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If you could go
anywhere in
the world,
where would
it be? >>

BY LOIS FRIEDLAND

Imagine your surprise at bumping noses with a sea lion pup in the Galapagos. Feel your adrenaline surge as you smack an inflated polo ball from atop an elephant in India. Envision a procession of Incan priests bearing sacrifices as dawn slowly lights up the Temple of the Sun in Peru's Machu Picchu.

Dream vacations don't have to vanish when your eyes open. With proper planning, you can create a journey that will last a lifetime. The memories are invaluable, the experiences unique, and fulfilling your wildest dreams is, after all, what life is all about.

the ultimate GETAWAY

Every person's definition of "The Dream Trip" is different. Some want to sit on an island beach and sip tropical drinks, while others want cultural experiences in locales such as Romania, or the Croatian coast. Others seek unusual experiences, such as an Antarctic cruise to view Emperor penguins, riding horses in Mongolia with tribes that herd reindeer, or hiking to Mount Everest's base camp.



Whatever your dream trip may be, the keys to locking it up are in the planning, whether you choose to create your journey from scratch or purchase a package from a tour operator.

Sherry and Giovanni Guglielmo created their extravagant getaway from scratch with the help of travel consultant John Clifford of International Travel Management. "We felt like a VIP the entire time," Sherry says. "This goes beyond even the constant upgrades. Giovanni said his expectations far exceeded what he imagined, keeping the dream holiday even more memorable. He decided the destination with John, so the whole research and preparation was really personalized and interactive," Sherry recalls.

Clifford offers his own key to creating a dream holiday from scratch. "Make it a 'wow' trip by choosing a destination that will create life-long memories," he recommends. "Pick a remote island in the Maldives

ÜBER TRIPS

Sherry Guglielmo wanted to explore exotic locales, stay in trendy hotels in interesting cities and be treated like a "celeb." Her Italian fiancé, Giovanni Guglielmo, worked with a travel consultant to plan the honeymoon around places and activities he knew she would enjoy. The result: They married in Rome, flew to Sydney, Australia for a few nights at the Establishment, a chic 33-room boutique hotel, then journeyed inland to explore Uluru (Ayers Rock), one of the world's largest monoliths, and the nearby Olgas. Stopping overnight in Sydney at the Medusa, a hotel set into an 18th century Victorian townhouse, they caught a flight to Bali where they divided their time between a seaside hotel and the ultra luxurious Amandari near Ubud, the country's cultural center. Sitting on lounge chairs by the pool, they could watch locals walk along a path leading from a small village, through Amandari grounds, to a temple. **Last stop:** Hong Kong for some shopping and dim sum!

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instead of Hawaii." In other words, think outside the box and explore nonconventional locales and experiences.

If you are going to plan a dream trip from scratch, consider using a dedicated travel agent or travel consultant. "Find an agent who cares and who wants to know about you," says Sherry. "If they ask you what your budget is right away, forget it. Look for one that takes a consultancy approach and shows complete transparency when presenting options."

You can use the Internet to brainstorm and explore different ideas that you might have. But, while it's easy to book ordinary trips, hotels and flights online, you're better off taking the ideas gleaned from the Internet to a travel consultant who can then put your dream trip together—especially if it includes more exotic locales, such as Eastern Europe, Oceanic islands or Africa.

Some travel consultants charge based on the amount of time it takes to craft the trip. But, as Clifford explains, "When you book on the Internet you are in a sea of millions. When you book with a travel consultant you are paying to be recognized as an individual and see things through the back door."

Agents and consultants (especially Virtuoso members) typically have access to preferred rates for properties that could land you in a nicer room than you'll find on your own. They can also book inter-country travel more easily, especially with airlines that still use paper

EXTRAVAGANT TRIPS ON MODERATE BUDGETS

For those of us on more limited budgets there are many ways to have a luxurious trip for far less money. My husband and I, for example, found one of our top-two dream trips online at the luxurylink.com auction site—a wonderful source of ideas and discounted packages. We wanted to walk among the ruins and photograph llamas at Machu Picchu and watch giant condors fly in the world's deepest canyon. We bought a Peruvian vacation that included overnights at Orient Express hotels in Lima, at the Monasterio in Cusco and the Sanctuary Lodge at the entrance to Machu Picchu (so we could get up early and watch the sunrise between two mountain peaks and light up the ruins inch by inch). Other inclusions were extravagant meals, private transfers at every stop and the most outstanding part of the trip: a three-day tour in a chauffeured car to an ecolodge on the rim of Colca Canyon, where we watched the giant condors soar. The cost was about half the going rate that several luxury tour operators were charging for just the Lima/Cusco and Machu Picchu stops. Using frequent-flyer miles to travel first class added yet more comfort to this memorable experience.

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tickets. A good travel consultant will ask you what type of lodging you prefer (small or large property, upscale or budget, trendy or remote) and then suggest different options. Whether you choose an apartment in a medieval Italian hamlet or the Georges V in Paris, a good agent will send you online links to review the properties, and give you details about the level of service you can expect.

If, on the other hand, you're looking for a pre-packaged dream vacation, such as an around-the-world private jet tour or an African photography safari, you're going to find plenty of companies offering similar trips. If you don't have a direct recommendation, explore on the Web. Once you've narrowed it down to a few companies, call and ask questions: What

is actually included in the package cost? What's the backup plan in case of a problem in a foreign country? If the trip doesn't include everything you want, can you add extra excursions?

Even if you're on a moderate budget, consider adding a few VIP options to make your trip special. After traveling halfway around the world, for example, and dragging your exhausted body out of customs in a new country, seeing a private driver wave a sign with your name on it is an instant stress reliever.

Choose a particular experience that you really want to enjoy—whether it's a tour of the Vatican or exploring Machu Picchu—and hire a private guide. The former lets you skip the hours-long line of tourists snaking around the Vatican and focus on the art and history that most appeals to you. The latter allows you to ask all the questions you want to make sense of the elegant but crumbling ruins, and move along at your own pace instead of hurrying to keep up with a group. You can learn more in a day from a private guide than a lifetime of reading books,



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FAMILY ADVENTURES

Want to include the children on a dream adventure? Searching for whales and dolphins while kayaking in Alaska's Icy Strait, taking a helicopter to the Mendenhall Glacier for a day of hiking and watching the snow-frosted mountain peaks anchored by green valleys through train windows as you chug along the Yukon Route is a trip that ensures a memorable family experience. This "Southeast Alaska: Glaciers, Whales and Wilderness Adventure," from Austin-Lehman Adventures, is just one of many great trips that will bring you and the children together. Other family adventures might be rafting the Grand Canyon or the Salmon River in Idaho, hiking the colorful canyons in Utah's National Parks, or going much farther afield to China or Europe.

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TIPS for trips

Make it WOW!

Think outside the box and create a truly unique experience that you'll cherish forever.

Get Help

Use the Internet to generate ideas for your journey, but hire an agent or consultant to help you put it all together.

Splurge

Add a few VIP touches to your trip, to really make it special.

Get a Guide

Choose a certain experience you really want to enjoy and hire a private guide.

Insure It

Travel insurance will cover everything from a canceled trip to a medical emergency. Don't leave home without it.

and the memories you walk away with are well worth the extra cost.

No matter how you choose to plan your getaway, travel insurance may be one of your wisest pre-trip investments, especially if you're booking an expensive vacation package. Policies vary considerably, so review them carefully before putting any money down. Ask questions such as: Will a policy cover money paid up front if you can't go or have to come home early for a valid reason? Will your money be refunded if the tour operator goes bankrupt? If you get sick during the trip, will the policy cover medical expenses and even an emergency flight home?

Taking the time to talk, research, plan and save is the key to making your own dream trip a reality. And, remember, you're not planning the trip of a lifetime, because there can always be more. You're planning a lifetime experience that will invigorate your soul and fill your chalice with rich and unique memories. So, start planning. The wonders of the world await!



DRIFTING THE DAYS AWAY

Wave to the little girl strolling with her family along the tow path lining the canal, as your barge slowly floats through France's wine country. Sip Burgundy while lazing on a deck chair as you make your biggest decision of the day: Do we explore that quaint village alongside the Loire, take a bike ride on a country lane or just keep sitting on the deck, watching the world slide by? River barging is growing in popularity as a slow-paced way to explore new locales. This style of river cruising comes in comfortable to luxurious barges, a diet-crushing flow of gourmet food and wines, and evenings spent talking with life-long and just-made friends, during leisurely meals.

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