

conciierge

THE INSIDE TRACK

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Rent your own island on the Maldives with chefs, butlers, spa therapists and a yacht with a full crew at your beck and call

THE NEXT LEVEL

Been There, Done That

A NEW ERA OF TRAVELLERS HAS GIVEN BIRTH TO A ÜBER-LUXE CATEGORY OF BESPOKE TRAVEL WHERE THE WORLD TRULY BECOMES YOUR OYSTER



TO A TEE

Customised, luxury travel experiences are all about getting to know the client thoroughly, from their priorities, purpose of the trip and educational background to their health and fitness level and unique interests

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'VE BEEN everywhere and done everything you can think of? In a booming era of luxury travel, many have been skiing in the Alps, traipsed to Machu Picchu and dived the Great Barrier Reef. So what's next?

"Anyone can book a first-class seat or five-star hotel," says John Clifford of International Travel Management, which specialises in bespoke journeys. "But [you don't get an] intimate connection with the people, sights, culture and cuisine. That's the hallmark of bespoke travel – you see the world from the inside." The baby-boomer generation, in particular, has acquired immensely personalised interests that result in bespoke journeys. "Clients may rent an entire castle or hill-top town in Tuscany for a special anniversary, instead of giving jewels or a car. Experiences can be relived in your heart and mind throughout your entire lifetime," says Clifford. He has arranged private tango lessons with Argentina's finest dance instructor, safaris to the Australian outback, a meeting with an Aboriginal shaman and private entry to St Mark's Basilica and the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice, ending with cocktails on the museum rooftop and private cooking lessons with a Michelin-starred chef.

Remote Lands is another group that does custom journeys to Asia, and has been known to arrange stays

at a maharaja's palace in India, meetings with the last known cannibals in Indonesia, horseback riding through the mountains of Bhutan and flying by helicopter to see the jungles of Cambodia. President Catherine Heald says, "Our clients are those who have travelled extensively and now want extraordinary experiences."

Remote Lands also specialises in private jet travel within the region. "You can visit more destinations, and more remote ones, in a shorter period of time," says Heald. "We had a client fly from the US around the world with his extended family, stopping in 13 cities in 9 countries in three weeks." They also have special services such as providing Internet access wherever possible and fitness equipment so you can work out wherever you wish and a private chef, beautician or professional photographer to accompany you throughout the trip. VIPs can also request security personnel and bodyguards.

But getting everything you want comes at a steep price. Clifford says excluding plane fares, guests pay about US\$2,000 a day covering guides, private entry or experiences and transportation. Accommodation is additional, ranging from US\$1,500 to US\$15,000 depending on locale and exclusivity. "But the market for this hyper-luxe category is growing. Private entries to certain sites, such as the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, can cost between US\$2,000 and US\$6,000."

WORDS: TAMARA DE GUZMAN; IMAGES: INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL MANAGEMENT