced Explora Atacama. An unfortunate fire necessitated a revamp of this sleek, superbly located lodge, which will reopen – looking better than ever – in January 2017; it'll still offer an array of thrilling activities too, such as horse and bike rides into the desert and tough volcano climbs. Alternatively, new glamping options allow you to camp in comfort under the Atacama's matchless star-filled skies. Elsewhere, a new flight from Santiago to Puerto Natales will provide easier access to Chilean Patagonia, home to some of the planet's most photogenic landscapes and best trekking. Travellers are also starting to realise that, although this is truly untamed countryside, self-drive is a real and rewarding option here. Vehicles and roads (a mix of paved and gravel) are good, navigation straightforward and the freedom of self-discovery hard to beat.



## THE SILK ROAD, CHINA

**Why it's hot...** The ancient, untouched west is becoming best

Urumqi, Turfan, Kashgar. Spices, caravanserais, Marco Polo... the evocatively named staging posts and images of the Silk Road – one of the greatest trade routes in history, which once stretched from Istanbul to Beijing – hold enduring allure. And as China's eastern cities draw those keen to see the fast-paced modern side of the country, the wild-west is re-emerging as a hot travel ticket, many centuries after this epic trade route was first pioneered. In 2014, the vast 'Silk Routes Network of the Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor' area was added to UNESCO's World Heritage list and, increasingly, the region is attracting China second-timers as well as those keen to glimpse a piece of the past. That's not to say the Chinese west isn't without its touches of modernity. A high-speed trainline between Beijing and Urumqi opened in late 2014, with the new station completed in June 2016. This means you can access this fascinating western outpost from the capital in just 15 hours, watching the whole country whizz by. From Urumqi you can trace the Silk Road's various strands and gain an in-depth insight into rural China. Plot your own journey, perhaps to include Dunhuang's Mogao Caves (rich in Buddhist art), the Jiayu Pass Fort (the western end of the Great Wall), yurt stays in the majestic Tian Shan Mountains, lunches with Uighur artisans, a drive along the Karakorum Highway and some boisterous haggling at Kashgar's Sunday market. It's a world away from shimmering Shanghai.





## ATLANTIC CANADA

**Why it's hot...** It's in party mood – and easier than ever to reach

All of Canada is looking pretty hot for 2017. It's the 150th anniversary of Confederation – when Canada became a nation. To mark the milestone, Parks Canada is offering free admission, all year long, to its protected places. In the Atlantic provinces, that means no entry fees for historic sites such as Nova Scotia's Halifax Citadel, Newfoundland's L'Anse aux Meadows Viking settlement or Prince Edward Island's charming Green Gables Heritage Place. It also means no fees for the country's famed, fabulous and diverse wildernesses, which run from the billion-year-old mountains of Gros Morne National Park to Fundy National Park, home to the world's biggest tides. Atlantic Canada is a region that has retained its authentic cultural mix, which includes Francophone communities, time-warp fishing villages, First Nations heritage and thriving Gaelic traditions. It's also a region that loves a good party. There are many annual festivals here already, dedicated to everything from music and lobster to highland flinging and folk singing, blueberries and busking; this vibrant programme will only be enhanced by the 150th celebrations. For instance, Rendez-vous 2017 sees a fleet of 40 tall ships sail across the Maritimes, accompanied by fireworks and parades. The easterly chunk of this enormous country has also never been easier to reach. There are direct flights to Halifax and St John's that take just 5.5 hours from the UK. The recent increase in airlines flying via Keflavik also provides great-value routes into the region – not to mention the tantalising possibility of two-centre Iceland-Canada breaks.

## RUSSIA

**Why it's hot...** It's revolutionary (and really good value)

Next year is a big one for Russia: 2017 marks the centenary of the Russian Revolution, the series of seismic events that put an end to Tsarist rule, caused untold upheaval and changed not only the country, but the entire world. This makes it a fascinating year to visit; the gulf between regal opulence and spartan Soviet style will seem all the more poignant. A&K has even put together a special itinerary to mark the centenary: 'Russian Revolution: 100 years since the End of Czarist Russia'. The trip will combine Moscow, Yekaterinburg and St Petersburg. As well as visiting the capital's onion domes, the site where the Russian Royal family met their death in Yekaterinburg (including meeting a local anthropologist who participated in the excavation works where the bodies were discovered) and the glittering canals, museums and palaces of St Petersburg, the trip will aim to shed light on Russian history. For instance, you'll visit the Grand Kremlin Palace and the State Armoury (with its fine collection of Fabergé eggs); you'll be able to sneak a peak at non-conformist art at the home of a prominent Russian artist and collector; and you'll see Moscow's Cold War Museum, housed in a former top-secret Soviet command post. We can even arrange a meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev's principal interpreter and a famous Russian TV presenter to talk contemporary politics. As a bonus, visiting Russia has rarely been cheaper than it is right now. A notoriously expensive destination, the weakening of the ruble has brought down prices, making the country more attractive to travellers. Though do get in quick: rates are starting to rise again and the football World Cup, being held in Russia in 2018, will likely see prices rise once more.



## OKINAWA ISLANDS & BEYOND, JAPAN

**Why it's hot...** Try tropical isles and breathtaking trains, before the rush

Japan is always cool. With its Michelin-starred sushi bars and singular mix of hyper-modern and uber-traditional, this is a country often near the top of travellers' wishlists. In late 2016, it was brought to the fore once more, as ITV's Joanna Lumley's Japan hit our small screens, travelling from snow-cloaked Hokkaido to the tropical Okinawan Islands. Indeed, southerly Okinawa is tipped to be a top choice. It fits perfectly with the growing trend for slow-paced, wellbeing-focused travel. Life is more laidback on this offbeat archipelago, which is renowned for its excellent beaches, snorkelling and diving (especially with manta rays, June-October) – not your typical trip to Japan. Also, it's one of the world's healthiest destinations, where a unique, wholesome cuisine contributes to the fact that there are more centenarians here than anywhere else on the planet. In Okinawa, 'clean eating' is a way of life, not a silly fad. Perhaps more quintessentially Japanese, there are two new train trips that might entice you to the country in 2017. From spring, the Twilight Express Mizukaze, a swish sleeper, will roll through unspoiled western Japan, linking Kyoto, Matsue, Izumo, Miyajima, wonderful views and authentic experiences. The luxurious Train Suite Shiki-Shima, launching in May, will plunge into the north east, running from Tokyo into Tohoku and Hokkaido, via high mountains, Ainu culture and onsen hot springs. No matter which region you fancy, book your trip to Japan now, before the Rugby World Cup (2018) and Summer Olympics (2020) see prices rise.

## MYANMAR

**Why it's hot...** New areas are opening up

A&K has been arranging trips to Myanmar for a long time. Indeed, our office on the ground will be celebrating 20 years of operation in 2017, meaning we have two decades of expertise under our belts, and know the country intimately. In 2011, when Aung San Suu Kyi revised her opinion and declared that responsible tourism to Myanmar should be encouraged, the country became officially 'hot'. A new raft of curious travellers rushed to visit the temples of Bagan, the glittering pagodas of Yangon and Inle Lake's tranquil villages. However, in reality, much of the country still remained off-limits, with most visitors sticking to a well-worn – albeit mind-blowing – circuit. Now, though, new areas are beginning to open up, offering offbeat add-ons to classic Myanmar trips as well as enticing options for second-timers. Particularly intriguing for 2017 is Kayah State. The state capital Loikaw is finally open to visitors; it's also now served by regular flights from Yangon, making it far easier to access. Kayah is a fascinating region, too: this is lush hill country, home to an extremely diverse population of ethnic groups. This includes the Padaung, otherwise known as the 'long neck tribe' – so-called for the tradition of ladies elongating their necks by wearing metal coils. This practice is no longer enforced, but there are some elders – now in their 60s and 70s – who've been wearing the rings all their lives. Visit now for a rare chance to meet them.





## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Why it's hot...** The state is starting to shine

South Australia is probably the country's most underrated state. It might not have an Uluru or a Harbour Bridge; Adelaide might be less obviously 'cool' than Melbourne. But it has a little bit of everything in one neat, delicious package – and people are starting to cotton on. Take the state capital: in 2016, Adelaide was voted the world's sixth most liveable city by The Economist's Intelligence Unit. It has a winning combination of style, grace, green spaces, great year-round weather, hip bars and thriving cultural venues – not to mention one of the most packed festival calendars of any city, from world music-filled WOMAdelaide to the Adelaide Fringe. Travellers are also beginning to realise that South Australia ticks all those quintessentially Australian boxes: in a relatively manageable area, there are award-winning vineyards and surf-bashed beaches; there is indigenous culture and native wildlife galore (Kangaroo Island is known as the 'Australian Galápagos'); and there is plenty of rich-ered Outback to explore. You don't need to be Croc Dundee to do so either. When the Arkaba Walk, one of the Great Walks of Australia, opened a few years ago, it reset the bar for wilderness hiking in style. This four-day trek through Wilpena Pound and the Elder Range combines desert homestead stays, swag camping under the stars, 600-million years of geology and mouthwatering local food and drink. New for 2016, the Murray River Walk is the latest addition to the Great Walks portfolio, and mixes waterside hiking with houseboat life and plenty of trademark bush-luxe.

## RWANDA

**Why it's hot...** Ecotourism options are ever expanding

The future's looking brilliantly bright for Rwanda, which has emerged from its turbulent past as one of the continent's most exciting wildlife destinations. Tucked into Africa's abundantly biodiverse Western Rift region, Rwanda has always had the potential to be a super wildlife spot, and now the infrastructure is catching up. Following years of decline, Akagera – one of Africa's oldest national parks, in the country's north-east – was given a new lease of life in 2016. Facilities have been upgraded and animals reintroduced, with new lodging options opening too. Of course, the country's headline wildlife act remains its mountain gorillas. Rwanda is one of the premier places to see these endangered apes, with wildlife-lovers drawn by the country's excellent guiding, relatively open habitats (which enable good viewing) and the legacy of Dian Fossey. The popularity of gorilla tracking here is set to be enhanced next year, as Wilderness Safaris creates a gorilla and chimpanzee lodge circuit. Due to open mid-June 2017, Bisate Lodge will sit adjacent to Volcanoes National Park, and provide an eco-luxe, community-tourism focused base from which to trek with the mountain gorillas. In 2018, Wilderness Safaris will operate another lodge in Gishwati-Mukura National Park, just a 15-minute helicopter flight to the south. This will give guests exclusive access to the habituated chimpanzee and golden monkey communities of Gishwati Forest. A&K itineraries combining the two camps will provide the ultimate, up-close primate experience.





## INDIA

**Why it's hot...** It's celebrating a year of culture

In many ways, the Indian travel experience is modernising apace. Airports are slicker. Many trains are getting faster. And in summer 2015, e-Tourist visas were introduced, making entry a whole lot easier, and cheaper too. And yet, this remains a place in which to revel in the past, especially in 2017. This year marks the 70th anniversary of India's independence from British rule, and has been designated UK-India Year of Culture. Many events will celebrate the ties between the two countries. For instance, Shakespeare's First Folio and the Magna Carta will tour India and the CSMVS Mumbai museum will tell the story of Indian civilisation using items on loan from the British Museum. Also, London's Madame Tussauds will open a branch in New Delhi, featuring plenty of bright Bollywood waxworks. The historic connections can also be soaked up in cities such as Kolkata, where neat Victorian architecture sits alongside thrillingly chaotic bazaars. Or you could stay at a rural homestead and chat to the owners about their colonial past. Alternatively watch the Saturday morning changing of the guard in Delhi – for which A&K can now access tickets. You could even explore the cool mountain-view hill stations of Darjeeling and Shimla, where the British used to escape to, to avoid the monsoon. For the ultimate retreat, though, head for the new Oberoi Sukhvilas at Chandigarh, near Shimla. Due to open in late 2016, this calming forest-set spa resort will offer massage, hydrotherapies, Ayurveda, a Turkish hammam and a Roman tepidarium to today's wellness-seeking guests.

## OREGON, USA

**Why it's hot...** New flights and celestial sights

California is the USA's most-visited state. But those in the know are increasingly looking north for a more offbeat Pacific Coast adventure: in Oregon you get wild beaches, whale watching, wine tasting and mighty mountains but far fewer people. Of course, Oregon hasn't gone entirely unnoticed. Portland is often voted one of the coolest/greenest/most liveable cities in the States; many fall for its laid-back, alternative, bike-friendly vibe and profusion of farm-to-table restaurants. The whole state's food scene is thriving. New producers pop up all the time, and craft brewing is particularly big – the state has the most craft breweries per capita (206 at last count), many of which can be visited on beer trails. Fortunately, Oregon is also extremely outdoorsy, with abundant hiking, biking, rafting, skiing and more, so it's easy to indulge guilt-free. The region is getting easier to reach too. A new Delta/Virgin flight between London and Portland starts in May 2017, adding to the numerous flights via Iceland. This new direct route is well-timed for the astronomical event of the year – Oregon Solarfest (18-21 August) – which coincides with the total solar eclipse. NASA experts, eclectic musicians and fine food purveyors will gather in the city of Madras; the climax will be a massive two minutes of totality and a unique moon shadow on Mount Jefferson. The 2017 eclipse is the first to be visible across the USA for decades, but Madras's clear skies and frame of soaring peaks promise to make it one of the top spots.



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# BE THE FIRST

Showcasing the newest places to  
stay around the world



## OBEROI SUKHVILAS, CHANDIGARH, INDIA

Oberoi knows a thing or two about accommodation – in 2016, Travel + Leisure magazine's readers voted it the World's Best Hotel Brand for the second year running. So Oberoi's latest venture, tucked in the north-west Himalayan foothills, near the Le Corbusier-planned city of Chandigarh, is a thrilling prospect.

The emphasis at this new luxe resort is on relaxation and rejuvenation. Rooms, ranging from haveli-like villas to opulent Raj-style tents (complete with all mod-cons, of course), are scattered amid landscaped gardens, within a clearing of protected Siswan Forest.

Leafy views from every window, an abundance of natural light, and the sounds of birdsong, barking deer and trickling waters lend a calming vibe. The spa facilities look set to be top-notch too: there's a Turkish hammam, Roman tepidarium, ultraviolet sauna, Ayurveda, hydrotherapies, massage therapies and more. Or take the opportunity to relax further afield: the cool, colonial hill station of Shimla – reached by heritage Toy Train – is just 100km to the north.



## THE SILO, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

From March 2017, you'll be able to bed down in a bit of brilliantly reinvented history. The 57m-high grain silo, which lords over Cape Town's lively V&A Waterfront – with Table Mountain as a beefy backdrop – was the tallest building in sub-Saharan Africa when it opened in 1924. Closed in 2001, it's set to reopen as the Mother City's slickest, most exciting new hotel.

With just 28 individually designed rooms, located across the top six floors, The Silo promises intimacy despite its grand scale. Its style aesthetic will be industrial-chic, softened and colour-popped by intriguing art – the ideal nod to the building's lower floors which, in September 2017, will open as the world-class Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA).

The Silo will also have one of the most enviable views in town, best enjoyed from the rooftop champagne bar or pool. Better still, all of Cape Town – from its beaches and Botanical Gardens to its museums and food markets – lies right outside its doors.





## ALILA ANJI, ZHEJIANG, CHINA

The Alila Anji might just fulfil many a Far East fantasy. The first Chinese venture from Alila (Sanskrit for 'surprise'), the Anji resembles a traditional Zhejiang village of whitewashed villas and sweeping tiled roofs, all built with a strong eco ethos. Inside, native woods and stone, handwoven textiles, exquisite silks and antique furnishings add to the authentic feel.

Even more idyllic are the surroundings: the hidden hillside resort looks over tranquil Tianfu Lake and sits amid a lushness of tea plantations and bamboo groves. Indeed, the location is so striking it was used in the Oscar-winning movie, 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' – this is Hollywood China made real. Guests can practise t'ai chi in the open-air pavilion, feel the benefits of Chinese medicine at the spa, sail out onto the lake, eat innovative farm-to-table food or simply hide away in this rejuvenating wilderness.

When you're ready to rejoin the world, the dreamy pagodas of Hangzhou (1.5hrs) and the bright lights of Shanghai (4hrs) are close by.



## MIAVANA, NOSY ANKAO, MADAGASCAR

The beauty and uniqueness of Madagascar – an Indian Ocean Eden, brimming with weird and wonderful species – might just reach their zenith at Miavana. This new resort on Nosy Ankao, part of a private five-island archipelago off Madagascar's northern tip, will offer the best in barefoot luxury living – think rustic-chic with an excellent wine cellar – combined with strong green credentials and some of the best wildlife experiences on offer anywhere.

There are just 14 exclusive villas at this exquisite eco-lodge, few enough to ensure that castaway feel; you can step right onto the squeaky, white sand from your own private deck. Expert-guided 'blue safaris' will probe the archipelago's bays, lagoons and channels – watch turtles nest, dolphins frolic and (in season) humpbacks migrating offshore.

Dive and snorkel trips will reveal the astonishing diversity beneath the waves. Alternatively, trips into the tropical rainforests nearby will reveal charismatic lemurs and an array of birds.

If you're interested in being one of the first to stay at any of these incredible places, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 760** to find out more.



THE STATUE OF LIBERTY | New York



# EAST *meets* WEST

BY CHARLOTTE WELLS

The USA is huge. With dramatic highways and rugged coastline, miles of prairie land, great lakes, rainforests and mountain ranges, not to mention some of the world's most exciting cities, it can feel impossible to decide where to head to first. ☹





BOSTON | Massachusetts

**T**housands of miles apart, the east and west coasts boast some quite different attractions. To the east, the well-trodden streets of Boston, glittering Miami, dreams on the boulevards of New York. To the west, breathtaking national parks, rangers in khaki uniforms, bears, elk and giant redwoods to boot, and a beachside lifestyle to envy. So, how to choose? We're here to help.

## TO THE EAST

### CITIES

#### **Boston**

Bean Town is an American city like no other. For one, it's a truly walkable city, not a claim most US cities can make. Second, founded in 1630, it's one of the country's oldest towns and is located just along the coast from where those fateful Pilgrims stepped ashore. Take the 2.5-mile Freedom Trail for an excellent introduction to this rare US old town.

Modern-day Boston is celebrated for its beer. With microbrewers popping up all around the city, these distinct, hop-heavy North American tipples are enjoyed at baseball games, on college campuses – MIT and Harvard are found in neighbouring Cambridge – and smart downtown dining rooms.

And, for the ultimate Boston experience, head to Fenway Park, home of the celebrated Red Sox, one of major league baseball's most successful teams.

#### **New York**

New York demands every ounce of energy. It's long been the home of that urban inspired strand of American culture, from mainstream boulevards to counter cultural hubs like the Chelsea Hotel, where Leonard Cohen rubbed shoulders with Jimi Hendrix rubbed shoulders with Patti Smith rubbed shoulders with Allen Ginsberg. The list goes on...

From iconic buildings – the Empire State, Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty – to the poignant Ground Zero Memorial, the renewed buzz of the meat packing district to fashion studios of the Garment district, one thing's for sure: New York has something for everyone.

#### **Miami**

Miami is a beach lover's paradise. Spend the day relaxing, indulging in some celeb spotting at iconic Miami Beach and lively nights at Ocean Drive, home of the city's finest nightlife. (We can fix you up with some VIP treats).

In recent years, Miami's booming art scene has rivalled those cities in the north that are better known for their cultural offerings. You can even join a local graffiti artist on an evening's painting.

A mix of art deco buildings, Cuban influenced cafes and cigar shops, white sand, surfside hotels, trendsetting nightclubs and wall-to-wall glamour make Miami a city that's hard to forget.

### CULTURE

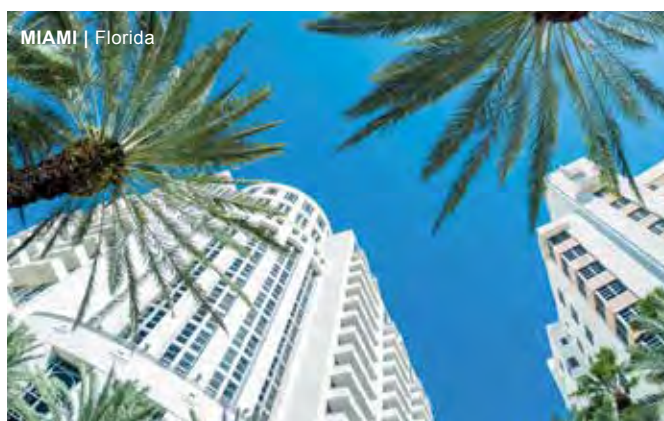
Cities on the East Coast are fast-paced, straight-talking, chasing a sense of sophistication that doesn't bother their more relaxed relatives in the west. The pulsing energy of New York and Boston is played out in high-class wine bars and fashionable boulevards. And in Miami, the large Hispanic population has helped invigorate a 24-hour party atmosphere.

### FOOD

The food on the East Coast is as varied, frantic and high-paced as the lifestyle. As such, New York is fast food heaven, from famous Coney Island hot dogs to hipsters' own wood-fired pizzerias. Plenty of high-end restaurants also cater to the culinary and time-sensitive demands of busy New Yorkers, many of whom rarely eat in. In Boston, exceptional dishes are often joined with a favourite Boston beer.

### SPORT

Grab your foam finger, don your baseball cap and see the New York Yankees in the Bronx, or round off a day of Coney Island rides with a night at the Brooklyn Cyclones. The East Coast is also home to such sporting legends as the Boston Red Sox and the Miami Dolphins.



MIAMI | Florida

#### | THE EAST |

A 16 day Classic New England trip, including international flights, based on two sharing is available from £2,740pp. For more information, or to discuss your trip to New England, please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 717.





SAN FRANCISCO | California

## WAY OUT WEST

### CITIES

#### Seattle

Seattleites celebrate the rain: it keeps the Californians away, and helps this beautiful Pacific Northwest city retain its alternative, independent charm. Independence is at its heart, even if its more famous independents – Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks – are now global conglomerates. The iconic Space Needle stands at the centre of town, and offers a 360-degree-view of the city. Then there's vibrant public markets, spectacular contemporary art galleries and independent cafes, bars and bookshops in which to lose track of time.

And, what's more, few cities can boast such an outdoorsy attitude. It's no wonder, with Mt Rainier National Park, the Olympic Mountains and orca-frequented waters on the doorstep.

#### San Francisco

The lingering fog of the Pacific adds a palpable sense of adventure as you arrive at this city by the bay. Flanked by the famous Golden Gate Bridge, beautiful San Francisco can match New York for cultural importance and Los Angeles for its amazing landscape. It's a literary city at heart, one-time home to some of the US's best loved authors, including Mark Twain, Jack London and the Beats.

It's also home to the largest Chinese community outside of Asia, as well as eerie Alcatraz and down at Fisherman's Wharf, the country's best clam chowder. We recommend joining a professional chef and learning how to make this delectable seafood soup.

#### Los Angeles

Everything is bigger in LA. A sprawling city with over 90 neighbourhoods, including Santa Monica, Brentwood and West Hollywood, this true world city has dictated trends the world over for decades. Visitors can go celebrity spotting on Rodeo Drive – where, behind closed doors, private shopping with celebs is a norm – stroll down Hollywood Boulevard and enjoy behind-the-scene tours at Paramount Pictures, Universal and Warner Brothers, the glittering heart of the city's multi-billion dollar filmmaking industry. The weather's great, the landscape's beautiful, and whether it's the high life or a surf-side hang out you're after, you can find it here in droves.

### CULTURE

Life on the West Coast has a more, out-of-town feel, with bronzed surfers wandering through downtown LA, sailors in San Francisco and sun-seekers in San Diego. Things move slower here, and CEOs wearing board-shorts are as common as suits and ties on Wall Street.

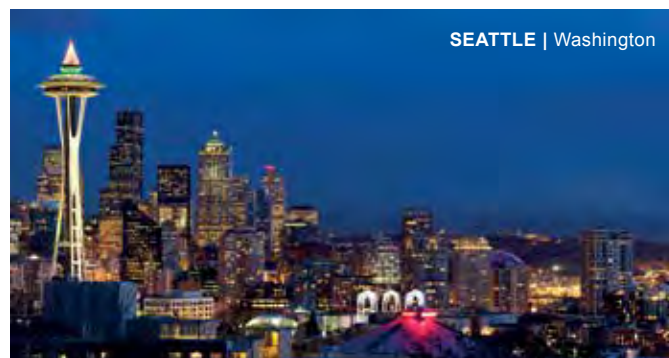
### FOOD

The USA is a country of immigrants, and perhaps nowhere else in the world can you sample so many world cuisines at such high standards. Korean, Vietnamese, Italian, Polish, Hawaiian and Mexican food all mingle to create some stunning culinary treats.

Cuisine in the west reflects the close connection between cities and their surrounding countryside, with healthy menus offering organic cuisine from farm to table. The Farmers Market in LA is the perfect place to enjoy a freshly squeezed orange juice, San Francisco is the place to try clam chowder, whilst all along the coast contemporary Mexican food is justifiably popular. Fittingly, meals are more of an occasion than in the East, so sit back, relax, and take your time.

### SPORT

The West Coast is more partial to football – or soccer – and LA Galaxy are the stars of the show. Alternatively, catch one of basketball's finest teams, the Lakers (watch out for Jack Nicholson in the front row) in LA, or head to the home of the Giants or the 49ers in San Francisco. Petco Park in San Diego offers great baseball and spectacular city views.



SEATTLE | Washington

#### | THE WEST |

A 10 day Highlights of California trip, including international flights, based on two sharing is available from £2,265pp. For more information, or to discuss your trip to California, please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 717.



# What's new IN A&K VILLAS



From the glittering Cote d'Azur and the glamorous Greek Islands to the quaint and intrinsically beautiful, all-English surrounds of the Cotswolds, our villas offer a home away from home in some truly magical destinations.

One of the joys of working for A&K is that we get to visit them all –there's not a single one that hasn't been tried and tested by a member of the team. It's great for us and it's good for you too, as it means that we know all our villas in intimate detail. In a saturated marketplace it's important to know what you're spending your money on.

### *Pre-Arrival Concierge Service*

Every villa booking includes the complimentary service of a dedicated pre-arrival concierge who can help you put the finishing touches to your holiday, whether it is a gourmet chef, a cake for a special celebration or a luxurious yacht charter around the Cyclades. All requests are welcome and we will do our utmost to meet your every need.

### *New Concierge Upgrades*

Should you wish to further enhance your villa stay, we have two specially designed concierge packages for you to choose from.

The Gold Package includes the services of a dedicated local concierge who welcomes you to your villa and provides invaluable local tips, recommendations and assistance throughout your stay should you need it. This package also includes an introductory tour of the local area to help you orientate yourself with the locality and provision a pre-arrival grocery shop, to allow you to stock up on all of the essentials before you arrive – simply tell us in advance what you'd like.

The Platinum Package goes one step further – it includes all of the services provided in our Gold Package but also has a variety of additional services to enhance your stay. Namely, a buffet-style breakfast on your first morning, a pre-stocked drinks fridge, luxurious toiletries, a daily maid service, mid-week grocery shop and a private chef for a lunch or dinner on a day of your choice.

### *Greek Island Glamour*

We are delighted to announce the addition of two of Greece's most exclusive and glamorous islands to our portfolio - Mykonos and Santorini. Each island is distinctive and uniquely beautiful in its own right; Santorini's dramatic volcanic landscapes, clifftop towns, excellent wines, art and culture set it apart, while Mykonos' soft white sandy beaches, haute cuisine and glamorous glitterati have made it one of Greece's most exclusive destinations. Two of our favourite properties on the islands are The Zarassi Estate and Villa Lavana.

### *The Zarassi Estate, Mykonos*

This private estate is located in one of the most spectacular settings of our whole collection, perched on a hillside, with 180 degree views of the Aegean Sea and just a short drive from the popular beaches of Kalafati and Kalo Livadi. The extensive grounds hold two elegant Myconian style sea-facing properties, a fabulous lazuline lagoon shaped infinity pool, heated Jacuzzi, mini spa and outdoor gym.

### *Villa Lavana, Santorini*

The island of Santorini rises out of the southern Aegean Sea in dramatic fashion. The small town of Oia sits at the northern edge of the island and is one of the best places to catch the island's notoriously beautiful sunsets. It is home to high-end designer boutiques, whitewashed chapels with blue domed roofs and Villa Lavana, our opulent three-bed property which sits in the heart of the town. The views from the villa are entrancing, the property overlooks the dramatic caldera as well as the island's volcano which sits majestically in the ocean below – a unique and intensely beautiful location. ☺

#### | VILLAS |

If you're interested in finding out about our range of villas please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 705.



THE ZARASSI ESTATE | Mykonos







# *The finer things* **IN LIFE**

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**KAY DURDEN** FINDS THE BEST PLACES TO ENJOY SOUTH AFRICA'S EXTRAORDINARY FOOD, ART AND WINE

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**T**here is a definite buzz at Cape Town's famous Waterfront. Construction is well under way for the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA), due to open later this year. When it opens, it will rival the Tate Modern in London and MoMA in New York as a leading institute of modern art and will house the continent's largest collection of contemporary African artwork.

“ IT'S OFTEN SAID THAT EATING IS A NECESSITY, BUT COOKING IS AN ART. IF THAT BE THE CASE, THEN SOUTH AFRICA BOASTS AS MANY GASTRONOMIC MASTERPIECES AS IT DOES THOSE IN PAINT, STONE, INK AND FILM. ”

Above the museum, which is housed in a converted grain silo, will sit a new boutique hotel. The Silo will have just 28 rooms, each stylishly designed by esteemed hotelier Liz Biden, and is likely to become one of the hottest hotel properties on the city's already competitive market. Windows capturing the views of Table Mountain and the surrounding city skyline should help its rise to the top.

Art lovers needn't be confined to the city, and should consider heading out to the Winelands, where breathtaking mountains rise among pretty towns and villages.

Leeu Estate opened its doors to guests in summer 2016 and boasts an extraordinary collection of sculptures by Anton Momberg, Angus Taylor and Deborah Bell,

a leading practitioner of the country's resistance art movement. Taking centre stage is Artemis, the Greek goddess of hunting, joined by her three dogs, the focal point of the manicured lawn that fronts the estate's impressive Manor House.

Bushman's Kloof Wilderness Reserve and Wellness Retreat lies three hours north of Cape Town, and offers a change of pace from the country's contemporary art scene. Set in the heart of the Cedarberg Mountains, the area contains 130 bush art sites, some of which date back 10,000 years. Created by the San Bushmen, the sites have been awarded South African Natural Heritage Site status.

It's often said that eating is a necessity, but cooking is an art. If that be the case, then South Africa boasts as many gastronomic masterpieces as it does those in paint, stone, ink and film. Various cultures have met at the base of the African continent over the years, and you can taste the coming together of these cultures in the country's unique, diverse cuisine.

Taste the blends of African and Malaysian spices at many of the Cape Malay restaurants spread throughout the country. Visit KwaZulu Natal and try a bunny chow – a hollowed out bread roll, filled with delicious curry. And throughout the country, particularly if you self-drive, find plenty of local delicatessens offering European-inspired chocolates and cheeses.

For true foodies, the Tasting Room at Le Quartier Francais in Franschhoek is worth a stop. Award-winning chef, Margot Janse has created an eight-course menu of contemporary, African-inspired dishes. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time – it's recommended that you indulge your taste buds for a full three and a half hours.

And of course, no meal would be complete without a glass of South African wine to accompany it. There are plenty of excellent varieties to choose from, many at very reasonable prices. As always, it's worth sampling the wines that you can't get at home – it's a well-known fact the local wine makers keep the best for themselves.

Nowadays, traditional wine tours are being enhanced by different modes of transport. The vineyards of the Winelands can be explored by car, on foot, by bike, on horseback or by Wine Tram, which allows you to hop on and off to visit up to eight wine estates.

For beer drinkers, Franschhoek now boasts its own microbrewery and if you're after something a little stronger, the local gin can be fantastic, with spirits crafted from scented produce of the Cape Floral Kingdom.

South Africa is a land of diversity. Whether you want a sumptuous picnic as a reward for climbing Table Mountain or a seafood braai (barbecue) as you watch dolphins play in the surf, South Africa has a lifetime of dramatic venues, views and moments to choose from. Just be sure to have a drink in hand as you watch yet another magical sunset. ☺



#### | SOUTH AFRICA |

A 12 day highlights of South Africa tour including international flights, based on two sharing is available from £3,279 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to South Africa, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 702**.







HUMPBACK WHALE | South Africa



# TOP 5

## HOT AIR BALLOONING EXPERIENCES



### 1 *San Pedro de Atacama, Chile*

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**Why?** *Be the first to float over the most dramatic of deserts*

Northern Chile's Atacama, the Earth's driest desert, is like another world. Its strange red-pink-orange rock formations and rumpled hills look more Martian than earthbound – especially when viewed from above, in surreal silence, from the basket of a hot air balloon. Flights over the Atacama only started running in September 2016, so as yet few people have been privileged to see this astonishing view: a unique condor's eye take on one of the world's wildest, remotest places. Rise up above the desert at dawn to see the early light ignite the Valley of the Moon, the salt flats and the surrounding plains, and to see daybreak on the snow-capped volcanoes beyond.

### 2 *Bagan, Myanmar*

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**Why?** *To appreciate the scale of an ancient kingdom*

Bagan was the first capital of what is now Myanmar, and between the 11th and 13th centuries, over 10,000 Buddhist temples were built here, on a vast, verdant plain by the banks of the Ayeyarwady River. Today, more than 2,200 remain, from multi-tiered pagodas and magnificent monasteries to gilded domes and simple stupas. The scale is almost impossible to comprehend – until, that is, you see it from above. Gazing down, you can see the full extent of the site; everywhere you look, another elegant tower or piercing spire bursts from the trees and rice paddies, reaching towards you. On a clear morning you might see right to Mount Popa, while the rising sun sets the stupas aglow and sends sparkles along the mighty river.





### 3 Masai Mara, Kenya

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**Why?** For matchless views of the greatest show on Earth

Animals don't always like humans. When we get close, they have a tendency to run away. Which is why watching the great migration from the discreet vantage of a hot air balloon is such an excellent choice. The millions of wildebeest and zebra down below will be unbothered by your vessel, drifting peacefully above. And, from on high, you can truly appreciate the huge numbers involved. Ascend at dawn, when the light is rosy pink and the wildlife is at its most active, and you might see herds stretching for miles, wending their way across the acacia-dotted plains and over the perilous rivers. With luck, you might even see the predators that lie in wait...



### 4 Canterbury Plains, Christchurch, New Zealand

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**Why?** For a movie-set panorama

Soaring over the Canterbury Plains in a hot air balloon is like living a Hollywood movie. Remember those sweeping Lord of the Rings panoramas, where wizards galloped across perfect meadows and snow-dusted mountains loomed imperiously behind? Well, board a balloon and you're in it. Taking off in the early hours, when the air is still and the light just right, the terrific topography of South Island is revealed in all its cinematic glory (perhaps minus the wizards...). Follow the looping Rakaia River and watch as the fertile farmland gradually rolls up into the South Alps, rising with a dramatic punch. And, in fitting Hollywood style, raise a glass of champers afterwards, to toast your epic ride.

### 5 Teotihuacan, Mexico City, Mexico

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**Why?** To better comprehend the 'city of the gods'

When the Mesoamerican architects built Teotihuacan, around 2,000 years ago, they did it quite precisely. The city's grid is aligned to 15.5° east of north, and it's thought its residents used this to set their sense of time or seasons. Looking down on the 'city of the gods' now is the best way to try to grasp the importance of the ancient urban planning. From a hot air balloon, you can make out the alignment of the Avenue of the Dead, where the pyramids' positions reflect the planets in our solar system, centred from the Temple of the Sun. From a hot air balloon, Teotihuacan is an enormous stone planetarium, set within a lush, green valley, with volcanoes and mountains all around.



A high-angle photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows vibrant turquoise water meeting a white sandy shore. The bottom half of the image is a close-up of the fine, white sand. The text is overlaid on the sand.

# *Love* IS IN THE. *air*

**W**hen is a holiday not just a holiday? When it's a honeymoon. Start spouting that particular 'H' word, and a trip takes on new levels of importance. This is likely to be the most momentous trip you'll ever take, the one you really want to get right. Fortunately, our specialists have precisely the knowledge needed to ensure your moon is magnificent. They've organised every type of trip you can imagine, from intimate mini-breaks to full-on five-star luxe, from whole-family wedding fiestas to hikes up Kilimanjaro. Each one individual, each one tailored to the two of you. ☺







SANTORINI | Greece

## MINI MOON?

*Try... Santorini*

A shorter moon doesn't mean scrimping on style or substance. Indeed, if you're condensing your fun into a few days, you can ensure you really make those days count. Islands, with their blissful, castaway vibe, make especially romantic destination choices – and they don't come much more romantic than the glorious Greek isle of Santorini. Here, neat vineyards and whitewashed villages tumble down the sides of the part-sunken caldera towards a blinding-blue sea. It's particularly spectacular at dusk, when the water glitters and the houses glow; for optimum romance, head for a quiet taverna terrace in cliff-top Oia or board a yacht to literally sail off into the sunset together. Also, don't miss the chance to taste crisp assyrtiko wines on an intimate tour of Santorini's best family-run wineries, try one of the volcanic beaches or simply relax in your hotel to soak up one of Europe's best views.

**Like that? Try this...** Channel a bit of 'When Harry Met Sally' style on a New York mini moon.

## EPIC MOON?

*Try... Alaska*

There's no better way to start married life than with a lovely long trip together, doing something sensational. If you're lucky enough to have more than two weeks to escape, then consider an Epic Moon – indulgent, unhurried, extraordinary. Alaska fits the bill perfectly, especially for those heading off after a summer wedding. Summer is when the wild-n-wonderful US state is at its best: bears are foraging, whales are blowing, trails are open, warm weather activities are in full swing. There are also plenty of wilderness-luxe accommodation options: incredible lodges where you can get back to nature and immerse yourself in matchless mountains without forsaking extras such as top chefs and world-class wine cellars. Even getting around becomes part of the adventure, with float-plane and helicopter hops adding a bit of A-list glamour (not to mention unbeatable views) to the regular hotel transfer.

**Like that? Try this...** Bullet-training around Japan, during spring cherry blossom or fall colour seasons.



MOUNTAIN VIEW | Antarctica



## TWIN-CENTRE MOON?

*Try...South Africa and Mozambique*

This type of trip is ideal for the indecisive, or for newlyweds who simply want to have their cake and eat it. Combining two places in one moon, you can balance relaxation and adventure, revving up and chilling out. Take South Africa and Mozambique. In the former you could start in cosmopolitan Cape Town, with plenty of wine-glugging, history-buffing and shark cage-diving thrown in. Next, consider a Big Five safari – perhaps game viewing in Kruger on a private reserve, where nights spent in a star-spangled treehouse could add extra romance. After all this action, you could hop to Mozambique, where beaches seldom come more dazzling, and where the water is jam-packed with marine life. Stay at a barefoot-luxe lodge, spend a day onboard a dhow, picnic on empty atolls and forget about the rest of the world.

**Like that? Try this...** *Mix Mayan ruins and Caribbean beaches in Guatemala and Belize.*

## BUCKET-LIST MOON?

*Try...Antarctica*

To ensure your honeymoon is the most memorable trip of your life, why not go to that place you've both always wanted to go? Antarctica, the planet's last true wilderness, features at the top of many a newlywed's bucket list, and makes for an unforgettable moon – especially if you choose a more sophisticated, more intimate vessel, on which you're guaranteed your own space to cosy up together as well as the adventure of a lifetime. Sharing the wonders of the White Continent is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Nowhere else will you get to sail in splendour between raucous penguin colonies, shimmering icebergs, calving glaciers and breaching whales; nowhere else can you navigate your two-person kayak amid the pristine ice floes as inquisitive fur seals and penguins pop up by your side.

**Like that? Try this...** *Watch the amorous antics of unique wildlife on a luxury cruise around the Galápagos Islands.*



BEARS | Alaska

## WEDDING CELEBRATION?

*Try...Amalfi Coast, Italy*

If you don't want the celebrations to stop after the wedding, take your friends and family with you! Hiring a show-stopper of a party house, in a jaw-dropping location, could provide an unforgettable setting for both the big day itself and the following 'buddy-moon' – a honeymoon with everyone you love. For example, Villa La Colonnata is an 18th-century merchant's house teetering on the cliffside of postcard-pretty Positano. This elegant pad has room for 16 and is packed with glorious interior details including exquisitely tiled floors, flamboyant frescoes and antique furniture. It also has a long, colonnaded terrace that seems to hover above the sea: it would make a fairytale setting for a delicious Italian wedding breakfast, cooked by a private chef. Continue the nuptials with a private yacht trip to Capri or a group stroll amid Amalfi's fragrant lemon groves.

**Like that? Try this...** *Soak up the sea views with your mates at Villa Med on France's Côte d'Azur.*

### | HONEYMOONS |

If you're interested in finding out about our range of honeymoons please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 546 624**. If you would like to download or request a pre-printed Honeymoons brochure you can do so by visiting [www.abercrombiekent.co.uk/request/](http://www.abercrombiekent.co.uk/request/)





# RELIQS OF THE RAJ

INDIA CELEBRATES 70 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITISH RULE IN 2017. MUCH HAS CHANGED OVER THE PAST SEVEN DECADES BUT YOU CAN STILL SPOT RELICS OF THE COLONIAL PAST, FROM NARROW-GAUGE RAILWAYS IN THE HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS TO GRAND MANSIONS IN KOLKATA. **KAY DURDEN**, SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER, HANDPICKS SOME OF THE BEST.





## CLASSIC COLONIAL CITIES

The Taj Mahal Palace is the undisputed star of Mumbai's city skyline. This luxurious hotel was built in 1903 and still stands majestically beside the Gateway of India, where couples gather in the evening and watch the boats floating their way down the harbour. Royals, heads of states, and both Bollywood and Hollywood stars have stayed at the Taj and each afternoon guests can enjoy a heritage walk with hotel butlers who share some of the stories of the Taj's extraordinary history.

Just up the road is the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, a bustling railway station and celebrated UNESCO World Heritage site. Its Victorian architectural style is in complete contrast to the rest of the city, where modern skyscrapers hedge for space with city slums, parks and open-air laundrettes like the dhobi ghat, where the city's colourful saris get laundered against hard-worn stones.

The contrast continues in Kolkata. Formerly Calcutta, this city of five million people was the capital of the British Raj until 1911 and was known as the 'Jewel of the East'. Scattered among the city's thriving communities of artisans, you'll find the magnificent white marble Victoria Memorial and the Writers' Building, the former offices of the East India Company.

## HILL STATIONS

The one-time summer capital, Shimla, is perched high in the Himalayan foothills. Among its cultural and architectural curiosities is Wildflower Hall, Lord Kitchener's former residence, which wouldn't be out of place in the Scottish Highlands. Enjoy a drink in the Cavalry Bar with the hotel's in-house historians before retiring to your very own Lord Kitchener Suite.

Darjeeling is another famous West Bengalese hill station, this one better known for tea plantations than Highland mansions, though 19th-century schools and churches can still be seen today. The town is perhaps best known for the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Built in 1880, visitors can still climb aboard the famous Toy Train and chug uphill. The perfect base from which to explore this area is Glenburn Tea Estate, where you can walk through the grounds to watch as tea-pickers select the best leaves, later to be added to the perfect English cuppa.

## RURAL RETREATS

Away from bustling city streets, you'll still find British influence wherever you go, as much distilled in the people you meet as realised in the architectural plans of old.

Nestled between Jaipur and Udaipur is Shahpura Bagh, a charming rural homestay set in 45 acres. This oasis far from the city is full of character – one A&K client went so far as describing it as 'India's answer to Downton Abbey'. Evening meals are served in the grand dining room, where guests are joined by the family members who recall how their ancestor Rajadhiraj Nahar Singh of Shahpura sold the family jewels in the 1900s in order to bring vital water to the local people.

Located between Udaipur and Jodhpur is the Mountbatten Lodge Ranakpur. It's run by Reggie Singh, another host who exudes a unique Britishness. A short distance from the stunning Jain temples of Ranakpur, it's conveniently located and each evening guests at this four-suite hotel gather at the hotel's terrace and watch the sunset as jazz music drifts gently from the bar. Gin and tonic anyone? ☺

CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI TERMINUS | Mumbai







#### | INDIA |

A 10 day Classic Northern India tour with international flights from the UK, based on two sharing is available from £2,725 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to India, please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 755.

**MOUNT KANCHENJUNGA AND DARJEELING** | India





# SMALL GROUP JOURNEYS

IRAN: A  
JOURNEY  
THROUGH  
PERSIA – AN  
A&K HOSTED  
JOURNEY

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AN A&K GROUP TOUR IS NOT YOUR STANDARD GROUP TOUR. We apply the same attention to detail to our Small Group Journeys as we do our Tailormade trips. They're a chance to visit the world's greatest sites, have unique experiences, gain behind-the-scenes access and stay in spectacular places with expert, empathetic and entertaining guides and a handful of like-minded travellers.

We've seen a big rise in demand for our Small Group Journeys. So, in 2017 we're launching more of them, taking world-curious groups to a new range of intriguing destinations. Here's a taster...

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## IRAN

**Why go by group?** To receive the world's warmest welcome.

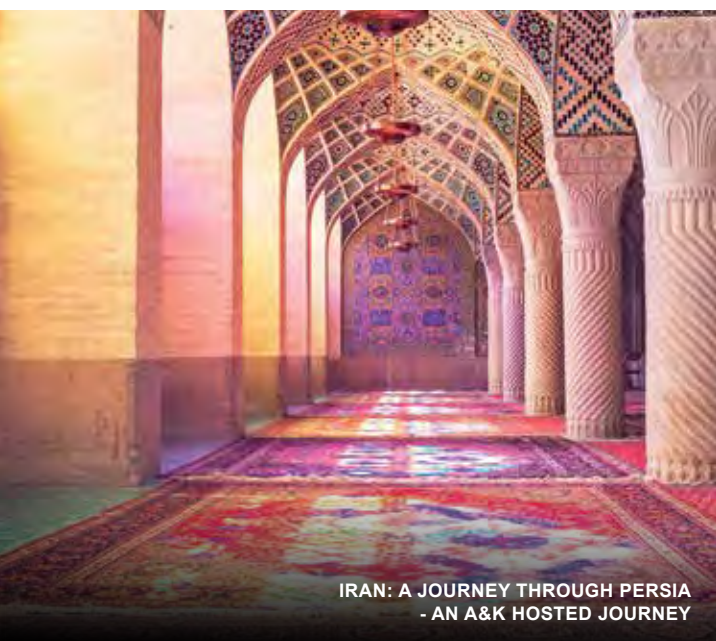
Iran is hot. As tensions with the West continue to thaw, the country is attracting increasing numbers of travellers. However, tourism here is still low-level, which is why our new Iran Small Group Journey is a great way to explore: you'll visit the classic sites in the company of experts, who will help you navigate local laws and customs, and who'll fill you in on everything from Achaemenid culture to the best carpet shops. The trip wends between highlights, from capital Tehran to the Persian gardens of Shiraz, the ruins of Persepolis, the oasis town of Yazd and the glittering Islamic architecture of Isfahan. But it packs in plenty more too, including offbeat desert towns, ancient necropolises, and free time to shop for rugs and spices. Also, expect a shower of kindness: Iranians are the planet's friendliest people, and your group will undoubtedly receive many invitations to tea.

**When?** 3 May, 14 Sep, 25 Oct 2017





MONGOLIA'S GOLDEN EAGLE FESTIVAL  
WITH PALANI MOHAN



IRAN: A JOURNEY THROUGH PERSIA  
- AN A&K HOSTED JOURNEY

## MONGOLIA

**Why go by group?** To watch eagle-toting horsemen with an acclaimed photographer.

Few countries feel quite so 'wild frontier' as Mongolia. This land of endless steppe and desert is bewildering, magnetic and, though thinly populated, culturally fascinating. Our Mongolia's Golden Eagle Festival with Palani Mohan Small Group Journey delves headlong into the country's cultural side, joining the Kazakh horsemen of the country's far west for their glorious annual gathering. Leading the trip is Palani Mohan, acclaimed photographer, Mongolia-phile and author of *Hunting With Eagles*, who'll help you understand the traditions – and capture them on camera. Bed down in a traditional ger, watch the mesmerising displays and meet the hunters themselves. Away from the festival, many more unusual encounters are guaranteed: find Flaming Cliffs, petroglyphs and dinosaurs in the desert; meet a unique breed of horse; hike in canyons and the foothills of the Altai mountains; and take a ride on a Bactrian camel.

**When?** 5 Oct 2017



## CHILE, BOLIVIA & PERU

**Why go by group?** To sample backpacking turned up to 11!

Combining a trio of terrific destinations; sharing food, fun and experiences with fellow travellers; moving on each day to a new adventure – our Treasures of the Andes: Chile, Bolivia & Peru Small Group Journey is all the best things about backpacking, with none of the privations. This multi-country tour is ideal for those craving thrills by day but comfort each night, as well as the unbeatable knowledge of a local guide. It packs in hiking and biking around the otherworldly Atacama Desert, spotting flamingoes on multi-coloured lakes, four wheel driving across the dazzling Salar de Uyuni, sailing across Lake Titicaca and riding the rails to Machu Picchu. But it also includes refined treats, such as high-class wine-tasting and interesting accommodation: a luxury lodge made of salt, a hideaway on a private island and the only hotel with views of Peru's 'lost' Inca city. Excitement and indulgence – the perfect mix.

**When?** 7 Apr, 29 Sep 2017

## 2017 CALENDAR OF SMALL GROUP JOURNEYS

JOURNEY	PRICED FROM	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
EUROPE													
<i>Spain and Portugal: A Journey Across Iberia</i>	£7,655					●	●	●		●	●		
<i>Italian Treasures: Rome, Florence and Venice</i>	£6,380				●	●	●			●	●		
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA													
<i>Egypt &amp; the Nile</i>	£4,600	●	●	●	●					●	●	●	●
<i>Splendours of Morocco</i>	£5,150	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
<i>Israel: Crossroads of History</i>	£4,075		●	●		●				●	●	●	
<i>Iran: A Journey Through Persia</i>	£6,395					●				●	●	●	
AFRICA													
<i>The Great Migration: Safari in Style</i>	£11,369	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●		●
<i>Botswana: Safari in Style</i>	£7,515	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<i>Climb Kilimanjaro: Summiting the Machame Route</i>	£4,385	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●		
<i>Southern Africa Safari by River and Rail</i>	£9,885			●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
<i>A Naturalist's Guide to Madagascar with Dr Charlie Gardner</i>	£5,750								●			●	
ASIA													
<i>Taj Mahal &amp; the Treasures of India</i>	£7,015	●	●	●							●	●	●
<i>India: The Taj Mahal &amp; Ganges River Cruise</i>	£7,235	●		●									●





A NATURALIST'S GUIDE TO MADAGASCAR  
WITH DR CHARLIE GARDNER

## MADAGASCAR

**Why go by group?** To spot wildlife with an expert.

Welcome to a country full of surprises and extraordinary creatures. Madagascar has people, wildlife and landscapes found nowhere else on Earth and a culture far more removed from any of its near neighbours. On our Naturalist's Guide to Madagascar, explore the island and its flora and fauna with wildlife expert Dr Charlie Gardner who knows the destination and its inhabitants like the back of his hand. Enter a land still largely untouched by tourism and prepare to be amazed by the rainforests, clear blue seas and white beaches in Manafy and the wildlife viewing in Perinet and Mantadia National Parks. Enjoy sundowners on the Mandrare River and visit the ancestral tombs of the Sacred Spiny forest.

**When?** 6 Aug, 12 Nov 2017



If you're interested in finding out about our range of Small Group Journeys please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 892**. If you would like to download or request a pre-printed Small Group Journeys brochure you can do so by visiting [abercrombiekent.co.uk/request/](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk/request/)

JOURNEY	PRICED FROM	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<i>Ladakh: Nature, Festivals and Photography with Palani Mohan</i>	£5,695						●						●
<i>Bhutan &amp; Nepal: Heart of the Himalaya</i>	£6,635				●				●	●	●	●	
<i>Myanmar and the Irrawaddy</i>	£4,595	●	●	●							●	●	●
<i>Images of Indochina and Angkor Wat</i>	£5,765	●	●	●	●					●	●	●	●
<i>Cruising the Mekong: Siam, Saigon &amp; Angkor Wat</i>	£6,845	●	●	●							●	●	●
<i>China &amp; the Yangtze</i>	£4,800			●	●	●	●		●	●	●		
<i>Classic Japan</i>	£7,535			●	●	●				●	●		
<i>The Ancient Silk Road with Sujata Raman</i>	£6,395									●			
<i>Mongolia's Golden Eagle Festival with Palani Mohan</i>	£7,555										●		
NORTH AMERICA													
<i>Family Alaska</i>	£5,995						●	●	●				
LATIN AMERICA													
<i>Peru: Machu Picchu &amp; the Sacred Valley</i>	£5,375	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<i>Patagonia: Tierra del Fuego to Torres del Paine</i>	£7,495	●	●	●							●	●	●
<i>Galápagos Wildlife Adventure</i>	£7,365			●	●	●				●	●	●	
<i>Treasures of the Andes: Chile, Bolivia and Peru</i>	£9,535				●					●			

NOTE: All prices are per person and exclude international flights from the UK. Where indicated internal flights are included. Single room supplements apply.







# *Exploring* THE TEARDROP ISLE

SRI LANKA'S TERRIFIC TRIO OF CULTURE, COAST AND WILDLIFE MIGHT JUST  
MAKE IT THE PERFECT DESTINATION, RECKONS **BRANDON CLEMENTS**



Lifting my head from the fluffiest of pillows, I looked out of the window: rice paddies and rich green forest; birds twittering their morning hellos into the warm, tropical air. Despite the temptation to laze there all day, I roused myself for breakfast – and was very glad I had. The table was spread with fragrant fish curry, lunumiris chilli paste and crispy hoppers, the egg-topped rice flour and coconut pancakes that are an early morning staple in these parts – and which are utterly delicious. Ah... welcome to Sri Lanka.

I had come to the teardrop isle to see if it might just be the perfect destination. Given its relatively compact size, it's easy to combine the country's cultural highlights, world-class wildlife and Indian Ocean beaches in one trip. Having travelled from Colombo into the heart of the country, and having woken up at Ulagalla – once the ancestral estate of the Anuradhapura nobility and now a luxurious resort – things were looking promising.

## CULTURAL CAPERS

Ulagalla is perfectly placed for exploring Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle, the area where glorious reminders of early Sinhalese civilisation can be found. With my driver, Sidney, I headed first to Anuradhapura. One of Sri Lanka's eight UNESCO World Heritage sites, it was the country's capital from the third century BC to AD 993, and regarded as one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. It now seemed mostly inhabited by langur monkeys. They were everywhere! They scampered around the temple walls and amid the monasteries, nibbled the flower offerings laid by Buddhist devotees and were generally very cheeky. We spent a few fascinating hours in their company, wandering around the vast ruined complex. Even a heavy downpour failed to dampen our – or the monkeys' – spirits.

A few hours' drive away, we sought refuge from the rain in the huge UNESCO-listed cave temples of Dambulla. Across the five caves, there are 153 Buddha statues, as well as beautifully ornate carvings and murals. It's a grotto gallery of the highest calibre, all the more remarkable for the fact that some of the artworks date back over 2,000 years.

Our second day of cultural exploration dawned dry and sunny, and we set off for Sigiriya – the Lion Rock – a fifth-century fortress built by King Kasyapa, that sits atop a 200 metre-tall volcanic outcrop. Ascending was hot and humid work: up a spiral staircase and along a narrow ledge before climbing steps through two enormous lion's paws, carved into stone. However, when I reached the top I could see why King Kasyapa had gone to so much effort. The jungle views were spectacular and, although the fortress is now in ruins, I could make out the old living ares, ceremonial halls, even the royal swimming pool. It was possible to imagine how life might have played out in those ancient days.





Our final stop in the Cultural Triangle was the city of Polonnaruwa, which rose to prominence in the 12th century after the demise of Anuradhapura. This was a jump forwards in time; a showcase of Sri Lanka's medieval magnificence. I walked around the ruins, more compact than the former capital but still full of treasures, from flamboyantly carved moon-stones to huge reclining Buddhas.

## SEASIDE SOJOURN

With a few days of culture under our belts, it was time for some R&R. So we headed for the east coast, towards the enticing ocean. This area is still fairly undeveloped – it was held by the Tamil Tigers for many years before the civil war officially ended in 2009. It is now open for business, and while new hotels are being built, it still feels like a sleepy backwater, perfect for some down time.

En route to the town of Pasikudah, Sidney pulled over at a sizzling street food stall. This part of Sri Lanka is mainly inhabited by Tamils rather than the majority Sinhalese population, and the food tends to be more akin to that found in southern India. At this particular stall, the vendors were busy making vegetable and beef samosas and a sort of deep-fried wrap, filled with spicy vegetables and boiled eggs. They worked quickly and expertly, frying us up a bag of spicy treats to graze on as we drove on to the coast.

Pasikudah itself was beautiful, a crescent-shaped bay with pancake-flat turquoise water and coconut palms swaying gently in the breeze. It was irresistible, and in a jiffy I'd changed into board shorts and plunged into water so warm it was like a bath. It was great to just kick back and relax for a while, and cool off with a glass of Lion, the delicious local beer.

Later, we hopped aboard the Topaz catamaran for a private cruise around the bay. It was a blissful few hours spent lolling on deck, gazing down at the corals from the boom net, jumping into the ocean and passing fishing boats as they headed out to cast their nets before dusk.

## INTO THE WILD

Head full of history, body fully relaxed, there was just one last element I wanted to tick off my Sri Lanka to-do list: the wonderful wildlife. Heavy rains had thwarted our plans to see the huge herds of wild elephant that gather in Minneriya National Park – though we did, unexpectedly, see one ele up close as it trundled out of the forest and onto the highway near Habarana. It seems some of the elephants like to try their luck, and will harass fruit and veg truck drivers for free food if they stop by the road. Yala National Park is home to elephants too, though it's more famous for one of its other residents: Yala is arguably the best place in the world to see leopards.

I was staying in the lovely Leopard Trails camp, a handful of luxurious tents scattered amid the forest near the park.



SUNSET | Pasikudah Bay

It was a beautiful setting, but – having never seen a leopard in the wild before – I was itching to get going. After a quick lunch and a refreshing G&T, we jumped into a Jeep. The search was on. Inside the park gates, the landscape was endless bush and scrub, dotted with a few watering holes. The birdlife was abundant, and we saw herds of spotted deer, crocodiles basking in the shallows and the occasional elephant, crunching through the undergrowth. But no leopard. And then...

Looking ahead, I saw a couple of Jeeps had pulled up by a patch of grass, and all of the passengers were sitting very quietly, their binoculars and long lenses trained on a gap in the large bush just in front. We waited alongside them. And waited. And waited. Suddenly, there she was: a sub-adult female leopard casually strolled out from the tree line, right towards us. She was a beautiful specimen, clearly well fed and with deep black rosettes flecking her sandy fur. For the next 40 minutes she had us in the palm of her paw, seemingly playing hide and seek, visible and then not. At one point she walked right through our convoy, stalking a rabbit; at another, she emerged from a thicket only five metres from our Jeep.

I returned to camp fizzing with joy. What a privilege to see such a beautiful big cat in its natural environment. And that evening, gathered around the camp fire with a cold beer, I felt I should probably raise not one but three toasts to Sri Lanka, a truly magical place. ☺

### | SRI LANKA |

A nine day highlights of Sri Lanka tour including international flights, based on two sharing is available from £1,995 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to Sri Lanka, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 755**.



A photograph of a man with white hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and white trousers, standing on a large, flat rock in a forest. Behind him is a small waterfall cascading over several rocks. The surrounding area is lush with green ferns and other foliage. The scene is captured in a natural, slightly overcast light.

# LAST LAND STANDING

WITH A CAREER SPANNING FIVE DECADES AND HAVING REPORTED FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, **JOHN SIMPSON** HAS BEEN NEARLY EVERYWHERE - EXCEPT AUSTRALIA. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE BBC WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR REPORTS FROM THE ANTIPODES.

PHOTOGRAPHER: HUGH HAMILTON



I've been a traveller by profession for 50 years. Heading off to foreign places and making them a part of my life is my reason for existing. It's a long time since I bothered to count up the number of countries I've travelled to, but it must be around 130.

Not as a tourist, though. I like to have a purpose for my travelling and for half a century that purpose has been to report on the news.

This is why I've never been to Australia. On a grand scale, nothing really bad happens there and it's a long way to go without a pretty compelling reason. If I'm honest, too, I've always thought of it as a country where Brits would forever be on the defensive: like being trapped eternally in a bar with David Campese and Shane Warne after an England defeat.

In recent years though, I've felt it was increasingly ridiculous to have been nearly everywhere except Australia; and my wife, Dee, who lived happily in Sydney for a while in the 1980s, began making the plans to get me there. By the start of this year I finally decided to agree.

I adore it. I am bowled over by the landscape. I admire the way the Aussies burnish their history and heritage. I love listening to them talking about themselves and their country, and delight in the slow, drawling, carefully judged understatement. 'Recommend this?' I ask, holding up a cheap bottle of local wine in a supermarket. Silence from the ancient character in shorts and bush hat, then the reply: 'Well, youse wouldn't want to drink it.' Above all, I look forward every evening to dinnertime, especially in Sydney.

“ I ADORE IT. I AM BOWLED OVER BY THE LANDSCAPE. I ADMIRE THE WAY THE AUSSIES BURNISH THEIR HISTORY AND HERITAGE. I LOVE LISTENING TO THEM TALKING ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THEIR COUNTRY, AND DELIGHT IN THE SLOW, DRAWLING, CAREFULLY JUDGED UNDERSTATEMENT. ”

I may never have been to Australia before, but I've known dozens of Australians. The international television news industry couldn't exist without them: they're so easy-going and fearless, you wonder if they always understand the dangers. And they're wonderful company. Over the years I've picked up an entire phrasebook from them: 'a dingo's breakfast', for instance, meaning no food, 'dry as a Pom's towel', because the English are supposed not to wash. 'The Aussie salute', when you wave the flies from your face. And now, as part of a tailor-made tour with Abercrombie & Kent, I am heading for 'GAFA' ('Great Australian F\*\*\* All'): the Outback.

There are three of us: Dee, me, and our ten-year-old son Rafe. From the moment we land in Sydney it is obvious that we are all going to enjoy ourselves immensely. There is the sunshine, of course. But there's something about laid-back, white-painted, decently looked-after places, attractively built on a human scale (though the skyscrapers are beginning to multiply) that even a demanding old grouch like myself, is completely sold on it.

The Rocks are just the right place to wander around on our first day – when we are all feeling as though we've just been taken out of a tumble dryer. We are eased back into real life by the pubs and the little stalls selling food and gadgets. That evening we dine by moonlight at a harbourside restaurant, with the boats bumping gently against each other, and are charmed by the easy-going waiting staff – and then we just manage to make it back to our hotel, the Langham, before we all fall asleep on our feet.

Now the rest of this huge island-continent lies waiting for us. Our expert Abercrombie & Kent guide helps to bring this fascinating ☺



THE ROCKS HISTORIC DISTRICT | Sydney, Australia



GREAT BARRIER REEF | Queensland, Australia





destination to life, and over the next few days we go round the harbour by boat, nudging into the little bays and gawping at the houses of the rich, and pass and repass under the Harbour Bridge: one of the great structures of Empire, as stolid as the nearby Opera House is fanciful and imaginative. We see dingoes, wallabies and a platypus at the zoo. We see the Blue Mountains, and have tea at various superbly restored cafés along the way.

Maybe tourism, I reflect, isn't all that bad after all. And we don't bump into a David Campese or a Shane Warne the whole time. We head north to tropical Queensland and the Daintree Rainforest. We each have our preferences on this trip, and this is unquestionably mine.

Silky Oaks Lodge lies in the heart of the forest. I had steeled myself for gigantic bugs and savage creepy-crawlies, but I needn't have worried: this is forest living at its gentlest. The river that runs through it is clear and fast-moving, and canoeing is one of our best – and most enjoyable – experiences. Rafe adores it. The night air is loud with croaking, but there seem to be no mosquitoes. I could stay at Silky Oaks much longer, learning to identify the trees and exploring, but we have other places to go to.

We fly in a small plane from the charming and surprisingly buzzy town of Cairns to the Great Barrier Reef – an absolute highlight for Dee. The reefs are visible in the water, so brilliantly green and clear that you can see the occasional rock or wreck lying on the bottom as though you are looking at it through glass. There's no doubt that the reef is in trouble, but most of what we see looks glorious. We are heading for Lizard Island, a lump of granite just over six square miles, lying in the brilliant waters of the fringing ocean. Captain Cook sailed past it on 12 August 1770, and wrote in his journal: "The only land animals we saw here were lizards, and these seem'd to be pretty plenty."

They still are, lying in the sun or scuttling away when we get near. The Lizard Island Resort is the best part of Rafe's entire trip. He loved Daintree, but here he is liberated, running along the white sand and throwing himself into the waters that lie only 20 yards from our cabin. He splashes, swims and dives like a pale amphibian. Sometimes he and Dee go snorkelling, coming back with tales

of brilliant coloured fish. For me, this is the saddest time. I am a trained diver, but a few years ago I was blown up in Iraq, and even after a couple of operations I can't put my head under water for fear of infection. So I sit and read and try not to think about what I am missing.

One last treasure remains: Ayers Rock, or Uluru, in central Australia. The heat is absolutely stunning as we fly in and drive to the Longitude 131° hotel. It is like landing on Mars, with the red soil dominating everything. The rock itself, that numinous sandstone prodigy the colour of dried blood, rears up a mile away in the broiling sun. I'm inured to famous sights, and usually a bit resistant to them – but not this one. Later that evening it looms over us while we and the other guests have dinner in the open air. When we've finished, an astronomer shows us the different constellations stretched out above us, and points out the vast extent of the Milky Way. The Aboriginal Yolngu people believe it's a gigantic river, and that, when they die, they are taken there by a mystical canoe. Gazing up in the companionable warmth and darkness, this legend seems more comforting than the fact that our Earth is just a microdot in such immensity.

Abercrombie & Kent's magnificent degree of local knowledge made all the difference to our trip. Their representatives are clearly hand-picked. They showed us the continent as only professional, highly informed Australians could. And they were fun and lively, too.

In our brief three weeks I came to love the freshness and openness of Australia. We'll definitely try to get there once a year from now on. Believe me, it's too good to stay away from. ☺

#### | AUSTRALIA |

An 18 day Australia trip based on international and domestic flights, accommodation, transfers, touring, based on two people sharing and a one night stopover in Singapore is available from £7,250pp. For more information, or to discuss your trip to Australia, please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 826.

# TOP 5

## NATURAL PHENOMENA



### 1 *Lunar Rainbow* *Victoria Falls, Zambia*

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The lunar rainbow or 'moonbow' is created as light from the moon is refracted by water particles in the air, ever-present from the spray of the falls. Only when the moon is full and skies clear of cloud is enough light reflected to create a moonbow. The falls are one of the few places on Earth where this phenomenon takes place, and are open for special evening tours to witness the lunar rainbow when one is due.

**When to go?** Dependent on the full moon but it is best seen April to July and in the early hours after moonrise – when the falls are in full flood and offer sufficient spray.

### 2 *The Blue Hole,* *near Ambergris Caye, Belize*

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The Great Blue Hole is a giant submarine sinkhole off the coast of Belize, near Ambergris Caye. It lies near the centre of Lighthouse Reef, a small atoll 70 km from the mainland and Belize City. The hole is circular in shape, over 300m across and 108m deep. The Blue Hole was originally a limestone cave formed around 150,000 years ago. As ocean levels rose the limestone cave was flooded and eventually collapsed, creating a sinkhole in the ocean – the largest of its kind.

Enjoy world-class scuba diving at the Blue Hole and outer lying island atolls. Huge stalactites and stalagmites can be seen in the hole as well as a variety of marine life and coral (species include nurse sharks, Caribbean reef sharks and bull sharks).

**When to go?** January to May, November to December.





### 3 *Bioluminescence, warm coastal waters and lagoons such as those in the Maldives*

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Bioluminescent Plankton transform the shoreline into a glowing sea of blue stars. As the waves crash into shore the plankton light up. The light is caused by a chemical called Luciferin, which the plankton release as a defence mechanism. Just simply wander down to the beach at night to witness a sea of stars, or brave a midnight swim and watch the water illuminate with every move you make.

**When to go?** August to December.



### 4 *Rainbow Ridges in China, Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park*

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Zhangye Danxia is known for the unusual colours of the rocks, which are smooth, sharp and several hundred metres tall. They are the result of deposits of sandstone and other minerals that occurred over 24 million years. It covers an area of 322 square kilometres. Visit the national park at sunrise or sunset to see the vibrant colours. There are four viewing platforms spread along a 5 mile walk around the park – it takes around 2 hours. The third viewing platform has a view of the famous 'seven-colour fan'.

**When to go?** Best time to go is from June to September, and at either dawn or dusk.

### 5 *The Firefalls, Horsetail Falls, Yosemite National Park*

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The natural firefall is one of Yosemite's most incredible spectacles. In early spring each year, when the water is warm enough to flow, skies are clear and the sun is at just the right angle, the falls look as if they are made of fire, a glowing orange ribbon. The name comes from the Yosemite Firefall, which was a summer event where burning hot embers were pushed over Glacier Point and appeared as a glowing waterfall. If all conditions are right, the falls will light up for just 10 minutes.

**When to go?** Late February to early March.



An underwater photograph with a blue-green tint. In the upper left, several divers are visible, swimming and looking towards the right. In the lower right, a large stingray swims towards the viewer, its long tail trailing behind it. The background shows the sandy bottom and some coral reef structures.

*Experience*

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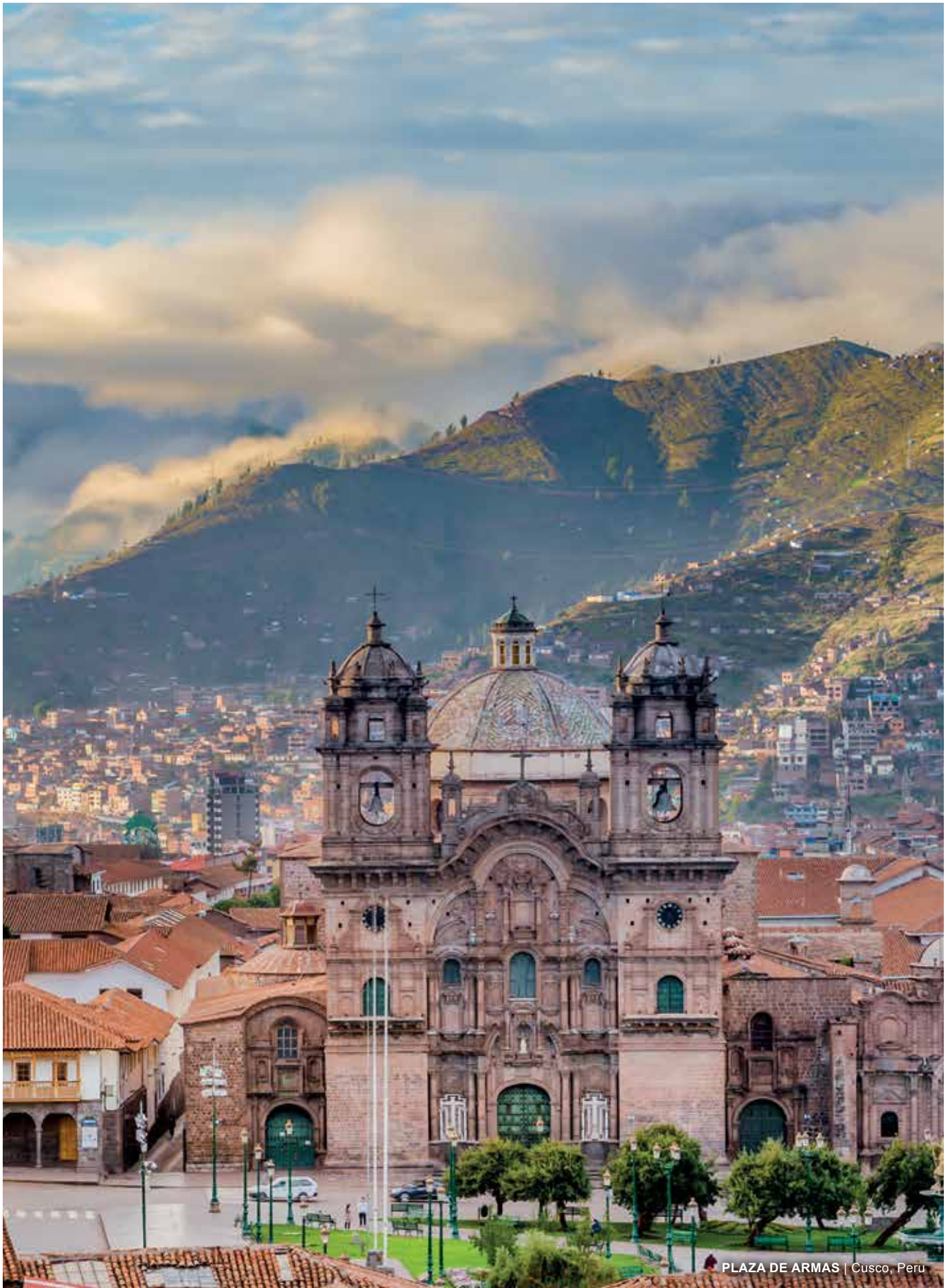
# TEENAGE KICKS

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WITH ITS COMBINATION OF HISTORY AND HIGH ADVENTURE,  
PERU MIGHT JUST BE THE PERFECT PLACE FOR A FAMILY TRIP,  
RECKONS 18-YEAR-OLD **RYAN GOLDS**.

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PLAZA DE ARMAS | Cusco, Peru



I've always liked the idea of South America. I've been lucky enough to visit some of the far corners of the globe, but never this part. So, keen to change that situation, I'd been pushing for a family trip to Peru for months. I knew the country would be beautiful and fun and rich in history. However, nothing could have prepared me for the adventure that lay ahead.

We arrived in the capital, Lima, and immediately headed on to Cusco, which at 3,399m is one of the highest cities in the world. Built in a valley, all the houses here have to conform to the city's dramatic topography, as do the people – a resilience to altitude and heights is helpful! Visiting was a real eye-opener to how people live, up in the air.

We started with a tour around Cusco, walking through the old town, past its cathedrals, squares, halls and houses. The old Inca walls, designed to survive earthquakes, were fascinating. It was impressive to see how ancient civilisations were able to protect themselves against the forces of nature when we struggle today, even with the help of modern technology. Our guide, Gilma, was fantastic at leading us through the back streets, taking us to parts of the city unseen by most tourists. This enabled us to meet some of the locals, tend llamas and get to grips with the day to day life of the city.

There was a diverse range of different activities on offer, from visiting art museums to hiking the Inca Trail. We decided to try zip-lining through the Andes. This meant a winding drive into the valley, which almost got the better of me... I kissed the ground when we finally got out of the minibus! Only to look up from my crouched position, to see the enormous size of the mountains before me – and the zip-lines suspended 100m high, which we were about to travel across.

As I felt the adrenaline start to pump, eager to rise to the challenge, my Mum had quite the opposite reaction. She almost ran back to the minibus to beg to be driven back to the city. By the time she had summoned the courage to take on the zip-line, I was in the harness, waiting to go.

Once we began to climb, the height really hit us, and the first zip-line came as a relief, as it meant we didn't have to climb



any higher. Nothing could have prepared me for the feeling of whizzing from mountainside to mountainside, amid the beautiful Andes. Amazing! Although it was quite nice, at the end, to have my feet firmly back on the ground.

The action didn't stop there. Next we set off on a three-day walk through the mountains along the Lares Trail. Our guide, Pierro, was a big man with a huge heart and a hug that could kill – I could feel my ribs being squashed with every hug! But, despite this, you always welcomed them. Indeed, the hugs became a necessary part of the hike in order to keep us walking.

The hike was difficult but very rewarding. The climbs gave us amazing views of the landscape and, as a bonus, we got to meet locals who live at these altitudes. Our group of five was attended by eight horses and as many people, each one helping us reach the end – not least by somehow cooking up fantastic, five-star quality food in the middle of nowhere enroute. It was hard work, but completing the trek was like winning the marathon an hour ahead of the field. It's a feeling I will never forget.

After the trek, Pierro welcomed us into his house, where his family cooked for us and showed us around. The warm, welcoming atmosphere was the perfect ending – especially because spending three days walking and sleeping in such close proximity to my own family had almost destroyed that homely feeling forever! Having no WiFi or phone reception meant I actually had to speak to them!

We rounded off the trip with a visit to Machu Picchu, one of the great wonders of the world. It was astonishing, and again I was taken aback by how much the Incas were able to achieve so many centuries ago.

Peru was an amazing place. However, it was a tiring trip so though the flight home was sad, I was glad to sit down and take a well-earned break. In fact, I think I might need another holiday...but how to top that one!



RYAN AND FAMILY, MACHU PICCHU | Peru

#### | PERU |

An eight day highlights of Peru tour based on two adults sharing with flights from the UK is available from £3,050 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to Peru, please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 701.

# REGENT *Seven seas* EXPLORER®

**GARY BUCHANAN** DISCOVERS THE MOST LUXURIOUS SHIP EVER BUILT™

Vibrant Barcelona has an attitude and sense of identity that's more than the sum of its parts. As a convenient port to embark a cruise the Catalan capital is unsurpassed. Contemplating my new surroundings and the bounty of ports that were to fill the next ten days, I succumbed to the sailaway party atmosphere on Pool Deck as one obliging steward after another topped up my champagne flute.

Luxury is an intensely personal virtue and comes in many guises on Regent Seven Seas Cruises' ships which have many imitators, but few suitors. With the bold claim of 'the most luxurious ship ever built', the new 750-passenger Explorer brandishes a CV full of impressive statistics such as a collection of art that includes works by Chagall and Picasso; one of the highest staff-to-guest quotients in luxury cruising; not to mention all-suite, all-balcony accommodation.

From the first port of call, Marseille, we headed to the impossibly pretty town of Aix-en-Provence on an excursion that was part of Regent's all-inclusive value proposition. Set against the rich, faded colours of historic buildings was the umbrella-covered market where carts full of succulent berries were displayed beside vegetable stalls with a cornucopia of peppers and aubergines contrasting with profusions of white asparagus.







I've often heard Monte Carlo described as a sunny place for shady people. An early morning heat haze caressed this tax haven cascading between the Southern Alps and the sea. There's something unashamedly elitist about sailing into this fairytale Principality and from our expansive balcony we could see the casino and grand hotels, apparently fashioned by pastry chefs.

The food analogy was not inappropriate onboard Explorer which ticks all the right boxes for gourmands. Being at the vanguard of all-inclusive cruising, Regent ships offer some of the finest speciality dining at sea without any surcharge. It was a tough choice each night to select between the French brasserie ambience of Chartreuse; the clubby steakhouse that's Prime 7; the Asian-inspired Pacific Rim; and the more casual Sette Mari trattoria.

Sometimes ships have to dock in ports that involve a long coach journey to attractions high on most tourists' 'bucket list'. This is the case at Livorno for Florence and Civitavecchia for Rome; as a result these excursions are often overpriced and underwhelming, but on Regent many options are included. We were impressed at the quality and scope of the organised tours which were far-removed from the frenetic route-marches we encountered as passengers from other ships were whisked from fountain to forum, ruin to relic, museum to monument, gallery to ghetto, cathedral to catacomb. Our options catered to a range of experiential preferences whether it was fervent foodies or cultural chameleons.

There is a tangible sense of some infinite satisfaction as you walk through the streets of Florence. Even the golden light on the faded ochre and terracotta buildings makes your heart beat faster. In the Eternal City that is Rome history is omnipresent and your senses are overpowered to the extent that you feel giddy with euphoria.

After the two hectic days of touring, dropping anchor off Sorrento was cathartic. The views are the stuff of arias; rocks plunge straight to a sea spangled by light polished to diamond brilliance, while in the distance Vesuvius is crowned by

gossamer cloud. We signed up for a tour to Capri but hadn't bargained for the crowds of oriental tourists in the Via Camerelle which boasts Brioni and Bulgari, Pucci and Prada – and every exclusive boutique in between. Eschewing this melee of capricious consumerism we took the funicular down to the Marina Grande and, far from the madding crowd, enjoyed superb pasta washed down with a crisp Scala Fenicia bianco.

A day at sea was spent under a cloudless cobalt blue sky that seemed to go on forever. We chose to enjoy a brunch in the Compass Rose with its stunning blue droplet light feature and soaring ceiling making it arguably the most stunning restaurant at sea. Freshly-shucked oysters, oodles of caviar, truffled foie gras and lobster tails were accompanied by a glass or two of Meursault. To atone for such excess we headed to the infinity plunge pool at the Canyon Ranch Spa as the ship's compass was set towards the Adriatic Sea.

As one of the world's greatest medieval cities, the Old Town of Dubrovnik with its gleaming white stone walls is on most travellers' desideratum. We strolled along the Stradun, past a labyrinth of narrow side streets and stairways, to the 18th century cathedral where Titian's polyptych The Assumption of the Virgin Mary, hangs behind the main altar.

'Elegance', 'glamour', and 'allure' are all too often considered buzz words of a bygone era. For ten days I had seen how these attributes are cherished and tempered by delicacy and decorum aboard Seven Seas Explorer. As the cruise concluded we swapped this serene ship for La Serenissima – Venice.



#### | CRUISING |

A 14 day holiday including a 8 day cruise with time to explore Venice and Rome, international flights, based on two sharing is available from £4,650pp. For more information, speak to our cruise expert Emma Browne on 01242 547 881.





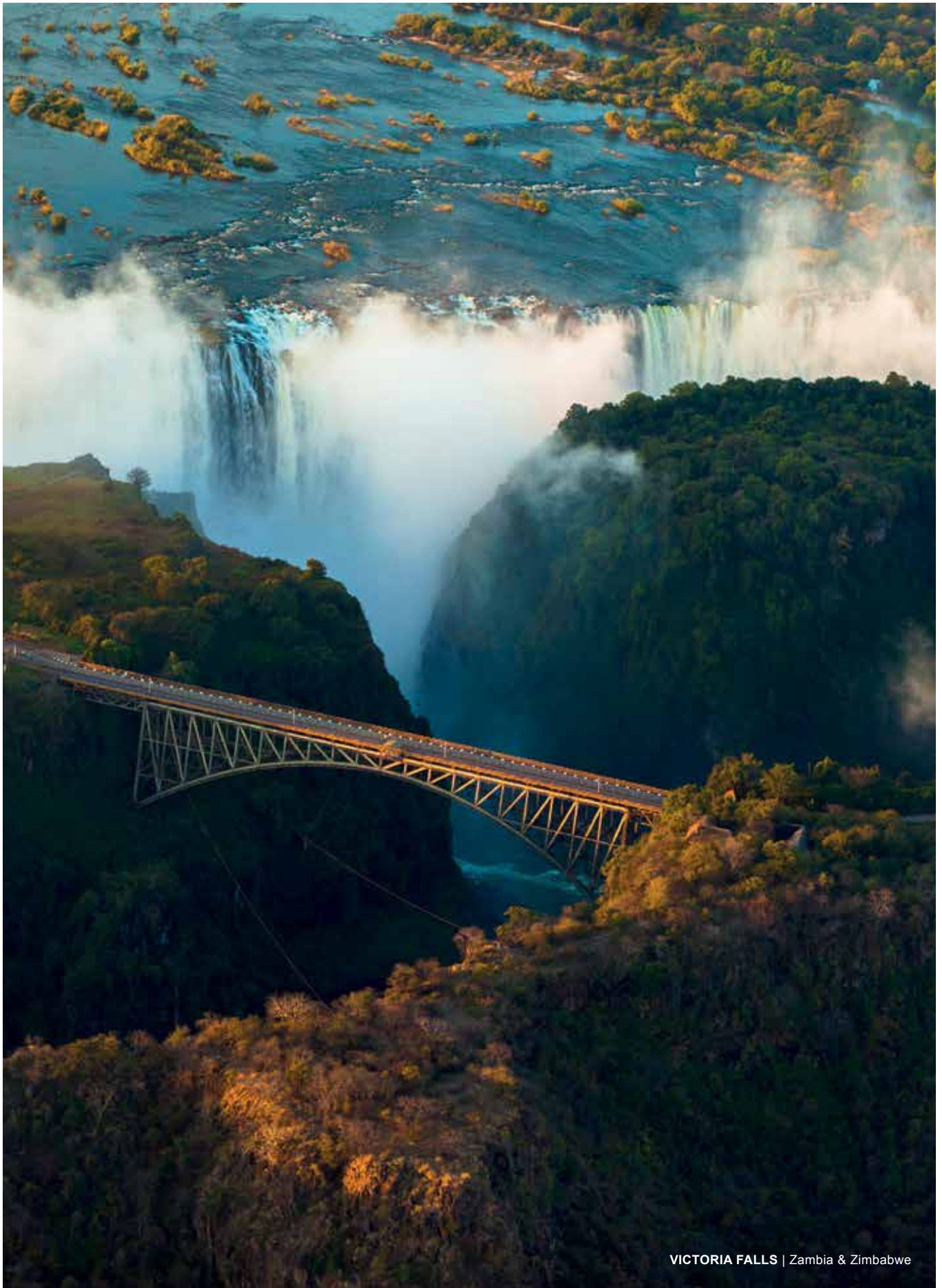


# UNDER AN AFRICAN SKY

DAVID BELCHER ENCOUNTERS A WORLD OF  
WONDER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA >>>

OKAVANGO DELTA | Botswana

[abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk) | 57



VICTORIA FALLS | Zambia & Zimbabwe



**T**he variety of people and places in sub-Saharan Africa is astounding. From Niger to Namibia, Mauritania to Mozambique, the countries of this vast region have for too long been viewed under the singular 'Africa' bracket, ignored for their own unique charms and individualities.

Of the region's two-dozen or so countries, South Africa, Botswana and Zambia boast sub-African safari at its authentic best. Though popular, they still offer the private, personal, new or unseen. From the Cape of Good Hope in the south to the tip of Lake Tanganyika in the north, holidays to these three countries offer fascinating big-city sights, iconic landmarks and an extraordinary variety of wildlife.

When it comes to South Africa, many tourists head straight for Cape Town, leaving Johannesburg all but uncharted. Of course, it's undeniable that Jo'burg hasn't had the easiest of recent histories, but today this is a city on the up, a rapidly changing, cosmopolitan centre of cultural and societal resurgence. Millennials have certainly made their mark on Maboneng, an artsy district of trendy cafes and incredible street art, and the museums of Newtown and theatres of Braamfontein showcase an exciting new side of South Africa's largest city, one eager to shake the strained imagery of the past. The Four Seasons in the affluent Westcliff neighbourhood

is one of the finer city stays. Perched on a hill overlooking the northern suburbs, it's a comfortable cocoon from the surrounding bustle. It's also close to the Johannesburg Zoo, so you can swat up on your nature knowledge before heading out of town.

It's about 150 miles from Johannesburg to Botswana, 600 fewer than Cape Town, so hopping across the border is easy enough. To the north is one of Africa's finest safari parks – Chobe National Park. Best known for its large elephant population, it was Botswana's first national park and is home to one of the largest concentrations of wildlife in all of Africa.

Sanctuary Retreat's Chobe Chilwero Lodge sits on the edge of the park. It's a riverbank lodge that offers old-world safari charm and, with the Zambezi flowing nearby, attracting much of the area's wildlife, including lions, zebras and those mighty elephants. It's true to say that animals here far outnumber guests.

North of here is Zambia. From Chobe it's reached by boat, which wind their way along the Zambezi and past the borders of Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe before arriving in Zambia, which perhaps surprisingly for a landlocked country, is best known for its association with water.

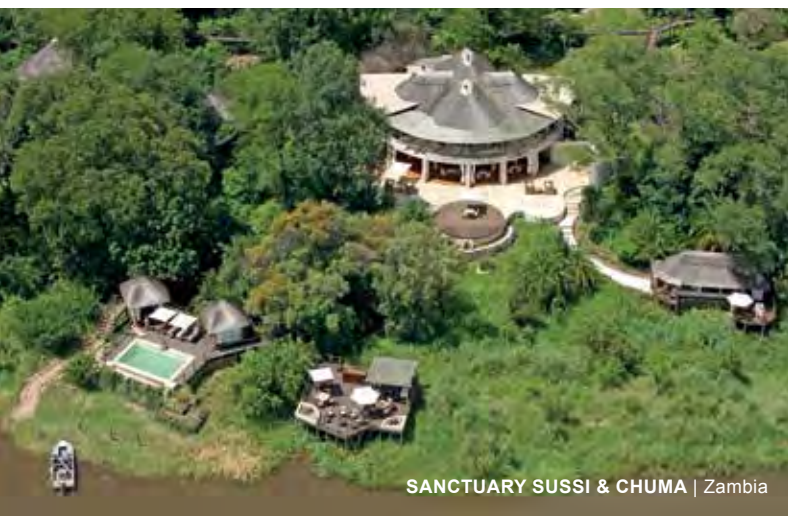


SANCTUARY BAINES' CAMP | Botswana





ELEPHANT | Botswana



SANCTUARY SUSSI & CHUMA | Zambia



WHITE RHINO WITH YOUNG IN MOSI-OA-TUNYA NATIONAL PARK | Zambia

Falling water, that is... For it's here that you find one of southern Africa's most enduring natural landmarks: Victoria Falls.

David Livingstone stumbled upon Africa's largest falls in the 1850s. He named them after his queen, and despite all his efforts, the local name Mosi-oa-Tunya – 'the Smoke that Thunders' – sums up the power of these iconic falls far better. The 'smoke' can be seen from miles away; the sound that accompanies it echoing through the deep gorges that follow and stays with you long after you've left. There's much here to keep you entertained, from taking a dip in Angel's Pool at the lip of the falls to partaking in numerous adrenaline sports – think white water rafting, bungee jumping or cage diving with crocodiles.

The Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park is also home to white rhinos, whose numbers have sadly dwindled in the past few decades. It's a rare treat to see these magnificent, severely threatened species in the wild, and a bush walk will take you right up alongside them. Large teams of rangers are now employed to protect white rhinos, which were hunted to near-extinction in Zambia. Some still believe rhino horn can cure everything from cancer to hangovers and local organisations are as busy educating people as they are protecting the local wildlife.

Here, again, you'll find a property worthy of its surroundings. Another Sanctuary Retreat lodge, Sussi & Chuma, is named after two of Stanley Livingstone's faithful friends, and its charm lies in its hospitality. Not far from the road, yet seemingly miles away from the bustle of the local town, the treetop lodges here are connected by wooden walkways and guests can benefit from the services of private chefs and housekeepers. A wide lawn runs down to the river's edge, the water rushing, anticipating the falls that lie a few miles downstream. Elephants roam under your room, hippo grunt in the river on your doorstep and monkeys mock you from the trees above your decking.

It's the perfect base to return to each evening. Float in a pool, cocktail in hand, enjoy a panoramic view of the Zambezi River and watch the rich variety of wildlife this sub-Saharan sanctuary supports. ☺

#### | BOTSWANA AND ZAMBIA |

A 10 day Botswana trip based on two sharing including international flights is available from £3,310pp. Based on 1 night at the Four Seasons Westcliffe, 3 nights at Sanctuary Chobe Chilwero and 3 nights at Sanctuary Sussi & Chuma, including internal flights and private transfers in Johannesburg. For more information or to discuss your trip to Botswana and Zambia, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 702**.



# *Experience the* COSMOPOLITAN CITY OF JERUSALEM

From cultural treasures and world heritage sites to trendy bars, boutique hotels and gastronomic restaurants, Jerusalem is the perfect combination of the old and the new, the East and the West.



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# 48 HOURS IN JERUSALEM

**SIMON KHANO** SHARES HIS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
EXPLORING JERUSALEM IN 48 HOURS. >>>

## Day 1: The Old City

*Introduction to the Old City as the sun rises*



The best time to experience the Old City of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives is early morning, the early rising sun lighting up the Dome of the Rock and the city's ancient walls. From here you can view numerous churches, synagogues and mosques, and the city that has been fought over for 4,000 years.



*A walk that traverses  
the life of Christ*

Walk down Palm Sunday Road with a stop at Gethsemane, where Jesus was betrayed, and the Tomb of Mary. Enter Old City at St Stephen's Gate and visit the vast Pool of Bethesda where Jesus performed a great miracle in the healing of a paralytic.



*An oasis inside the Old City*

Walk along the Way of the Cross passing pilgrims and souvenir shops. Stop for coffee and apple strudel in the peaceful (and incongruous) garden haven of the Austrian Hospice. From the rooftop enjoy a stunning view of the Old City. Enjoy a plate of hummus for lunch in one of the local cafes.

### | JERUSALEM |

A four day highlights of Jerusalem tour including flights, based on two adults sharing, a private guide and transport is available from £1,495 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to Jerusalem, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 546 634**.

*The Temple Area*



Visit the Western Wall and beyond it, the Dome of the Rock, both of which are holy sites to all those of faith. Get a better understanding of the melting pot of cultures and religions that shape the Middle East today.





### *The Four Quarters of the Old City*

Mooch through the bazaars and markets of the Old City taking in the Four Quarters: Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Armenian. Peel back the archaeological layers of the past, and uncover the distinct character and ethnic diversity of the present.



### *Sunset over the Old City*

Emerge from the Old City at New Gate to enjoy a drink at the Notre Dame Rooftop where you'll get a panoramic view of the city. As the sun drops the walls of Jerusalem turn pink and then the city lights up after dark.

## Day 2: The New City



### *The Model of Jerusalem & The Shrine of the Book*

Visit the fascinating replica of how Jerusalem would have looked 2,000 years ago. Much of the topography and the outline Old City have not changed. Nearby is the Shrine of the Book, the home of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the museum that narrates their fascinating story. Both visits help illustrate the role that religion played in ancient society and politics.



### *The Bronfman Archaeological Wing at the Israel Museum*

This world class collection of local man-made artefacts, all found locally, spans 10,000 years of human history. The collection covers everything from weapons, household items, burial rituals and religious art. It gives a fascinating insight into the huge diversity and character of life in Israel.



### *Mahane Yehuda Market*

Stroll through the energetic and mesmerising Mahane Yehuda market to take in the ethnic diversity of Israel as reflected in its foods. There are numerous market eateries that cater to every taste and budget, so this is a great place for lunch.



### *Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial*

Spend time at Yad Vashem, a sombre memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. To Israelis it is also a national symbol that "safeguards the past and imparts its meaning for future generations".

### *Drink at the Courtyard at the American Colony Hotel*



The Courtyard has character, history and a beautiful garden, and there is no better place for a quiet drink on a warm balmy Jerusalem evening.



ANCIENT SILK ROAD | Xi'an



# THE CHINA SILK ROAD

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THE ANCIENT SILK ROAD OPENS UP A WORLD OF HISTORIC WONDERS AND  
DRAMATIC TOPOGRAPHY; SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER **ROSS PAKES**  
EXPLAINS THE BEST WAY TO TRAVEL IT IN STYLE

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TERRACOTTA WARRIORS | Xi'an

## What is it?

Well it's not one road, but a network, stretching across around 7,000 kilometres and linking the Far East with Persia, Mesopotamia and Europe. As well as Chinese silk, a range of items including gold, semi-precious stones, spices and perfumes, were transported by pack animals across the primitive Silk Road highways. Rest stops or caravanserais – the Silk Road equivalent of inns or service stations – were sited along the routes. From Roman times, there was also a system of shipping routes plying goods between Imperial Egypt and India and beyond.

## When?

The Silk Road was used between the 2nd century BC and the 15th century, with peaks and troughs of activity depending on the rise and fall of regional empires. The decline of Mongol rule led to the final disintegration of the ancient trading routes.

## Where?

Perhaps the best-known sections of the Silk Road are those that criss-cross Central Asia – the so-called Stans. The ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, Osh in Kyrgyzstan and Almaty in Kazakhstan were important Silk Road centres, preserving to varying degrees the architecture and market-trading culture of the routes' glory days.

The Silk Routes penetrated deep into China, with three distinct caravan roads linking India and Persia with the cities of Chengdu, Urumqi and Xian. To give some idea of the scope of this network, the Chinese Government has submitted no fewer than 48 individual routes to UNESCO for consideration. In 2014, the Silk Roads' Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor – spanning China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were recognised as a World Heritage Site.

## How?

A&K offers a multitude of ways into and along the Silk Road. You can dive deep into the ancient delights of Central Asia. You can approach via Chengdu in unexplored western China. Or you can turn your Silk Road trip into a luxury rail experience.

**Silk Road Stans:** A&K can arrange bespoke visits to admire the architectural wonders and explore the markets, bazaars and caravanserais of the region's oldest cities, including Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Tashkent in Uzbekistan and Ashgabat and Merv in Turkmenistan. All display signs of long decades under Soviet influence, while retaining deep connections with their Silk Road heritage. Samarkand never fails to impress visitors, its Registan – deemed by Curzon to be “the noblest public square in the world” – boasting imposing madrasahs on three of its sides. The entire city of Merv has World Heritage listing, while Ashgabat is home to the fortress of Old Nisa, earliest of the Parthian Empire capitals, and the Arkadash stud farm, which breeds the Akhal-Teke horse – believed to be one of the oldest in existence. Travelling between these fascinating cities, by train, private car or luxury bus, visitors get to see the archetypal geography of Central Asia, all golden steppes and arid mountains.

A&K occasionally organises group trips to the region, such as the Ancient Trade Routes of Central Asia hosted tour which, in October 2016, visited Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Group sizes on these tours are limited to no more than 24 guests.

**Western China wanderings:** A&K's 14-night Silk Road: China itinerary takes visitors to ancient cities that lie on all three of the Silk Routes that ran from Central Asia into western China before finally meeting up at Xi'an. Highlights include world-famous historic sites such as the famed Sunday market in the old city of Kashgar and Xi'an's Terracotta Warriors, as well as less obvious, but equally enthralling experiences such as a tour of Dunhuang's magnificent Mogao Caves, arguably the most







MINGSHA SAND DUNES | China

well-preserved repository of Buddhist art in the world; the visit includes access to areas normally closed to the public. To show how Silk Road traditions are kept alive in remote corners, there's an opportunity to see how the semi-nomadic kasaks maintain their way of life in the Tian Shan Mountains and meet craftsmen and artisans as well as market traders in bustling bazaars. Tuftan – hardly known in the West – was built in the 2nd century BC as a garrison town and became a key point on the Silk Road. Stranded between a towering mountain range and the Taklamakan desert, it has thrived thanks to a truly monumental water irrigation system. Here there's time to wander around ruined temples, palaces and ramparts, before enjoying a traditional lunch with a local Uighur family. Five short flights and two scenic road-trips ensure that most of this trip is devoted to seeing and doing – not to logistics.

**The Silk Road on the iron way:** The Golden Eagle is Russia's only fully en suite private train, offering the comfort and luxury of a 5-star hotel, with butler-style attendants and haute cuisine and with ever-changing landscapes on the 4,000-mile journey between Moscow

and Beijing. The 21-day Silk Road itinerary takes in Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia and China – all key Silk Road nations. As well as visits to the ancient Silk Road trading centres of Khiva, Ashgabat and Merv, there's the chance to take an in-depth look at Bukhara's Ark – a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara – and the enchantingly named Palace of the Moon and Stars, as well as stops in Samarkand, Tashkent and Almaty. This unique rail-transit of Eurasia includes a pre-departure champagne reception, exclusive steam haulage at Lake Baikal and private classical concerts in Irkutsk and Kazan, plus a barbecue on a station platform. ☺

#### | CHINA SILK ROAD |

A 15 day Silk Road trip based on two sharing, excluding international flights is available from £6,595pp. For more information, or to discuss your trip to China, please call one of our travel specialists on 01242 547 914.

## A UNIQUE OASIS OF PURE EXCLUSIVITY.

A unique hideaway on quiet Layan Beach, Anantara Layan Phuket Resort offers 30 rooms and suites, as well as 47 pool villas. Energize in the Muay Thai boxing stadium, or be pampered at Anantara Spa. Drinks flow at the beachfront pool bar, and dining is vibrant with contemporary Thai and Mediterranean flavors. For exceptional luxury, indulge in one of our exclusive two-story residences on the hillside, with full use of the resort's services and facilities.

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# THAILAND

## *Beyond the Beach*

For many, Thailand conjures images of white sands, azure waters and striking coastal landscapes. An accessible and affordable slice of paradise, it continues to attract holidaymakers looking for the ultimate R&R destination.

But there's far more to this alluring country than sand and sea. From the hospitality of Chiang Mai's hill tribes to the chaotic, intoxicating buzz of Bangkok, this is a country with much to offer the curious traveller.

A&K's Ailine Fisher goes off the beaten track, and picks some of the best bits of this fascinating Asian nation.





## AYUTTHAYA

*Best for... ruins and relics*

The surviving ruins of Ayutthaya are testament to the former glory of what was once the most magnificent city in Asia. Founded in 1350, it survived four centuries and 33 kings of five dynasties before being destroyed by the Burmese in the 18th century.

Eighty kilometres north of Bangkok, Ayutthaya was once the Kingdom of Siam and a prosperous international trading port. Today the ancient monuments of this kingdom form the Ayutthaya Historical Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that contains palaces, Buddhist temples, monasteries and statues, all of which are scattered around a busy provincial city.



## BANGKOK

*Best for... shopping and street-food*

A visit to Thailand's vibrant capital pairs day time cultural visits with a famously energetic nightlife. It's well worth sticking around for a night or two and making the most of the city's noodle stalls, bustling flea markets and designer shopping malls before continuing on your journey.

### WHAT TO DO

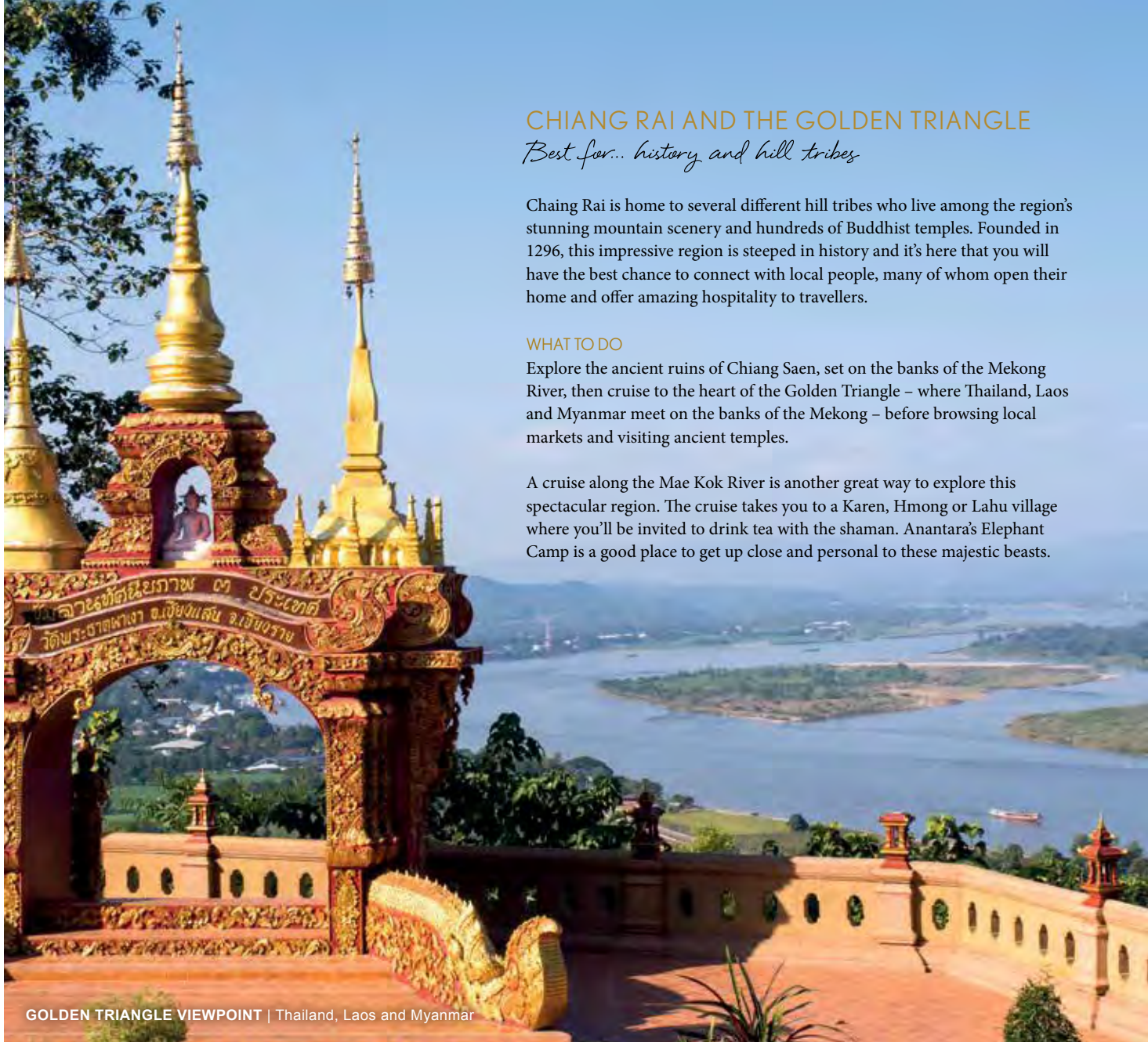
The variety of shopping offered by Bangkok is unrivalled. Visit Pak Klong Talad, the city's famous flower market, and head down to the Mekong Railway Market, a local set-up squeezed beside the tracks of one of the city's railway lines.

Our recommended street food tour includes a visit to the century-old Nanglerng Food Market, one of the city's oldest bazaars where you can relax with a cold beer and watch the vendors prepare and serve delicious food. Finish your day on the water, exploring the Thonburi Klongs and the Chao Phraya River by private boat. You can also visit the famous 'Bridge on the River Kwai' in nearby Kanchanaburi Province.



VIEW OF WAT ARUN ALONG CHAO PHRAYA RIVER | Bangkok, Thailand





## CHIANG RAI AND THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

*Best for... history and hill tribes*

Chiang Rai is home to several different hill tribes who live among the region's stunning mountain scenery and hundreds of Buddhist temples. Founded in 1296, this impressive region is steeped in history and it's here that you will have the best chance to connect with local people, many of whom open their home and offer amazing hospitality to travellers.

### WHAT TO DO

Explore the ancient ruins of Chiang Saen, set on the banks of the Mekong River, then cruise to the heart of the Golden Triangle – where Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet on the banks of the Mekong – before browsing local markets and visiting ancient temples.

A cruise along the Mae Kok River is another great way to explore this spectacular region. The cruise takes you to a Karen, Hmong or Lahu village where you'll be invited to drink tea with the shaman. Anantara's Elephant Camp is a good place to get up close and personal to these majestic beasts.

GOLDEN TRIANGLE VIEWPOINT | Thailand, Laos and Myanmar

## ISAAN

*Best for... adventure and authenticity*

If you're feeling adventurous, then we recommend heading to Isaan. Situated in the north east of the country, bordering Laos and Cambodia, Isaan is home to an authentic way of life rarely witnessed in the more popular tourist spots. Rice fields, small rural villages and Lao-influenced food and traditions offer a glimpse into the Thailand of yesteryear.

### WHAT TO DO

Visit a silk weaving village to learn about Isaan's best-known craft and explore Thailand's most impressive Angkor-era remains, including the mighty sandstone temple at Phimai. Isaan has not one but two National Parks. Khao Yai lush woodland is home to tigers and elephants, while Pha Taem is known for its extensive rock art, estimated to be over 3,000 years old.



PHIMAI HISTORICAL PARK | Thailand





ANGKHANG MOUNTAIN | Chiang Mai

## CHIANG MAI

*Best for... temples and local cuisine*

It's the different culture and fine food that form an important part of any trip, and it's those things that make Chiang Mai a perfect addition to any Thailand holiday. An hour's flight from Bangkok, the hustle and bustle of the city becomes a distant memory as the picturesque countryside slides into view, littered with gleaming temples and lively markets where some of Thailand's best cuisine can be enjoyed.

### WHAT TO DO

The best way to see Chiang Mai is by bike. Ride through the peaceful Sri Lanna National Park and enjoy the spectacular views of the surrounding valleys and mountain peaks. Visit temples nestled in villages, meeting friendly faces along the way, and stop for lunch at a local market where you can discover the ancient secrets of Thai cuisine at a private cooking class. For more culinary delights, visit the Araksa Tea Plantation to learn about the tea making process and how to cook the spicy pork sausage that is unique to this part of Northern Thailand. For a truly atmospheric experience, explore the ancient capital of Wiang Kum Kam by horse and cart before enjoying a Kantoke dinner set within the grounds of the temple.

Chiang Mai is also home to the Elephant Nature Park, a unique project that rescues and rehabilitates elephants that have been harmed or abused. 🐘

### HRH THE KING OF THAILAND

Considered by the Thai population as the true Father of Thailand, HRH King Bhumibol Adulyadej was greatly revered and loved by the nation and his passing in 2016 was very sad news for all Thais. However, as a proud nation they want to continue to show people how his hard work and dedication helped the country develop to the beautiful place it is now and welcome visitors to their nation with pride.

### | THAILAND |

A 12 day Highlights of Thailand tour including international flights, based on two sharing is available from £2,190 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to Thailand, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 895**.





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or call 01242 547 881 for more details.

# TOP 5

## ALTERNATIVE ISLAND HOPPING DESTINATIONS



### 1 *The Cayes, Belize*

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**Why?** To explore a scatter of awesome Anglophone atolls

**Who for?** Families, couples, beach bums, water babies

More than 400 isles and atolls speckle Belize's Caribbean coast. That means there's one for everyone, whether you're after lively, laidback or completely off-grid. Ambergris Caye is the biggest, and has some buzzing bars and slick hotels. Nearby Caye Caulker (motto: 'go slow') is lower key, and less expensive. The marine reserve offshore makes it ideal for snorkelling and kayaking – if you can bear to leave your hammock. The almost uninhabited Turneffe Atoll, a ring of mangrove-frilled cayes around an azure lagoon, is excellent for snorkelling. Or venture out to Lighthouse Reef, home to some of the world's best dive sites, including the Blue Hole. You could hire a private isle – Coppola Resorts' Coral Caye is a glorious spot to play Crusoe.

### 2 *The Caribbean*

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**Why?** To find the new edge to this classic paradise

**Who for?** Couples, honeymooners, foodies, families

Everyone thinks they know the Caribbean: it is palm trees, crystal waters, endless sands. But there's more to this textbook paradise. As well as beach beauty, there are increasing numbers of boutique hotels, plus plenty of exciting extras. For instance, Barbados remains a romantic, relaxing choice, but also offering swimming with turtles, the Caribbean's top surf break, ultra-chic retreats and the region's most innovative cuisine. Small, lesser-known Anguilla – also a hot foodie choice – is the place to find peace. Its beaches are some of the Caribbean's best, with top-class resorts to match. Turks & Caicos is perfect for families. There are 40 islands to hop between and a barrier reef that provides wonderful, safe water activities, from diving and snorkelling to watching humpback whales.





## 3 *Venice, Italy*

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**Why?** For classy, culture-filled urban isles

**Who for?** Culture buffs, couples, foodies, romantics

There's nowhere quite like Venice; no place so packed with famous sites and equally alluring back alleys. Every inch is a photo opportunity. But despite the ubiquitous canals, it's easy to forget the city is actually a cluster of bridge-linked islands. And that beyond the historic centre, many more islands dot the lagoon. These offer both an escape from the crowds of St Mark's Square and a different take on Venetian life. Base yourself somewhere central and fabulous – such as the Palace Bonvecchiati or Baglioni Luna – then hop around. Cheap vaporettos (water buses) zip between islands. Try Murano, famed for its glass-blowing; Burano, famed for its lace-making and bright fishermen's houses; Vignole, famed for its vineyards; and Torcello, home to a spectacular seventh-century basilica and the illustrious Locanda Cipriani Restaurant.



## 4 *Dalmatian Archipelago, Croatia*

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**Why?** To feel like a billionaire aboard your own yacht

**Who for?** Sailors, adventurers, deck-lazers, couples, families, groups

Tantalising. That sums up the prospect of island-hopping off Croatia. There are upwards of 1,200 outcrops lying in the country's blisteringly blue waters. The only thing for it is to charter your own boat. Indeed, there's nothing quite like the sense of freedom and discovery you get from plotting your own route around the Dalmatian Islands – with a full crew to help you, of course. Cast off from the wonderful walled port of Dubrovnik and you could cruise between the unspoiled forests of Mljet, pretty Korcula, the mouthwatering seafood tavernas of Vis, and lively Hvar, with its olive groves and gorgeous old town. Don't miss the chance to drop anchor at the largely uninhabited Pakleni Islands, an undeveloped paradise of sandy coves, or slow-paced Lastovo, which few tourists ever reach.

## 5 *Hawaii, USA*

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**Why?** To turn your island-hopping up to 11

**Who for?** Honeymooners, hikers, adventurers, surfers, families

Hawaii is for island lovers who hanker for more adventure. You can simply laze on the lovely Pacific beaches, but there's so much more to explore. By combining three or four islands – each of which has its own personality – you start to see what makes this US outpost tick. Big Island is the most boisterous: you can hike on an active volcano and watch lava pour into the sea. Oahu is the most developed, especially Waikiki Beach, but Pearl Harbour packs a historic punch. Magnificent Maui is activity central – come for whale-watching, windsurfing, cycling, diving and more, plus a good dose of authentic Hawaiian culture. Ancient Kauai is more dramatic still, a spectacular scrunch-up of jungle-clad valleys, towering cliffs and plunging ravines.











# VENICE

*a city for all ages*

— by Georgina Blaskey —

NOT JUST FOR ROMANTIC OCCASIONS, VENICE IS A  
DESTINATION OF HIDDEN GEMS THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN ENJOY





THE GRAND CANAL | Venice

Venice: home of canals, decorative churches, the infamous Carnevale and, ahhhhh, romance.

In my mind, this was definitely a destination for my husband and I, children left firmly at home with grandparents. But when I talked to the Abercrombie & Kent team ahead about all the family friendly things to do, I had a change of heart. With two kids over seven, whose stamina and strength increase proportionally to the number of ice creams on offer (and this is Italy after all, so no lack of gelaterias here), suddenly the city seemed a whole lot more accessible.

Made up of over 118 islands, Venice is an exciting destination in which to arrive, whatever your age! Whisked from the airport via a Riva speedboat water taxi, there is nowhere on Earth where your transfer feels more glamorous – and when we arrived at the JW Marriott, entering a subterranean dock, we felt as if we'd entered a Bond villain's secret lair! This hotel is ideal family accommodation. Located in the lagoon a mere 20-minute ride away from the hub of St Mark's Square (there's a complimentary shuttle service, every half

hour, day and night), this five-star hotel on Isola delle Rose is paradise found. A converted hospital, the property has been restored by architect Matteo Thun to create luxurious, sophisticated, open spaces combining contemporary comfort with Mediterranean style. Lush, formal gardens frame your view of the city's lagoon and multi-domed skyline. With a rooftop restaurant (Sagra) boasting a jaw-dropping backdrop of Venice and a family pool overlooking the zucchini- and tomato-rich vegetable garden with views towards the Adriatic Sea, scenic doesn't come close.

On the first morning, nothing prepared us for our arrival in St Mark's Square. While there are lots of tourists (20 million a year and counting), even the forest of selfie sticks couldn't dampen the sensation that we were stepping inside a classical painting. Every street, canal and bridge in Venice is utterly enchanting. We walked around with our jaws dropping at the overwhelming beauty of the place. To avoid too much queueing with small children, we improvised. Instead of going into St Mark's Church, we went up the Campanile di San Marco next to it. With a lift providing quick access to the



top of the bell tower we continued our tour with a panoramic view of the geography of the city a great way to bring our 2D pocket map to life. Back on solid ground, we walked with the crowds through the little streets to the Grand Canal and the famous Rialto Bridge. While it's undoubtedly stunning, standing on the bridge looking down the canal is picture-postcard perfect – Canaletto's finest laid out before you.

I'd never used a tour guide for a family trip before, but having spent the first day wandering aimlessly, enjoying soaking up the atmosphere, day two with Martina may have just changed my mindset forever. From the moment we met, Martina engaged the children brilliantly, especially my seven-year-old son. We started our A&K tailor-made tour at the gondola maker, Roberto Tramontin, one of only four left in Venice, whose great-grandfather founded the 'squero' or Venetian boatyard on Dorsoduro, a smart area not overrun with tourists. Learning the process of boat building from start to finish, how the eight types of wood are prepared and manipulated, how they are carved and decorated, added a new level of appreciation to this centuries-old method of transport.

Next stop, it was our turn for artistry at nearby mask atelier Tragicomica Di Gualtiero Dall'Osto. After taking in the beautiful masks on display, we disappeared down a side entrance and into a behind-the-scenes workshop to try our hand at creating our own masterpieces. Gualtiero and his team were there to transform our average artistic efforts into something sensational, adding gold studs, jewels and trimmings, so now the kids have a little taste of the Carnevale adorning their bedroom walls.

Our final stop was Murano, a quietly industrious island with a global reputation for glass-making, where we visited Cenedese, one of the most respected factories. Time and time again, and this was no exception (despite the millions of euros of irreplaceable, breakable items around us), our children were greeted warmly and taught how glass is blown by one of the company's legendary masters. It was a calm, reflective end to an insightful day touring Venice's hidden gems (and we only needed one ice cream in four days!). Returning to the Marriott, the kids cannonballed into the swimming pool as we put our feet up, side by side, Aperol spritz in hand, watching the sunset (so there was a bit of room for romance after all...). ☺

#### | VENICE |

If you're interested in finding out about our range of family holidays, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 546 612**.



**MASK MAKING** | Tragicomica Di Gualtiero Dall'Osto



**TRADITIONAL GONDOLA** | Canal in Venice









# FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

WE OFFER A NUMBER OF EXCELLENT CULINARY TOURS IN  
MEXICO. PRODUCT MANAGER **GRAEME BULL** SHARES  
A FEW OF HIS FAVOURITES. ☺

COCOA BEANS AND POD | Oaxaca



One of the best ways to learn about Mexico is through its extraordinary cuisine. World renowned and UNESCO-recognised, Mexico's culinary heritage is as fascinating as it is diverse, a complex fusion of age-old cooking and farming techniques and cultural customs.

## MEXICO CITY CHOCOLATE INDULGENCE

Many people think of the Swiss when they think of chocolate. But they might be surprised to hear that the world's favourite sweet treat traces its origins to Mexico. This tour teaches travellers about Mexico's role in cultivating cocoa – and how, in turn, chocolate has influenced Mexican history.

You'll stop at one of the Mexican capital's premier restaurants, Café Tacuba, visit an artisanal chocolateria and enjoy a three-course lunch at Azul Condesa, the restaurant opened by famed Chef Ricardo Muñoz Zurita, where you can try Zurita's own take on mole – a smoky, savoury chocolate sauce – and some delectable chocolate desserts.

## ARTISANAL MEZCAL EXPERIENCE, OAXACA

Journey through the valley of Oaxaca and visit three communities which produce premium mezcal on this spirit-lover's tour.

Far from the tourist trail, the mezcalerias of San Dionisio Ocotopec, San Baltazar Chichicapam and Santa Catarina Minas produce Mexico's famed agave-based spirit using varied distillation methods. See how donkey-power is still used in the fermentation process and learn how to taste the difference between mezcal distilled using the traditional copper still and that using a pre-Columbian clay still.

## OAXACA STREET FOOD EXPERIENCE

This tour takes you to the soul of Oaxacan cuisine – the region's famous street stalls. Try freshly made tortillas, tamales and empanadas, sample Oaxacan hot chocolate and get a taste for atole, a warm corn-based drink often served at breakfast, on this do-as-the-locals-do tour.

Food plays many roles in Oaxaca and throughout the morning your guide and local vendors will explain how things are made and the role these different dishes have played in Oaxacan culture.

## CANCUN-RIVIERA MAYA COOKING CLASS AT MEXICO LINDO

Learn to cook Cancun-style while overlooking the Caribbean during this Riviera Maya cooking class. This hands-on workshop, run by expert local chefs, focuses on the many different aspects of Mexico's cuisine, from regional varieties to the use of specific local ingredients.



MEXICAN BREAD | Zaachila near Oaxaca



PREPARED FOODS | Oaxaca



TOASTING COCOA BEANS | Oaxaca





PREPARING CACAO FLOWERS | Oaxaca

## AUTHENTIC, FRESH MEXICAN COOKING CLASS IN MEXICO CITY WITH CASA JACARANDA

Experience all the elements of Mexican culinary life, with visits to a bustling market and cooking in the home of Beto and Jorge, on this special cooking tour in Mexico City. Classes are focused on seasonal products, buying only from vendors and butchers that sell the freshest ingredients and participants are encouraged to discover their own sazón (seasoning), so they can return home with a newly acquired Mexican skill.

## A TASTE OF PUEBLA: THE MOLE POBLANO TOUR

When it comes to gastronomy, Puebla is one of Mexico's richest states. Mole, the decadent, savoury chocolate sauce that was apparently created by nuns in the 19th-century originates here, and it's a definitive part of the rich selection of Mexican dishes. Start with a typical market visit to learn which ingredients go into a mole recipe, sample a variety of mole pastes and finish with a hands-on cooking class.

## CASA OAXACA CULINARY EXPERIENCE

Chef Alejandro Ruiz's restaurant Casa Oaxaca is listed among the best restaurants in Latin America. His contemporary take on traditional Oaxaca food has made him a culinary star around the world.

This four-hour class, led by Alejandro or a long-standing member of his team, starts with a visit to the Sanchez Pascua market where travellers have the opportunity to meet the chef's favourite merchants and learn about the local ingredients, spices and seasonings used at Casa Oaxaca. Returning to the kitchen, you'll enjoy step-by-step lessons on how to prepare a range of traditional dishes, salsas and tortillas. Enjoy a delicious meal and sample artisanal mezcals while learning about the variety of flavours of this important Oaxacan spirit.

### | MEXICO |

A 14 day Classic Mexico tour including international flights based on two sharing is available from £4,960 per person. For more information, or to discuss your trip to Mexico, please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 701**.



# *Sushi* ON THE SLOPES





**D**etox January is the latest craze in healthy living. Problem is many of us like to go skiing at the beginning of the year and, as we all know, skiing holidays are rarely indulgence-free. So, to help lighten things up, we're celebrating a surprising alternative to the usual carb-heavy slope-side snack. Hello sushi.

This Japanese superfood is a satisfyingly healthy (and fulfilling) après ski alternative and it is now easily attainable, even on the slopes of Europe's highest mountain range, thanks to the ever innovative ideas of chefs and hoteliers. We've paired three of our favourite ski resorts with fine hotels that offer excellent Japanese dining, so you can have the best of both worlds – supreme skiing and guilt-free indulgences. And with all three resorts located at high altitude, they're our perfect picks for late-season spring skiing.

### *L'Apogee Hotel, Courchevel 1850*

OK, so it's no surprise that you can find good sushi in one of Europe's most famous ski resorts. But this is a pretty exceptional Japanese restaurant by anyone's standards, with executive chef Jean-Luc Lefrançois presenting a variety of sumptuous creations, including black cod in miso sauce and Koori Carpaccio, paired with an extensive sake and tea list.

The hotel itself is a new member of the Oetker Collection, linked to several world-renowned hotels including The Bristol in Paris and Hotel Du Cap Eden Roc in Antibes.

With a dedicated children's VIP concierge, L'Apogee is great for families and there's also an indoor pool and a large spa, complete with a beauty salon, hairdresser's and treatment rooms.

### *The Chedi, Andermatt, Switzerland*

On first inspection, The Chedi, Andermatt looks just as an alpine hotel should do; steeply pitched roofs and pine trees dotting the forecourt of this newcomer to the Swiss ski scene. Step inside, however, and this five-star hotel really reveals its true identity. Truly contemporary in design with straight lines, bold, modern furnishings and polished wooden and stone walls



L'Apogee Hotel | Courchevel

all beautifully lit by the tranquil flickering of the numerous fireplaces dotted about the hotel. There's an award winning spa and wellness centre, plus hydrothermal baths and a suitably chic glass roofed swimming pool. Located in the stunning mountain village of Andermatt in Central Switzerland, the hotel also boasts one of the country's best modern Japanese restaurants, not to mention Switzerland's only sake sommelier. It is a remarkable example of The Chedi hotel's incomparable aspirations for true luxury.

### *Mont Cervin Palace, Zermatt, Switzerland*

Located in the heart of the picturesque Swiss resort of Zermatt, the Mont Cervin Palace deserves its place as a member of the Leading Hotels in the World. It's been welcoming guests since 1851 to experience the finest in Swiss hotel traditions and spectacular hospitality. Almost as iconic to Zermatt as that of the presence of the towering Matterhorn, all of the hotel's rooms enjoy superb 'Toblerone' views of this mighty mountain. There's also an outdoor and an indoor pool, a solarium, an ice grotto, hammam and fitness centre, as well as kids' club and separate children's swimming pool – so each and every one of their guests is well and truly catered for. And when it comes to sushi the Palace's Myoko restaurant is definitely the specialist. Delivering authentic dishes from The Land of the Rising Sun to the heart of one of Switzerland's best loved alpine retreats.

#### | SKI |

If you're interested in finding out about our range of ski chalets please call one of our travel specialists on **01242 547 705**.



THE MATTERHORN | Zermatt

# A&K PHILANTHROPY

## TEACHING THE WORLD TO READ



Literacy can have a huge impact on a person's prosperity. There are over 250 million children around the world who lack basic reading and writing skills and its felt particularly acutely in sub-Saharan Africa, where few children have access to even the most basic tools they need to learn to read.

We have teamed up with Worldreader, a not-for-profit organisation that uses a new solution to tackle this age-old problem. By utilising simple, inexpensive technology, they are getting reading materials to children in the world's poorest communities and unlocking the potential of millions of lives. Since it was founded six years ago, Worldreader has reached over five million people with an extensive

digital library of local language and culturally-relevant e-books, available on e-reading devices and mobile phones. With reading programmes in 14 sub-Saharan African countries, Worldreader has distributed over three million books to 475 schools and libraries. Its intentionally curated libraries of locally created content make it popular with students and teachers alike.

In 2016, Worldreader joined forces with Abercrombie & Kent for its first East African excursion. The tour combined a safari with an opportunity for donors to see their philanthropy in action, visiting schools and libraries in Tanzania and Kenya. As well as witnessing Worldreader's literacy

programmes first hand, donors had the chance to understand the broader context in which Worldreader fits.

An example of the partnership between Worldreader and Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy (AKP) is Ilboru Secondary School in Tanzania, a school for deaf and disabled young people. AKP funded construction of the primary school and the recently completed first wing of the secondary school, and facilitated the introduction of e-readers and associated teacher training. It's been an interesting and valuable project, one that Worldreader has been using as a case study to explore ways to run successful programmes for similar groups in the future.

In Kenya, in the isolated communities on the edge of the Mara, A&K Kenya's full-time AKP Coordinator Sarah Liaram has also been managing initiatives, bringing e-readers to a larger and more diverse section of the population.

At the Gijedabung and Mwikantsi primary schools in Tanzania's Arusha River Valley, content about conservation is included in the e-readers. This gives readers an opportunity to hear from communities living in rural parts of the country – about their views concerning living with wildlife, and how conservation plays into their vision of the future for their children. Providing local and culturally relevant books such as these is just one key aim of the Worldreader programme.

Their collection now features over 40,000 titles in 43 languages, from over 331 international publishers.

In just a few years, digital technology has transformed entire education systems, bringing new information and opportunities into parts of the world that have been under-resourced for decades. Worldreader has joined individual teachers, administrators, community leaders and students at the forefront of this reading revolution.







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# PERFECTION FROM EVERY PERSPECTIVE

The Bay of Islands New Zealand, where the seafood is as fresh as the idyllic scenery. While nature abounds, luxury is certainly not forgotten. Both inside and out this retreat is designed to offer a unique perspective of this incredible vista from every angle. Yours to share or savour alone as you dine alfresco on the tantalizing bounty, caught fresh from your doorstep and prepared to your taste.