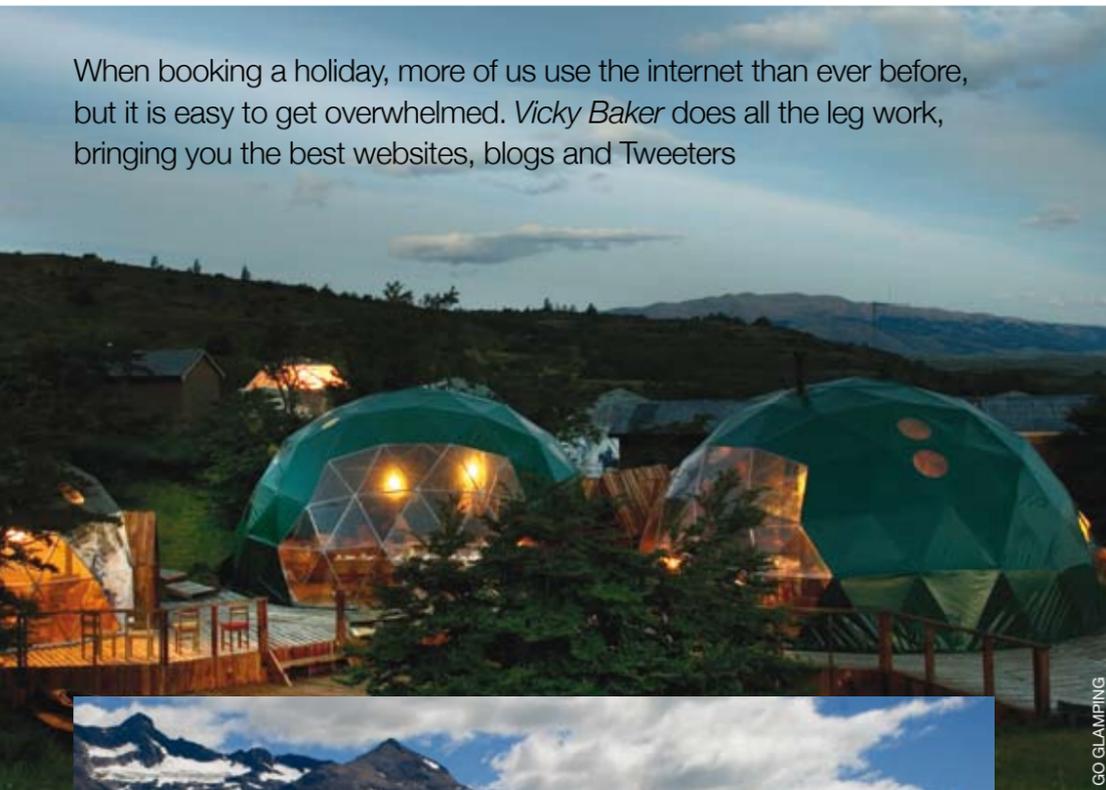


UNT@NGLE THE WEB

When booking a holiday, more of us use the internet than ever before, but it is easy to get overwhelmed. *Vicky Baker* does all the leg work, bringing you the best websites, blogs and Tweeters



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TWENTY-NINE days and 12 searches on 22 different travel sites: that's how long it takes to book the average holiday online. That sounds like a lot of hard work to us. The worldwide web is wide indeed, but it can be a whole lot easier to manage if you know exactly where to find the sites that suit your tastes. Read on and let *Matchbox* guide your way.

BEST LUXURY TRAVEL SITES

• globorati.com

This clean, stylish website bills itself as “the latest word in luxury travel”. Founded by Mark Jolly, a contributing editor at *Condé Nast Traveler*, it is continually churning out stunning hotels, spas and

experience trips, all neatly divided into popular categories (family, active, beach, eco, etc). Refreshingly, *Globorati* also knows when to step back and take a jibe at luxury travel gone mad, such as one-night package at the Four Seasons Miami costing \$50,000 (the massage uses lotion infused with ground diamonds).

• thecoolhunter.co.uk

The Cool Hunter claims to be “roaming the UK and the globe so you're in the know”. The travel section could be more regularly updated, but be sure also to look under the hotel and restaurant headers for round-the-world tips. The photos – which showcase the best in architecture and design – are frequently jaw dropping. Meanwhile, in the off-line world, you'd be wise to pick up a copy of their book – *The World's Coolest Hotel Rooms* – and get ready to drool.

• goglamping.net

A couple of years ago, you couldn't move in the UK for yurts. Well, not literally, but certainly in the travel press. Not just a one-season wonder, the trend is still going strong and expanding to all corners of the world. *GoGlamping* pulls together a selection of special places in remote locations, from a glass igloo in Patagonia to a tipi on the Algarve. One of the newest additions is *Karijini Eco Retreat*, which offers eco tents in the wild Australian west.

• globalista.co.uk

Amid our singing the praises of the net, let's not forget there's a whole lot of useless rubbish on it too. *Globalista* aims to save you the task of wading through it by producing quality all-you-need-to-know reports on the world's major destinations (over 170 at last count). Annual membership is £99, while a single report costs £15, cheaper than your average travel guide. Other services include an “Ask *Globalista*” travel advisory (available to members and non-members) and a handy weekly round-up of the best cuttings from the UK travel press.

BEST FOR BOUTIQUE HOTELS AND SPECIAL PLACES

If you want to knock that average of 22 sites down to size in one quick hit; simply visit anyone of these six: i-escape.com, mrandmrsmith.com, chicretreats.com, perfectescapes.com, sawdays.co.uk and oneoffplaces.co.uk. Five minutes browsing the photos on any of these sites is enough to overload you with inspiration.

BEST DESTINATION BLOGS

According to a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal*, the US is now home to over 452,000 professional bloggers. They don't specify how many of these are travel blogs, but they're certainly on the up. Also on the increase are those who blog for love, not money. These writers are so passionate about their hometowns they can't help but share all their insider knowledge. Tune in to their updates before you take a trip and you'll arrive fully clued into the local scene.

Paris: Badaude.typepad.com is wonderful blog, not least for its series of “address book” tips, but also for its fabulous illustrations by the artist behind it.

Berlin: Berlinlovestory.com shares the discoveries of singer *Andrea McEwan* in her adopted home.

New York: You can't get more local than nycbloggers.com, where (almost) all the city's bloggers are arranged by subway stop.

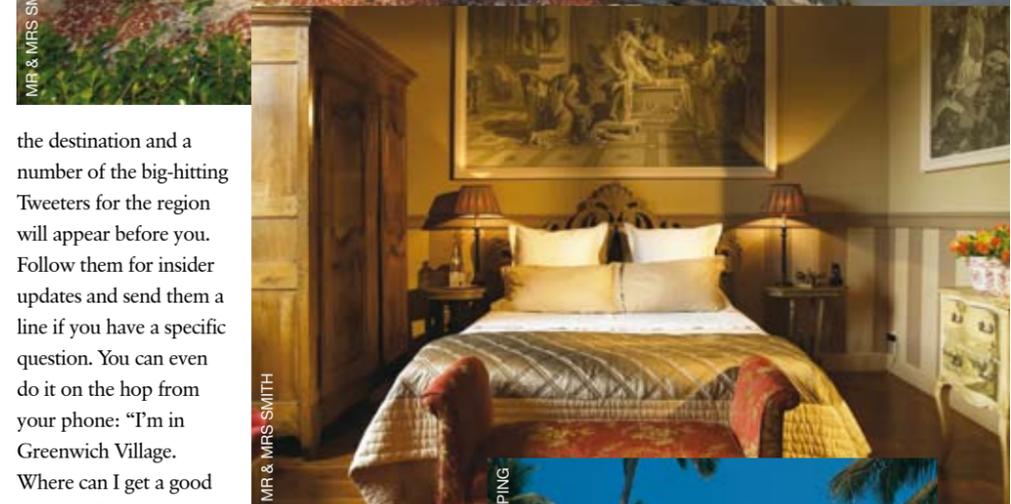
Across Europe: For a one-stop shop for European cities, try spottedbylocals.com, which handpicks writers that live in the cities and speak the lingo.

BEST LUXURY TWEETERS

Have you succumbed to Twitter yet? Or, more than that, have you realised its potential to aid travel? Sure, there are users out there who delight in telling the world that they “had a lovely sandwich for lunch”, but there are also others sharing black-book secrets on exactly where to find the best lunches worldwide. And dinners. And hotels. And clubs. And bars. And just about anything you could imagine. Build up your list of followers, then save some of those time-consuming internet searches by simply throwing out a question, like “Anyone know a good hotel in San Francisco?” Twitter is a direct line to all manner of worldwide experts, frequent travellers and clued-up locals. If you're heading somewhere in particular, then go to wefollow.com, type in



MR & MRS SMITH



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the destination and a number of the big-hitting Tweeters for the region will appear before you. Follow them for insider updates and send them a line if you have a specific question. You can even do it on the hop from your phone: “I'm in Greenwich Village. Where can I get a good bagel?” Here are some luxury travel folk you should be following:

• luxury_travel

“Blogging on anything and everything to do with luxury travel”

• mylittleswans

“The premiere club for sophisticated family travel”

• luxtravel

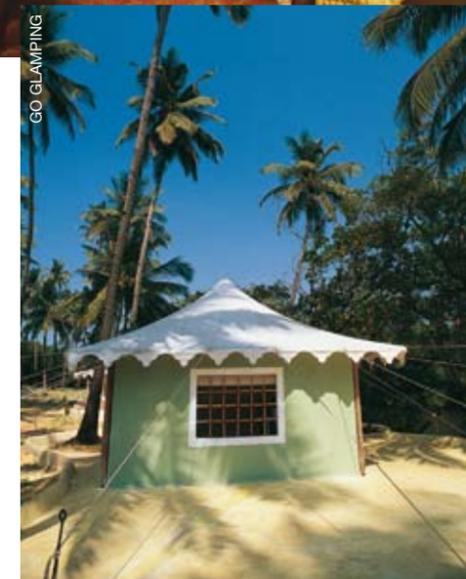
“Luxury travel consultant/expert on design hotels, exotic destinations and gay travel”

• kiwicollection

“Guide to the best luxury hotels, resorts, spas and destination experiences in the world”

• smithhotels

“The luxury travel and boutique hotel experts Mr & Mrs Smith”



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