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INSPIRATION

The top travel specialists to know right now

Meet Condé Nast Traveller UK's hand-picked little black book of the key travel specialists right now

BY TOBY SKINNER AND EMMA LOVE

2 November 2026

When we created our inaugural list of the top travel specialists last year, it was based on the belief that they're more crucial than ever. In an age of Web3, artificial intelligence, and vast warehouses of digital information on nearly every destination imaginable, we need them. Not just to guide us to the heart of a place, avoiding lazy tropes and opening doors that would otherwise remain locked, but to make sure we do so with due sensitivity to local environments and communities. A year on, with the likes of ChatGPT making even more of an impact, that belief remains unchanged and firmer than ever. So, we've spent the past months at *Conde Nast Traveller* slowly growing our list of top UK-facing travel specialists.

According to James Jayasundera, who has run tailor-made specialists Ampersand Travel for more than two decades, there are both practical and emotional reasons for the very human role of a travel specialist. "The world is changing so fast, and more people are travelling based on something they've seen online or on an Instagram reel," he says. "You need a really informed guide to explain both the reality of what you'll see, and its impact; to manage expectations, but also to guide you towards something that might be even better."

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Jayasundera has travelled extensively since he was a child, initially with his English mother and Sri Lankan diplomat father. Now, he doesn't just have one of the most far-reaching little black books in the business (especially on Sri Lanka and India), but also a very global context: meaning he can tell you how the Himalayas might compare to the Andes or the Dolomites, or the nuances of Asian versus African safaris. He says Ampersand trips are also about compassion, and often sensitivity to very specific needs – from a 75-year-old woman who wanted to learn to swim with her granddaughter to a terminally ill woman who knew that her trip to southern Sri Lanka with her husband would be her last, and passed away happy and at peace on the flight home from Colombo.

That humanity sums up our list of travel specialists, which now has nine new additions. They include global all-rounders like Carrier and Crossing Travel, as well as companies with a laser-like regional focus, such as Selective Asia, founded by Nick Pulley after living in Thailand and extensively travelling through its surrounding countries, and Mahlatini Luxury Travel, known for its trips to Africa and the Indian Subcontinent. We've also picked travel specialists such as ski expert Powder Byrne and Kirker Holidays, which organises cultural city breaks in Europe. They join other operators with a finely carved niche, including The Slow Cyclist, founded by round-the-world biker Oli Broom, flight-free experts Byway, and Inclusive Morocco, which offers magical trips that address specific destination challenges, especially for LGBTQ+ travellers.

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All these brands trade in the unGoogleable: the local party fixer, the world-expert guide, the secret diving spot, access to the after-hours museum or gallery, sometimes with the artist; they can find the exact villa for your exact needs, or create the bucket list trip that doesn't just exceed your expectations but explodes them, leaving you transformed. Enjoy our list of trusted travel specialists – and happy travels.

SECTIONS

The All-Rounders | The Regional Specialists | The Special Interest Operators | The Villa Fixers

The all-rounders



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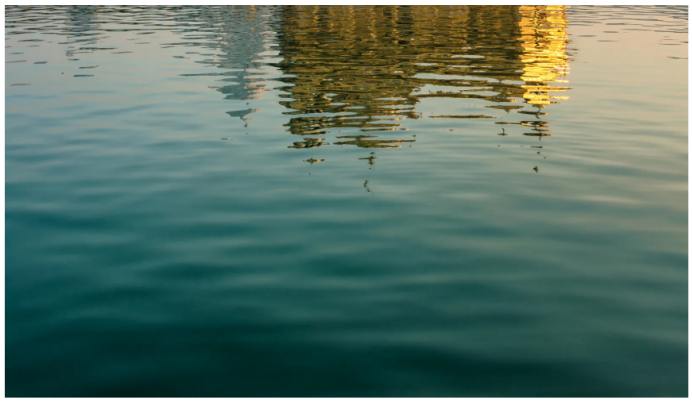

Golden temple, the holiest shrine of Sikhism in Amritsar. Getty Images

Crossing Travel

Best for: Destination weddings, honeymoons and milestone celebrations; design-led journeys across Europe and worldwide
Key destinations: Japan, India, Italy, Peru, Africa; bespoke journeys across Europe, Asia and the Americas
Signature trip: Japan and South Korea – ryokans, temples, artisans & architecture
Also Try: Switzerland's Medical and Wellness Retreat
Website: crossingtravel.com

Launched in 2013, the London-based Crossing Travel is an international team working across time zones. Founder Sangeeta Sadarangani's strength lies in her little black book and 24/7 service – whether it's resolving a flight disruption in Tokyo at 3am or securing an impossible-to-book restaurant reservation in Paris. Her company has grown mainly through word of mouth (95 per cent of new clients arrive by referral), with one-of-a-kind journeys across all seven continents, from Peru to India (where one client tried his hand at making rotis for visitors at Bangla Sahib Gurdwara in New Delhi). The "Celebrations by Crossing" service specialises in organising destination weddings, from 15-guest gatherings to 150-person events; it includes seamless luxury hotel blocks for weddings and bespoke activities such as chef's-table dinners, yacht days, and perfume-making ateliers.

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ALSPrivate

Best for: Bespoke ultra-luxury travel, extraordinary celebrations and personalised adventures
Key destinations: The Alps, France, Austria, Italy, British Virgin Islands, bespoke journeys worldwide
Signature trip: Michelin-starred dining experience on a remote glacier above Verbier
Also try: Private island takeovers and superyacht expeditions
Website: alsprivate.com

ALS Private, renowned for pushing the limits of possibility in ultra-luxury travel and events for private clients and global corporations. Founded in 2013 by former professional skier Bella Syme, the company's story began in the Alps, where it built a reputation for providing unparalleled ski and chalet experiences. ALS Private has now expanded its portfolio to include a collection of properties and meticulously curated experiences on land and at sea in destinations as varied as Courchevel, Mustique, and Lapland. Describing part of its mission as turning the "impossible into reality", the company provides access to unique and exclusive villas, superyachts, private islands, and hotel buyouts for high-net-worth families, celebrities, and corporate firms worldwide.

Regent Holidays

Best for: Tailor-made journeys to lesser-explored corners of the world
Key destinations: Nordics, Baltics, Balkans, Caucasus, Southeast Asia, Far East
Signature trip: Classic Japan and Korea
Also try: Faroe Islands Fly-Drive Adventure
Website: regent-holidays.co.uk

Noel Cairns formed Regent in 1970 after travelling through the Balkans and Turkey – then

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unusual destinations for UK visitors – and wanted to arrange similarly unconventional holidays for others. Regent Holidays became the first UK operator to offer tours to Albania before expanding to destinations like Belarus, Central Asia, North Korea and the Baltic states. Today, the company uses trusted relationships with local partners to create personalised tours to some of the most extraordinary, remote and unconventional destinations in the world, curated by its knowledgeable and hands-on team.



Aerial view of Ortigia Island and Siracusa city at sunset. Landmark in Sicily, Italy. Getty Images

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Carrier

Best for: Attention to detail
Key destinations: Europe, South Africa, East Africa, North America, Caribbean
Signature trip: Under the spell of Sicily
Also try: Serene South Africa
Website: carrier.co.uk

Born from its roots as Africa specialists, today, Carrier's nearly 90-strong team arranges holidays to over 75 countries. Personalised experiences, private access, and intricate itineraries involving complex logistics are all USPs – whether that involves sourcing a Peloton for a superyacht or arranging a private dinner with Nelson Mandela's former prison guard. Key to it all is the company's long-established on-the-ground partnerships with DMCs who will go the extra mile (think asking a National Geographic producer to join a safari in India for photography enthusiast guests). Collections such as Running Wild, a series of immersive wildlife journeys, are designed for individuals who want to make a positive impact through community engagement and conservation.

ITC

Key destinations: Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Europe, Asia & Australasia.
Signature trip: Ultimate Caribbean Island Hopping Adventure
Also try: Best of Japan
Website: inspiringtravel.co.uk

Founded in 1974, ITC Travel Group is one of the oldest specialist travel groups in the UK. What began as a Caribbean holiday specialist has since grown into a collection of brands that span the globe, offering highly personalised, experience-led travel based on first-hand destination knowledge and expertise. Its broad portfolio includes African and Latin American wildlife specialist Rainbow Tours; the Inspiring Travel Company, which specialises in high-end tailor-made holidays; and Regent Holidays, the experts on tailor-



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made journeys to lesser-explored corners of the world.



Flying from Maun, Okavango Delta - Scott Dunn Owen Tozer

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Scott Dunn

Best for: Going anywhere
Key destinations: Africa, Europe, Asia, North America, Australasia
Signature trip: Ultimate Sri Lanka
Also try: Imagine Egypt
Website: scottdunn.com

Born in 1986 out of Andrew Dunn's desire to revolutionise ski holidays for the luxury traveller, this global tour operator specialises in high-end holidays, whether clients are wanting the finest private chalet in the Alps, a remote safari lodge in the Okavango Delta or an expedition cruise to Antarctica.

The immersive, seamlessly-run Explorer Kids Clubs in destinations such as Greece and Courchevel 1650 are next-level, looking after children from as young as 4 months old to teens; the Scott Dunn Private network focuses on bespoke travel, one-of-a-kind experiences (such as rare access to the Vatican Archives; teeing off at Augusta National with a former golfing champion) and access to everything from insider storytellers to private castles and yacht charters.



Sierras Chicas hills near Cordoba, Argentina - Cazenove + Loyd Johnny Greig

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cazenove+loyd

Best for: Bespoke, tailor-made journeys with rare access
Key destinations: Kenya, Japan, India, Argentina, South Africa
Signature trip: Luxury Kenya: Exclusive safari + beach
Also try: Japan's Hidden Gems: Two Week Japan Itinerary
Website: cazloyd.com

With a shared background working in Botswana's safari industry, Henrietta Loyd and Susie Cazenove decided to band together in 1993 to create journeys for clients throughout east and southern Africa (Christopher Wilmot-Sitwell joined later, launching the Latin America and Asia divisions). Today, cazenove+loyd covers seven regions of the world, from Kenya and Brazil to Oman's Dhofar Province and the islands of the Pacific. In each, its travel experts draw on first-hand knowledge and close relationships with the people on the ground, gaining access to spectacular places and private properties. One months-in-the-planning trip for a client to Papua New Guinea, for instance, was based around them spending time with several seldom-visited communities, including the Huli Wigmen of Tari and the Kasua people.


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True Travel

Best for: Exceptional knowledge
Key trips: African safaris, Europe, Asia and South America
Signature trip: A Journey Through Japan
Also try: Rwanda: Gorillas & Wilderness
Website: true.travel

Founded by prolific traveller Henry Morley in 2013, True Travel now runs bespoke trips to every continent except North America, with a focus on service and details – and a particular expertise in family trips, from organising Junior Rangers programmes in South Africa to teenage treasure hunts around the Greek islands. "Everything we do is about in-depth destination expertise and service," says Morley. "In a world where technology is all-consuming, our clients deserve exceptional human service" says Morley. "If your flight is cancelled at 2am, we will fix it before you wake up. We'll book you in Room Four over Room Eight, because we've been there, and we know." True Travel is also a B Corp, offering clients the chance to offset double their trip's carbon emissions, and with a foundation working on everything from seagrass rewilding in Scotland to female empowerment programmes in Zambia.



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Key destinations: Maldives, Mauritius, South Pacific, New Zealand and Australia
Signature trip: Australia travel itinerary: Station and Tropical Island Life
Also try: Island hopping in Tahiti
Website: turquoiseholidays.co.uk

When husband-and-wife James and Sue Bell, together with Brian Barton, started Turquoise over two decades ago, they identified Tahiti as an untapped destination for honeymoons – which instantly became their speciality. This was later followed by family travel and once-in-a-lifetime trips such as a recent itinerary that encompassed gorilla trekking in Rwanda, safari in Kenya, Botswana and South Africa, and a beach hideaway in Mozambique. Nothing is sold that hasn't been seen by one of the team (in 2024 they visited over 300 hotels between them) and concepts such as "50 Rooms or Less" which cater to demand from clients seeking out truly authentic places to stay.



Asmat tribe expedition - Steppes Travel

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Steppes Travel

Best for: Far-flung culture
Key destinations: India, Kenya, Ecuador, Botswana
Signature trip: West Papua and Asmat tribe expedition
Also try: Andes to the Amazon self-drive
Website: steppestravel.com

Over 30 years ago, Nick Laing was in the foothills of the Altai Mountains in southern Russia (part of the Great Steppe), listening to folk music and gazing out across the landscape, when he had a lightbulb moment: that others might like to see such remote parts of the world too. Fast-forward to now and B Corp-certified Steppes Travel crafts epic safaris and far-flung cultural journeys. Behind-the-scenes access and unique experiences are a trademark – whether clients are viewing a private Mughal art collection, rhino darting in South Africa or staying in a tented camp as part of a hosted group tour to the Kumbh Mela in India, the largest religious gathering in the world.



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Bhutan - The Ultimate Travel Company Getty Images

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The Ultimate Travel Company

Best for: Going global
Key destinations: India, Kenya, South Africa, Japan, Australia
Signature trip: Peru & The Galapagos
Also try: Canada: In Search of Spirit Bears
Website: theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk

Although The Ultimate Travel Company specialises in tailor-made journeys and small group tours to over 100 countries, the roots of its two directors are in adventure travel. Nick van Gruisen and Rowan Paterson worked as professional guides in Africa and the Himalayas respectively, before setting up Worldwide Journeys & Expeditions, which merged with The Ultimate Travel Company in 2003. A trusted global network of on-the-ground partners opens doors to remote bear lodges in British Columbia, safari camps in Botswana and desert retreats in Chile's Atacama. Closer to home, the company arranges European weekends shaped around art, food and culture, from Bilbao's Guggenheim to the palazzos of Venice.



Sulawesi - Red Savannah Getty Images

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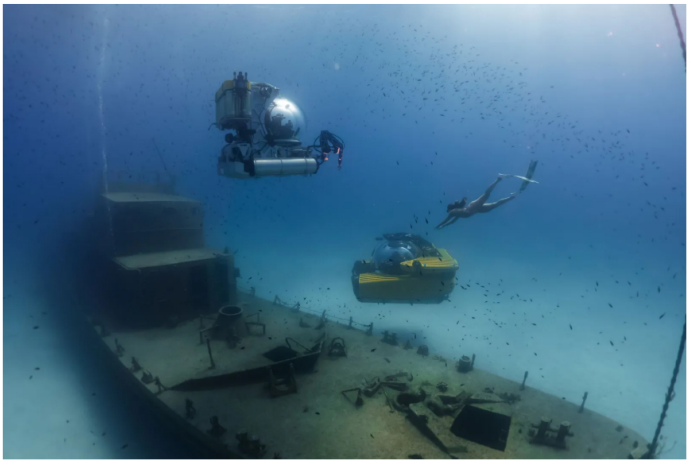
Best for: Culture-soaked specialists
Key destinations: Brazil, New Zealand, Botswana, Vietnam, Indonesia, Italy
Signature trip: Classic Peru & Bolivia
Also try: Flying Safari in Namibia
Website: redsavannah.com

When George Morgan-Grenville founded Red Savannah in 2011, his priority was client-first service and crafting private journeys everywhere from Africa to Indonesia. What makes Red Savannah stand out are its superb specialists, who each have deep-rooted connections and years of experience in their region, meaning they know the best naturalist in Australia, or which guide in Chile suits a family with younger children, or they can find a last-minute chef for a special birthday lunch in New Zealand. A handpicked selection of charter gulets and yachts, and luxury villas in France, Italy, Greece, Spain and the Caribbean are also on their books.



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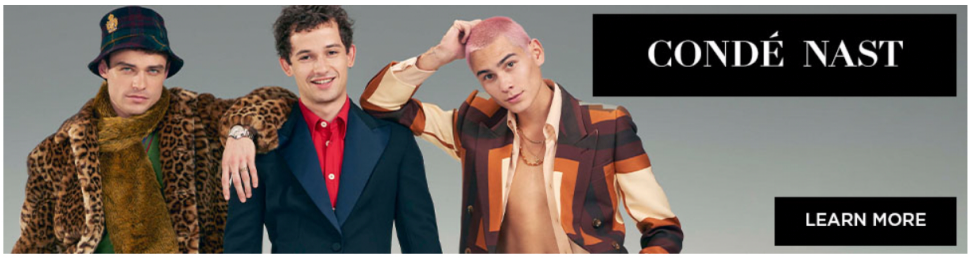
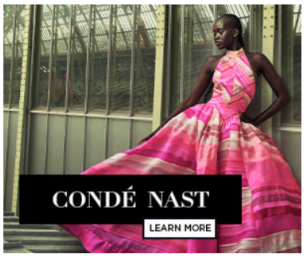


Cookson Adventures

Best for: A true epic
Key destinations: Antarctica, Galapagos, Iceland, Kenya, Norway
Signature trip: Antarctica by superyacht and submersible
Also try: Aurora domes: our luxury Iceland camp
Website: cooksonadventures.com

Henry Cookson's next-level expeditions – such as winning the Polar Challenge race to the Magnetic North Pole in 2005 – were the inspiration behind Cookson Adventures, which he launched 19 years ago. The company creates (and often hosts) around four built-from-scratch, carbon-neutral adventures a month, typically incorporating superyachts, helicopters, submersibles and camps in places where there is little infrastructure such as the Namib desert in Angola or the rainforest in Papua New Guinea. Frontline access to conservation is key: recent expeditions have helped translocate 26 elephants from Namibia to Angola, collar lions in Mozambique and research whales off Svalbard



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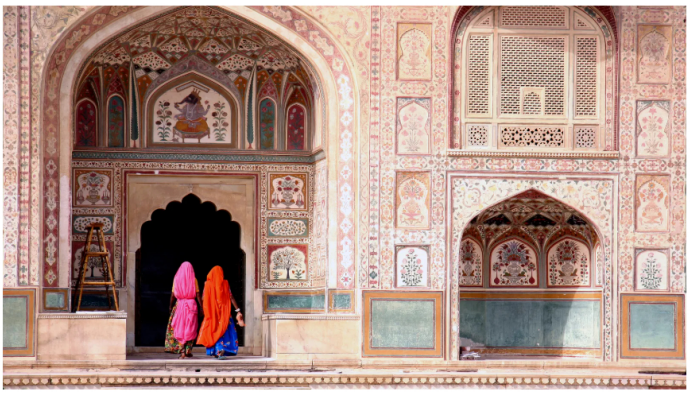

Rajasthan - Audley Travel Getty Images

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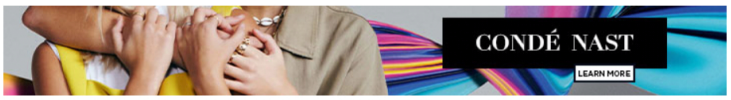

Audley Travel

Best for: Classic tailor-made
Key destinations: Southeast Asia, Japan, North America, South America, Australasia, African safari, India, Italy
Signature trip Classic Japan by train
Also try: Cape Town, Kruger and Victoria Falls
Website: audleytravel.com

When Audley was founded in 1996 (then under the name Asian Journeys), co-founder Craig Burkinshaw had already been offering small-group tours to Vietnam, having fallen in love with the country as a backpacker in the early 1990s. The company offered a new type of travel: individual journeys, designed to match the traveller's passions and preferences. This tailor-made ethos has remained key to the brand, even as it's grown to become one of the bigger UK-based travel brands, covering more than 80 destinations. Audley still offers deep personalisation, though, beginning trips by asking travellers how they want to feel, rather than what they want to see. It aims to connect people to their destinations on a much more resonant level: for example, sorting a Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan trip for a keen photographer, from the sunrise at Agra to the blue buildings of Jodhpur's Old Town. Or even helping families find the villages where their émigré grandparents lived.



Botswana - Abercrombie and Kent Sanctuary Retreats



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Abercrombie & Kent

Best for: Small-group classics
Key destinations: Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Japan, Peru
Signature trip: Kenya Safari in Style
Also try: Private Botswana 2024
Website: abercrombiekent.com

Geoffrey Kent grew up on a farm in Kenya and, together with his parents, set up Abercrombie & Kent in 1962 to pioneer luxury safari travel. Now the tour operator has one of the largest in-house DMC networks in the world, whose in-depth local knowledge and meticulous attention to detail is behind each of the tailor-made trips it arranges to over 100 countries. Small-group journeys (some of the most far-flung led by Kent himself), expedition cruises and private jet adventures are also key areas of expertise. Sister company Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy focuses on initiatives in education, healthcare and conservation.



Jacada Travel Alicia Warner

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Jacada Travel

Best for: Personal journeys
Key destinations South Africa, Kenya, Botswana, Italy, Costa Rica
Signature trip: An awe-inspiring journey to Namibia and South Africa
Also try: Iceland family adventure: wild landscapes and Viking history
Website: jacadatravel.com

Started by Alex Malcolm in 2008 who wanted to showcase a lesser-seen side to Brazil, Jacada Travel now designs one-of-a-kind journeys across all seven continents and 80 countries (since 2020, it has also been part of Wilderness Safaris). Driven by a commitment to purpose-led travel, Jacada pairs expert specialists with an in-country concierge team that can deliver extraordinary access – travellers might find themselves visiting Queen Nefertari's tomb or standing beneath the Sistine Chapel at dawn with the Vatican keyholder. The company's Positive Impact Collection has a selection of rigorously vetted properties and experiences, chosen for their transformational impact not only on the destination or host communities, but on the travellers themselves.



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Chad - Daunt Travel Alistair Taylor-Young

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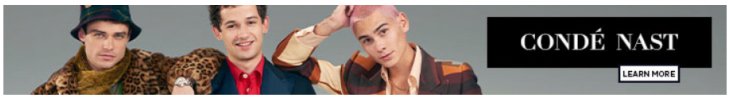

Daunt Travel

Best for: The personal touch
Key destinations Nepal, Italy, Kenya, Mongolia, Greece
Website: daunt-travel.com

Raised by nomadic parents, for Alice Daunt a career in travel was just about inevitable. She has been in the industry for nearly 30 years, setting up her agency just over a decade ago (she describes her approach as "a personal touch with a sense of adventure"), to create individual trips for clients – whether they are seeking out the road less travelled in Chad or a weekend in Venice. She is always uncovering overlooked corners and has access to private homes that few others have on their books. "We are suited to people who are as happy eating at the best table in a three-star Michelin restaurant as they are having a picnic in a bucolic setting on a summer's day," she says.



Skiing in Iceland-Pelorus Pelorus

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BY LAUREN BURVILL

Best for: Adventure luxury
Key destinations: Iceland, Scotland, Norway, New Zealand, Kenya, Morocco
Signature trip: New Zealand Beyond Boundaries
Also try: Morocco experiences inspired by Mission Impossible
Website: pelorustravel.com

Few founders can fuse top-end travel with proper adventure quite like Geordie Mackay Lewis and Jimmy Carroll, two former British Army captains who founded Pelorus in 2017, using many of the skills they learned on long-range desert patrols and helicopter operations. While the focus is on bespoke global adventures planned with military precision, the team are also seriously connected, so can organise everything from stays at Scottish distillers' private manor houses (with access to distilleries not open to the market) to learning stunt choreography with the Mission Impossible teams. Pelorus Yachting organises next-level charters from the fjords to the Falklands, while Pelorus Aviation runs private journeys via helicopter, private jet and group plane charters. The family service offers trips inspired by the imagination of the children, such as sleeping in a futuristic airstream camper and meeting a real-life astronaut.



Elegant Resorts Elegant Resorts



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Best for: Exotic comfort
Key destinations: The Caribbean, Indian Ocean, the Med, Southeast Asia
Signature trip: The Many Faces of North America | Luxury Cruise
Also try: Wildlife, Wilderness and Wellness in British Columbia
Website: elegantresorts.co.uk

Geoff Moss and Barbara Catchpole launched Elegant in 1988 with top-end trips to the Caribbean and especially Barbados on Concorde. While the postcard-worthy Caribbean remains a key focus (there's still an office in Barbados), the brand has expanded across the world – not just a network of the best hotels and experiences, but a concierge team that can add bespoke flourishes and secure in-demand reservations. Recent examples of going the extra mile include organising a surprise proposal for a regular client's granddaughter at the Summit One Vanderbilt overlooking the New York skyline.



Minerva Private

Best for: Uber-exclusivity
Key destinations: worldwide
Website: theminervatravelgroup.com

Founded in 1999 by the ever-immaculate Amanda Teale, Minerva Private has kept its network tight and exclusive ever since. There's hardly any information on the website, and they're notoriously tight-lipped about releasing specific details of their offerings. Clients come by referral, knowing that Teale and her small team can arrange the impossible.



A salt mine in Peru - Black Tomato

Black Tomato

Best for: Epic family trips
Key destinations: Morocco, Japan, Iceland, Argentina, Chile, Italy, US
Signature trip: A Journey into Morocco
Also try: Tokyo and Kyoto: A Japan Family Holiday
Website: blacktomato.com

When they launched in Shoreditch in 2005, Tom Marchant, James Merrett and Matt Smith named their brand after the sweet, juicy black tomatoes of Russia – and their MO has been to bust travel's "same-same" status quo ever since. As well as bespoke global trips that prioritise local community access, the team specialise in attention-grabbing itineraries like their high-end TV-inspired jaunts, including *Yellowstone* and *Ripley*; or family trips based on children's stories, such as *Alice in Wonderland* in which the kids have tea parties and go on treasure hunts in the Oxfordshire countryside.

Voyageurs du Monde

Best for: Extra services
Key destinations: South Africa, the Maldives, Japan, Italy, Sri Lanka
Signature trip: The Ultimate IndoChina
Also try: Namibia Road Trip: Etosha National Park to Fish River Canyon
Website: originaltravel.co.uk

When Tom Barber, Alastair Poulain and Nick Newbury launched Original Travel from a spare bedroom in 2003, their core product was what they called Big Short Breaks. These days, they've gone long-haul, and now go by the name of Voyageurs du Monde, having become part of France's leading tailor-made travel company. But the level of service has only developed, with travellers getting everything from airport meet and greets with fast-track service to personalised app itineraries. The group owns a collection of remarkable properties, from the *Steam Ship Sudan* on the Nile to Gandhi's one-time home in Johannesburg. It also has a global charitable foundation and claims 100 per cent carbon absorption on trips, which makes their excursions extra guilt-free.

Joro Experiences

Best for: Enriching Journeys
Key destinations: Worldwide, brief-led exploration on land and sea
Signature trip: Your Private African Wilderness
Website: joroexperiences.com

Founded in 2017, Joro's three co-founders bring a unique experience set to their deeply personalised trips, which have included everything from intricate multi-year family sabbaticals, polar and marine research expeditions by private charter, and immersive 'world-as-classroom' adventures tailored entirely from a blank sheet. Duncan Over is ex-Army, but also spent years running horseback safaris in the Okavango Delta; while Justin Packshaw, also ex-Army, has done everything from summiting Everest to reaching the South Pole unsupported using a kite-ski. Managing director Henry Comyn is also the

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founder of The Conscious Travel Foundation, and he's behind much of the carbon-neutral B Corp's eco-seriousness, which includes producing impact reports for every trip.

Explorations Company

Best for: local projects
Key destinations: Sahara Desert, Chad, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Angola, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, Arctic, Antarctica
Signature trip: The Great Migration in Tanzania
Also try: The Emperor Penguins of Atka Bay, Antarctica
Website: explorationscompany.com

Founded 35 years ago by Calcutta-born, Kenya-raised Nicola Shepherd, the Explorations Company was shouting about conservation and community engagement on our travels before much of the rest of the world was. Its offering is broad, from Japanese family trips to private mobile camping in the Brazilian Amazon, but the primary leaning is towards nature, and staff tend to be genuine regional experts who've spent serious time in situ. One per cent of trip fees go to carefully chosen local initiatives, and the company has raised more than $5 million for more than 100 projects and initiatives around the world, from the Sumba Hospitality Foundation to the Zambian Carnivore Programme. Clients can visit community and humanitarian projects, and conservation projects (including spending time with researchers of various species, such as safaris in Mozambique's Gorongosa wilderness to learn about its pangolin conservation programme)

The Regional Specialists



Animal cheetah wildlife safari drive savanna nature cat Africa grass Getty Images

Dorsia Travel

Best for: African adventures
Key destinations: Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Botswana, the Maldives
Signature trip: The ultimate safari
Also try: Wildlife Wonders: from Rwanda to Botswana
Website: dorsiatravel.com

Born from a blog Tom Cahalan started over a decade ago, Dorsia Travel specialises in bespoke trips to safari and beach destinations – from private islands in the Maldives and the Caribbean to exclusive-use lodges across Africa. Between them, Cahalan and his wife Lucie (who previously worked in management at The Connaught) spend months each year on the ground, staying at properties they recommend to their mostly US-based clients. "What sets us apart is how personal we keep it," he says. The pair regularly travel with their children, too, meaning they can give first-hand advice on what works for all ages. One recent request was a family's first safari, which included conservation activities for the children, fine dining in the bush and a sunrise hot air balloon ride over the Mara.

Plan South America

Best for: Couples, families and small groups looking for the inside track on Latin America
Key destinations: Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador & Galápagos, Bolivia, Uruguay, Venezuela. Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Antarctica
Signature trip: Road tripping in the Argentine Northwest (Argentina)
Also try: Where the Andes meet the Amazon (northern Peru)



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Website: plansouthamerica.com

Founded by former journalist Harry Hastings in Buenos Aires in 2006, Plan South America explores the furthest reaches of Latin America, building an enviable network of guides, conservationists, chefs, artists and local characters along the way. Now operating between London, Buenos Aires and Santiago, the company creates individual private journeys for travellers that go beyond the familiar luxury circuit. With an emphasis on cultural immersion, rare access and meticulous planning, its strength lies in knowing which lodge is worth the detour, which guide will bring a place to life and where to find authenticity. Experiences range from tracking jaguars in Brazil's Pantanal to exploring remote Andean communities and private sailing expeditions through Patagonia and Antarctica.



Lioness with cub in the Kruger National Park South Africa Getty Images

Mahlatini Luxury Travel

Best for: Meaningful encounters
Key destinations: South Africa, Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe
Signature trip: Bucket list Africa
Also try: Classic Cape Town, winelands and Kruger
Website: mahlatini.com

Sparked by a friendship formed while exploring South Africa, Mahlatini Luxury Travel, was founded in 2002 by Greg Fox and Chris Goldring, curating bespoke journeys across Africa, Asia, and beyond. As a certified B Corp, they balance high-end luxury with purposeful community and conservation encounters, so that guests can go on transformative journeys beyond the picture-postcard version of a destination. Travellers may be invited to track rhinos in Namibia, support community-led conservancies in Kenya, or connect with changemakers at non-profit Uthando. No two itineraries are the same but all are based on firsthand insight.

Africa Travel

Best for: Tailor-made safaris, multi-generational trips, honeymoons
Key destinations: South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Seychelles, Mauritius, Mozambique
Signature trip: Icons Of Africa – Cape Town, Victoria Falls and the Masai Mara
Also try: Ultimate Gorillas
Website: africatravel.com

Through decades of visiting Africa, the team at Africa Travel have built strong relationships with local guides, hoteliers, the best chefs, community chiefs, gallery owners and winemakers to enhance clients' experiences. From their Cape Town office they can arrange experiences such as private after-hours gallery viewings with artists; tastings with the actual vintner not the wine estate's PR person; a safari with one of the last master trackers; a private meeting with Nelson Mandela's former prison guard, an authentic and genuine meeting with the Himba people, or a lecture from South Africa's foremost botanist.



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Wajag Island, Selpele, West Waigeo, Raja Ampat Regency, West Papua, Indonesia Getty Images

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Selective Asia

Best for: An Asian deep-dive
Key destinations: Japan, Indochina, Bhutan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India
Signature trip: Sri Lanka Reimagined
Also try: Mountains and monasteries: Nepal and Bhutan
Website: selectiveasia.com

Nick Pulley spent his student loan on flights to Asia, organised half-moon parties on Koh Pha Ngan, and lived in a wicker hut on a Thai beach for a year before eventually starting Selective Asia two decades ago. These days, the B Corp company arranges privately guided travel anywhere from India at its westernmost boundary to Japan and South Korea in the east. This includes lesser-visited destinations such as West Papua and the Southern Spice Islands, say, or trekking in Tibet with a focus on community connections. In the past year, the team has visited nine countries to uncover lesser-known corners and crafting new ways of visiting better-known highlights away from the crowds and minimising impact.

Red Dot Tours

Best for: Highly personalised journeys for curious travellers
Key destinations: Sri Lanka, India, The Maldives, Bhutan & Nepal
Signature trip: Boutique Sri Lanka – ancient cities with specialist guides, tea plantation hikes with local experts, tracking leopards and time on the coast, whilst staying in pretty boutique hotels
Also Try: Journey into Ladakh – Himalayan villages, Tibetan culture, mountaintop monasteries, Ladakh feasts and remote mountain passes
Website: reddottours.com

Red Dot Tours creates personalised, private journeys for curious travellers to Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan. Founded over 20 years ago, and with an office in the UK and Sri Lanka, the company applies deep knowledge and local connections to create journeys that aim to create genuine and unique connections that travellers might never otherwise have encountered, from a dinner with a leading conservationist to flying kites with a Jaipuri family from their rooftop. Red Dot supports as many in-country jobs as possible, such as running an all-female sales team in Sri Lanka where women are traditionally under-represented in the tourism industry. It also works with the Tea Leaf Trust and The Conscious Travel Foundation.

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Rooftop bar at Lighthouse Ahangama, Sri Lanka - Ampersand Travel Matthieu Salvaing

Ampersand Travel

Best for: The haute Subcontinent
Key destinations: India, Japan, Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia, South Africa
Signature trip: A Luxury Tour of India: Forts, Palaces & the Taj Mahal
Also try: Indonesian Indulgence: Exploring Java, Bali & Sumba
Website: ampersandtravel.com

Raised in Rome with Sri Lankan and English roots, James Jayasundera's summers were spent pinballing between Italy, Sri Lanka and India, receiving an early education in food, culture and the art of travel. After years of crafting elaborate trips for family friends, he founded Ampersand Travel in 2003. More than two decades on he is still designing itineraries, advising clients and leading escorted tours himself). The team are masters at dealing with the unexpected, from scrambling an additional private plane when guests exceed the luggage limit to finding a last-minute venue after unexpected rain in Jaipur for a birthday (part of a recent 70th celebration involving 10 parties in 10 palaces). Tailor-made cultural journeys across India, Japan, Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia and South Africa are their speciality, alongside honeymoons, wildlife adventures and multi-generational getaways. James also owns 7 Koppies, a boutique hotel in South Africa's Cape Winelands, featured in Condé Nast Traveller's 10 best hotels in the region.

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Up Norway

Best for: Bespoke, immersive, luxury Scandinavian journeys
Key destinations: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Svalbard, Gotland, Faroe Islands
Signature trip: The Arctic Circle Express
Also try: Arctic Women: Braver by Nature
Website: upnorway.com

Founded in 2016 by native Torunn Tronsvang, this Oslo-based, B Corp-certified specialist trades opulence for hyper-authentic, deeply felt regional connection. Up Norway crafts personalised journeys that strike a balance between untamed nature and Scandinavian craft and design, such as sauna sessions beneath the Northern Lights. But its particular strength is its ability to offer clients private access, such as rural farm experiences, encounters with local artists, and artisan food and drink tastings, including visits to a cider producing family by the Hardangerfjord. It's all made possible by Tronsvang's relationship with local insiders, built over decades.



Upper Hunza - Wild Frontiers Alistair Taylor-Young

Wild Frontiers

Best for: Cultural adventures
Key destinations: India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia
Signature trip: The original Pakistan Hindu Kush Adventure
Also try: Uzbekistan: Land of Silk Road Treasures
Website: wildfrontierstravel.com

The inception of Wild Frontiers began with Jonny Bealby's 1996 expedition across India, Afghanistan's border regions and northwest Pakistan – following in the footsteps of Peachy Carnehan and Daniel Dravot from Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*. When he came to Pakistan's valleys of the Kalash – the last pagan tribes of the Hindu Kush – he was so taken by their hospitality that he stayed for three months and vowed to bring travellers back to this beautiful region. In 1998, he created a version of the Hindu Kush trip he runs to this day, and Wild Frontiers was born. Ever since, it's become an exemplar of immersive, sustainable and community-driven travel – running global trips as far afield as Namibia, Colombia, Mongolia and Japan, but with the brand's true heart still in the region that Bealby fell for almost 30 years ago.

Greaves India

Best for: In-depth India
Key destinations: India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives
Signature trip: Boutique palaces and forts of regal Rajasthan
Also try: Culture and coast of central and east Sri Lanka
Website: greavesindia.co.uk

Managing director of Greaves India, Tanya Dalton, is an unrivalled expert on the Indian

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Managing director of Greaves India, Tanya Dalton, is an unrivalled expert on the Indian subcontinent. The company was set up by her grandfather in the 1970s, then led by her mother, Mehra Dalton, whose British and Indian heritage and unwavering belief that "well-curated luxury travel is possible within the Subcontinent" made it the renowned tour operator it is today. No two trips for clients are ever the same, whether she is arranging for an author or historian to act as a guide for the day, booking a private mobile camp or curating an itinerary to lesser-known, less-accessible regions. Greaves has offices in Delhi and Mumbai and, crucially, it handles its own on-the-ground logistics. Dalton says, "AI has led to a growth in in-depth enquiries and bookings. Clients are asking for more intrepid, layered itineraries than ever before. It means we can go deeper into some of the lesser-known northeastern states, or beyond the capital of Leh in Ladakh, where on-the-ground expertise really counts."

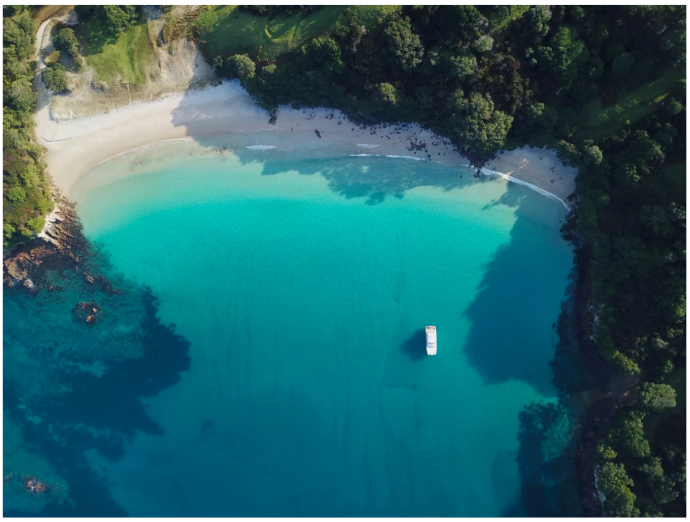


South Africa - Journeys by Design Tswalu Kalahari

Journeys by Design

Best for: Bespoke safaris
Key destinations: East and southern Africa, central Africa
Signature trip Off the Map: a journey through Eritrea
Also try: An adventure to Chad and Central African Republic
Website: journeysbydesign.com

Established in 1999, Journeys by Design is an independent travel company that designs private safaris to East and Southern Africa. They arrange 7-star private lodges, private jets and helicopters, but things get more intriguing with their Rare portfolio, which features one-off, privately guided specialist experiences – like staying with the nomadic Rashaida on Eritrea's Red Sea Coast, a helicopter expedition in South Sudan, mobile camping in Ethiopia or visiting the rainforests of Gabon. As well as providing a high-end travel design service, they also offer bespoke philanthropic advisory services, enabling clients to combine travel with philanthropy.



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Best for: In-depth Oz
Key destinations: Australia, New Zealand, Fiji
Signature trip Australia: icons and insights
Also try Australia and New Zealand: Supreme Luxury Lodges
Website: southern-crossings.com

Australia-based Stuart Rigg and New Zealand-based Sarah Farag have turned Southern Crossings into one of Oceania's foremost luxury travel specialists for unique journeys in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. As hands-on owner-directors, their meticulously crafted trips are shaped by a personal passion for the destinations, deep local connections fostered over four decades, and an understanding of travellers' evolving aspirations. Aided by their travel design teams in Sydney and Auckland, Southern Crossings arranges extraordinary experiences – whether it's securing private access to remote wildernesses, arranging intimate encounters with leading chefs and conservationists, or curating behind-the-scenes cultural moments.



Haa, Sangwa Camp - MyBhutan

MyBhutan

Best for: Insider's Bhutan
Key destination: Bhutan
Website: mybhutan.com

Matthew DeSantis initially learned about the Land of the Thunder Dragon at school in Connecticut, where he became friends with Bhutanese prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, son of then king Jigme Singye Wangchuck. A systems engineer by training, he moved to Bhutan in 2010 to build technology for the country's tourism industry, and three years later founded MyBhutan, making his name by providing unprecedented access and first-of-a-kind journeys through regions that welcome very few guests – which is exactly what he still does today. He is also behind the mobile Sangwa Camp, a collection of luxury tented camps that open only in valleys receiving less than 1% of the country's tourism. DeSantis remains committed to incubating community-benefiting nonprofit initiatives.



Eagle Huntress - Eternal Landscapes Mongolia Marios Forsos

Eternal Landscapes Mongolia

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Best for: Mongolian immersion
Key destination: Mongolia
Signature trip: Untamed Mongolia
Also try: Altai & Eagles with Altai Festival
Website: eternal-landscapes.co.uk

Mongolia-based Jessica Brooks and Turuu were a tour leader and driver respectively when they found out that the company they were working for was being restructured – so the pair decided to go into business together. That was in 2010. Since then, they've specialised in limited departure micro-tours (with a maximum of six guests) run by female guides that support local communities and immerse travellers in the country's culture, landscapes and way of life. The hands-on duo design every trip, which is shaped by a slow-travel philosophy and deep local knowledge. Travellers might trek in the Altai with a Kazakh eagle hunter or explore steppe, sand dunes and river valleys, staying with herding families, experiencing contemporary Mongolia through its people and everyday realities.



Deliciously Sorted Ibiza

Deliciously Sorted Ibiza

Best for: Ibiza on speed-dial
Key destinations: Ibiza, Formentera, Mallorca, Menorca
Website: deliciouslysortedibiza.com

Founded by Serena Cook in 2002 who recognised a gap in the market when Ibiza was still relatively undiscovered, this is the White Isle's original concierge service. Since then, it has evolved into a one-stop shop for clients holidaying across the Balearics – whether they want a blowout birthday party for 500 guests, a last-minute table at Pacha or a charter yacht. Long-standing relationships all over the archipelago mean she and her multi-lingual team have everyone on speed-dial (tennis coaches, plant-based chefs, dive instructors, masseurs, sound healing gurus), plus The Fincadelica Collection, a raft of the most fabulous villas, countryside fincas and heritage palaces for rent.



Peru - Dehouche

Dehouche



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Dehouche

Best for: Off-track South America
Key destinations: Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia
Signature trip Brazil North Coast Adventure
Also try Peru for families
Website: dehouche.com

When friends Paul Irvine and Henry Madden went on holiday to Brazil in 2003, they realised that travel agents weren't catering to those who wanted to get off-the-beaten-track but with a high level of service, based on insider knowledge and access. The pair quit their careers in finance and spent the next year scouting out tiny pousadas, secluded beaches and seaplanes, and now specialising in high-end, tailor-made travel across South America. Most clients come to Dehouche for active trips (which the team operate in-house), packed with special, tailor-made experiences: a workshop with carioca designer Gilson Martins say, or purpose-built zero-impact glamping in the Lencois Maranhenses National Park. Being on the ground is still key to their business model, although now they've widened the net to South American countries more broadly.



Italy - Bellini Travel Emilie White

Bellini Travel

Best for: La dolce vita
Key destination: Italy
Website: bellinitravel.com

When royals, the great and the good want to really get the inside track on Italy, Emily FitzRoy is the first name they call. She's been doing this for more than a quarter of a century, and is considered a world-leading expert on travel and hosting in the country – with the inside track on the best boatmen and guides from Syracuse to the Dolomites. Her secret, which is shared through word of mouth, is fairly simple. "We only suggest people and places that we love". Recent highlights include a week-long trip for one client with Professor Tom Henry, a world-leading expert in Raphael, to see the artist's finest masterpieces in private hands or in after-hours museum and gallery tours across the country – all while staying and eating with the very best, of course.



Indigenous dancer at Kahnawake Pow Wow, Kahnawake, Quebec - Entrée Destinations Entrée Canada



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Entrée Destinations

Best for: Remote wilderness lodges
Key destinations: Canada, Alaska
Signature trip: Stories of Canada Newfoundland and Labrador
Also try: Clayoquot Sound Experience
Website: entreedestinations.com

Marc Telio was just 24 when he launched Entrée Destinations in 1994, after wondering why Canada didn't have the sort of thoughtful boutique travel brands he'd found elsewhere. Today, Entrée is considered the key luxury travel brand for Canada, and in 2005 started offering Alaska trips too. They offer Canadian and Alaskan adventures of all stripes, but much of the brand is rooted in pristine wilderness locations, and trips have become especially supportive of Canadian Indigenous communities – with Telio becoming an advocate and partner for Indigenous tourism groups, and the brand launching its Stories of Canada series which focuses on deep immersion into local communities.

Amakuna

Best for: Insider-led Colombia
Key destination: Colombia
Signature trip: 14-night Magical Colombia
Also try: 21-night Authentic Colombia
Website: amakuna.com

Marc Beale and Boris Seckovic founded Amakuna in 2014 after leaving careers in finance and real estate in London to move to Medellín for love, and falling for Colombia along the way. The Colombia-only luxury travel specialist designs private, tailor-made journeys, each planned and managed by its own Medellín-based team. Every trip begins with a conversation with the founder and draws on deep local knowledge and long-standing relationships with exceptional guides, independent hoteliers, artisans and cultural insiders, from horseback safaris with cowboys in Los Llanos to ultra-discreet Cartagena celebrations on private islands. Behind the scenes, the team handles the complexities of travelling across Colombia and provides round-the-clock local support.

Aracari

Best for: Latam eco-luxe
Key destinations: Peru, Bolivia, Galapagos
Signature trip: Peru's Spellbinding South
Also try: Extraordinary Peru and Bolivia
Website: aracari.com

Having left the corporate world in London for a year-long Asian jaunt, Peruvian-born Marisol Mosquera had the idea of setting up a boutique travel operator in the homeland back in 1996. Aracari has been a pioneer in sustainably driven luxury on the continent ever since, especially in Peru, where it has published its own guide to green stays in the country – while Mosquera has become a prominent voice on travel issues in the country, such as opposing plans for a new airport in the Sacred Valley of the Incas. But though Peru remains the heartland, Aracari runs hyper-local and community-focused trips as far afield as Argentina to the south and Colombia to the north.

The Special Interest Operators





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Family of three skis down slope at ski resort, snowcapped mountains in distance Getty Images

Powder Byrne

Best for: Next-level ski holidays
Key destinations: Switzerland, Japan, Italy (Dolomites), Austria, Spain (Andalusia)
Signature trip: Zermatt ski resort
Also try: Arosa
Website: powderbyrne.com

When Rory Byrne founded Powder Byrne in 1985, his mission was to redefine the luxury family ski holiday. Now led by his son Edward, it's known for masterminding tailored trips, not just in the Swiss Alps (although these are still the most popular), but beyond, such as Japan. For starters, clients can take PB Private Flights from Heathrow to Zurich (or a PB Private Jet), then a chauffeur-driven transfer to their resort. There are ski programmes for all age groups and abilities, from the PB Crèche (for children aged four months to three years) to Piste to Profession, a gap-season programme for adults aged 18+, as well as ski guiding for adults. Their Private Nanny & PB Private Tutors are also available for school age children. Additionally, a dedicated Client Concierge hand-picks the best dining and après-ski experiences, and matches families with carefully chosen hotels and private properties, backed by long-standing and exclusive partnerships.

The Luminaire

Best for: Extraordinary access
Key destinations: worldwide
Signature trip: The Way of the Samurai, Japan
Also try: The Land of the Thunder Dragon: wilderness in Bhutan
Website: theluminaire.com

The Luminaire creates unique experiences for curious and culturally hungry travellers. Founded by Adam Sebba, they have formed the Guild of Experts: a collective of leading explorers, photographers, chefs, art curators, historians, archaeologists, musicians who offer unrivalled experiences and access to extraordinary places. Journeys might include exploring a Cambodian temple by torchlight; visits to an art restoration laboratory in Venice. The company's big selling point is their ability to secure private access to normally inaccessible places. For example, off-market islands, sold-out exhibitions, off-limits sections of Versailles. As the global partner behind Mandarin Oriental's Exclusive Journeys programme, The Luminaire designs immersive experiences, such as tours of secret cellars in the Champagne region, or stargazing and natal charting in the Moroccan desert with an expert astronomer.



Londra Palace Venice

Kirker Holidays

Best for: Cultural city breaks
Key destinations: Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Morocco
Signature trip: Venice: Londra Palace
Also try: The Kirker music festival in Madeira
Website: kirkerholidays.com

Providing a balance of comfort and cultural interest – that's the ethos at Kirker Holidays.

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which has 40 years of experience in delivering short European breaks and longer tailor-made trips through a local lens, from recommending independently owned hotels to native resident guides for a private city walking tour. Culture is a priority and clients can take advantage of the complimentary London-based Kirker Concierge service to book everything from opera and concert tickets to restaurant tables and skip-the-queue museum passes. Additionally, a team member is available around the clock to assist with any itinerary changes that may arise.



Large herd of African elephants walking forward along a path in the dry lake bed of Amboseli National Park Getty Images

Aardvark Safaris

Best for: Lesser-known Africa
Key destinations: Kenya, Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia
Website: aardvarksafaris.com

Operating in Africa and the Indian Ocean since 1999 (Alice Gully joined in 2004 and is now the sole owner and hands-on CEO), Aardvark Safaris has a knack for helping clients achieve their initial holiday wish list while also introducing them to magical, out-of-the-way places. This stems from the brilliant team of experts, who have all either previously lived or worked in Africa, as well as the fact that they visit new properties and favourite lodges every few months. All trips are tailor-made, and most clients – 85 per cent – are repeat customers or referred through word of mouth.



Giraffes herd in savannah Getty Images

Expert Africa

Best for: Expert safari experience
Key destinations: Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Zambia, Tanzania
Signature trip: Reedbuck Safari
Also try: Perekani Walking Trail
Website: expertafrica.com

For more than 30 years, the Expert Africa team has seriously impressive credentials (including managing director Chris McIntyre, who co-authored the first travel guide to Namibia and Botswana in English in 1990). Their team, which includes zoologists, professional guides and former camp managers, crafts tailor-made safaris across Southern and East Africa and can recommend not just the best big-name reserves but

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small, characterful camps – most of which they work with directly (meaning no need for ground handlers). One safari for a recent client, for instance, was built around legendary guides and hosts such as zoologist and wild-dog expert Nick Murray at a private bush camp in Mana Pools and Dave Carsen, an engaging storyteller and one of Zimbabwe's elite professional guide trainers.



Pond side at Chiva-Som Hua Ha Hin, Thailand Chris Schalkx

Healing Holidays

Best for: Wellness
Key destinations: Middle Europe, Southeast Asia, India, the Indian Ocean
Website: healingholidays.com

A global explosion of interest in wellness has meant it can be hard to keep up with where to go for a health fix. But whether it's spiritually adjacent Ayurveda, anti-ageing, emotional healing or lab coats and fasting, it's a solid bet that Healing Holidays will offer the best of the best trips. Founded by Frances Geoghegan in 2004, it's become the leading authority in the most booming corner of high-end travel – thoroughly testing all spas and wellness resorts for quality, and using decades-old contacts to secure the best rates and the best therapists for clients. A listing with HH is a sign that a spa has made it, joining names like VivaMayr or Ananda in the Himalayas – making it a wellness equivalent to the Michelin guide as well as a tour operator.



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Byway Christyn Reyes/Pexels

Byway

Best for: Flight-free holidays
Key destinations: Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Benelux, Scandinavia
Signature trip: Journey to Italy
Also try: Switzerland via the Glacier Express and Bernina route
Website: byway.travel

Corp-certified Byway is the first entirely flight-free travel platform. Based on the principle that travelling through the world is better than flying over it, the company takes the faff out of organising complex multi-stop itineraries by train, boat and bus – such as Switzerland via the Glacier Express, Spain's ancient cities or the Amalfi Coast in Italy. Almost all trips are bespoke, with on-demand WhatsApp support throughout and insider recommendations on everything from handpicked hotels to what to see in each destination and bag storage at stations.

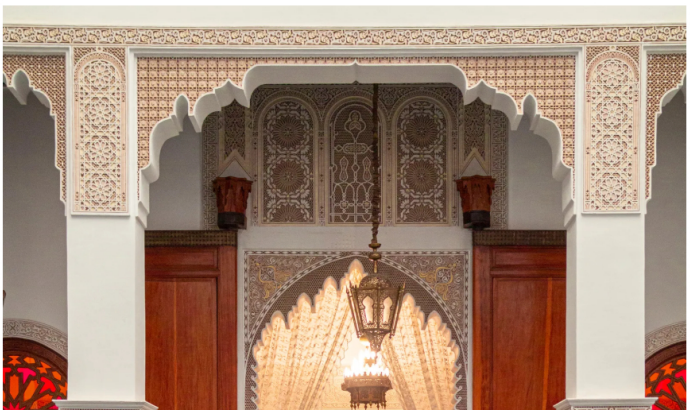


Kenya - Coral Tree Travel Getty Images

Coral Tree Travel

Best for: Family safaris
Key destinations: Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana
Signature trip: Kenya safari and beach holiday
Also try: Luxury Namibia safari
Website: coraltreetravel.com

The only UK tour operator to specialise solely in luxury, tailor-made African safari for families, Coral Tree Travel was founded in 2021 by Mike and Tess Kelly (who met in Zanzibar) to share their experiences with others and plug a gap in the market. Everyone on the team is both an Africa expert and a parent, so understands exactly what makes a successful bush adventure for all ages (they also work with the top safari operators in each destination, which they visit regularly). Right now, 60 per cent of families booking with them are choosing Kenya and Tanzania, with self-drives in Namibia for those with teens also popular.



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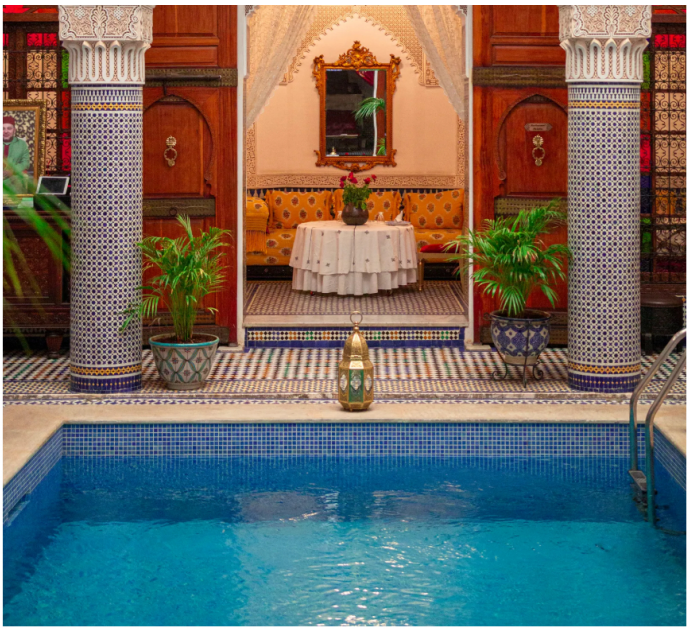

Inclusive Morocco



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