

To the ends of the earth in extreme luxury

How the super-rich are organising expeditions that don't scrimp on style

Susan d'Arcy and Jeremy Lazell Published: 13 December 2015



£85,000: ballooning in the Arctic offers serious dinner-party cachet (David Briggs)

The idea of a superyacht based in the Antarctic might seem laughable. But a specialist charter firm is doing brisk business down there, with high-net-worth clients happy to splash out £400,000 or more for a week's polar exploration that doesn't mean missing out on life's little luxuries, such as spa pools and Balinese massages.

VIP, it seems, now stands for Very Intrepid Person. "These days, it's all about visiting pristine destinations that nobody else can get to — and bespoke everything." That includes personalised Inuit parkas in the Arctic, rare vintage wines on safari in the Serengeti and underfloor heating at Egyptian wilderness camps.

Geoffrey Kent, has spotted the trend and launched a series of ultra-exclusive expeditions. The first will be to Palau, in Micronesia, next year, re-creating Jacques Cousteau's trip in the 1960s. It costs up to £125,000pp for nine days. "It's

a new kind of journey,” he says, “taking intrepid travellers to unexplored places accessible only by private jet.”

If you want a piece of the action, and have a spare few zeros on your bank balance, here are eight places your megabucks can get you in 2016 — with a more realistically priced (if not necessarily cheap) alternative in each case.

Cruising Antarctica

The Antarctic is hardly crowded, but the elite adventurer needs to be certain theirs are the very first footprints in a particular patch of snow. Enter the 253ft superyacht *Legend*, launching next May and ice-strengthened to power through to the places other boats cannot reach, in a style they can't begin to match.

It will have vast suites, a spa, a movie theatre and a pool. Walking with emperor penguins and kayaking with leopard seals are incredible experiences — but readily available to other holidaymakers hereabouts, so *Legend's* superior toybox includes an on-board helicopter (an extra £188,000 a week), for an albatross's-eye view, and a three-person submarine capable of diving to nearly 1,000ft. Go on, it's only another £62,000.

The damage

A week costs £390,000 for up to 26 people. Allow £65,000 for fuel and food, depending on how partial guests are to foie gras and Château Pétrus. Flights are extra; a private jet from London would add £115,000pp.

The cheaper alternative

Cruise on a small vessel across the Drake Passage from Ushuaia to the South Shetland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula, with excursions on foot and by Zodiac and kayak to see seals, penguins and whales. Prices start at £7,950pp for 12 nights, full-board, including flights.



£266,000: the 194ft *Senses* yacht is your home with a helipad in Thailand (Tim McKenna)

Exploring the Arctic

Baffin Island, in Canada, is one of the most inhospitable environments in the world. Unless you're super-rich, in which case tents have 10ft-high cathedral ceilings and hot showers to create a warm, fuzzy bubble after a hard day's kayaking or sledding in search of polar bears and narwhals. Heli-skiing and scuba diving are tasty titbits to slip in at the next dinner party, but for real cachet, it has to be hot-air ballooning wearing your welcome pressie: a bespoke Inuit parka.

The damage A guided nine-day trip costs up to £85,000pp, including all meals and activities, but not flights.

The cheaper alternative Visit the Arctic Watch camp, 800 miles northwest; see Oliver Thring's feature overleaf.

Archaeology in Egypt

For decades after its discovery in 1918, the Abu Ballas pottery hill baffled scientists. How did 400 large earthenware jars come to be in the middle of the Western Desert? The riddle piqued the interest of six Canadian businessmen-cum-Indiana Jones wannabes. They wanted to investigate the theories for themselves, assisted by three leading archaeologists, but didn't want to slum it.

Enter the bespoke operator Brown + Hudson, which laid on a private jet, helicopter transfers and a desert camp that was less boy scout, more Roman emperor, with muslin-draped beds, silk rugs, hot showers and — courtesy of a special metal lining on the tent and a game chap with a shovel and a pile of coal — underfloor heating through the cold desert nights.

The damage

Their eight-day tour can be replicated from £135,000pp, all-inclusive, including private jet travel and chopper transfers (brownandhudson.com).

The cheaper alternative

Join Dr Neil Faulkner in Jordan, visiting Roman ruins, Byzantine churches, Amman, Petra, the Dead Sea and TE Lawrence's desert camps at Wadi Rum. A week starts at £1,895pp, B&B, including flights.



£13,000: camping it up in Tanzania **Outback Australia**

Western Australia is 10 times the size of the UK, with a population of just 2.5m — vast tracts are untouched, but the area locals prize as true wilderness is the Bungle Bungle Range, an expanse of otherworldly black-striped sandstone towers and gorges within the Purnululu National Park, east of Broome.

Most visitors arrive by road, a bumpy five hours on dirt tracks, and stay at campsites with no showers. The wealthy explorer, however, books one of the nine minimalist suites at the Homestead at El Questro, perched on a clifftop above the Chamberlain River, where freshwater crocodiles swim. Then they take helicopter forays into the Bungle Bungles' least visited corners, with just a guide and a champagne picnic for company.

The damage

A 21-night all-inclusive trip, with three nights at El Questro and stays at Lizard Island, on the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru and Kangaroo Island, starts at £46,995pp with Bridge & Wickers. The price includes domestic travel by private jet and first-class international flights.

The cheaper alternative

This three-week trip from Adelaide to Darwin takes in Kangaroo Island, Alice Springs, Uluru, Watarrka National Park and Broome, where you pick up a 4x4 for a nine-day journey through the Kimberley region and Kakadu National Park. Prices start at £3,249pp, including flights and car hire.

Diving in Micronesia

Geoffrey Kent has been globetrotting for more than 50 years, so when he says Palau's 250 islands, east of the Philippines, are among the most unsullied on earth, who's going to argue? His little black book gets guests access to the coral reefs of Seventy Islands, a Unesco World Heritage Site closed off since 1956, as well as exclusive use of Jellyfish Lake — it's just you and a million (non-stinging) jellyfish bobbing about in the water. Your base isn't bad, either. Saluzi is a 227ft superyacht with slick suites, a spa, a nightclub, an open-air cinema and a huge inflatable water slide to ensure a big splash whenever you take a dip in the South Pacific.

The damage

Nine days start at £96,000pp, all-inclusive, sailing from Hong Kong on November 13.

The cheaper alternative

A live-aboard holiday on a traditional eight-berth *pinisi* sailing ship, diving the wrecks, reefs and inland waters of Palau, and visiting Jellyfish Lake, starts at £4,145pp for seven nights, full-board, including two nights on Palau and flights.



£30,000: drop into New Zealand (German Dimyaninov) **Sailing in Thailand**

You don't have to sail far from the southern Thai coast to see why the privileged love this stretch of the Andaman Sea. It is dotted with uninhabited tropical islands, each a bouquet of palm trees with a ribbon of bone-white beach. Your only neighbours will be turtles, and you're more likely to spot a dugong than a tourist in the water. Your temporary home? Senses, a 194ft motoryacht with a range of 6,000 nautical miles, creamy Philippe Starck interiors and a crew of 14, including top-rated chefs and dive, kitesurf and wetbike instructors.

The damage

A week starts at £266,000 for up to 10 people. "Budget" £65,000 or so for food and fuel. Flights are extra, too.

The cheaper alternative

Island-hop for a week in the Andaman Sea. Cabin charter (skipper and crew) on an 82ft catamaran starts at £1,715pp, full-board; bareboat charter (no crew or provisions) on a 33ft yacht starts at £1,600pp, including flights, fuel and fees.

All-action New Zealand

It's three parts 007 glamour, one part Bear Grylls grit on this adventure across South Island. Explorers are literally parachuted onto a golden lick of beach outside Moeraki to start an epic journey that has been carefully plotted to avoid roads wherever possible.

It's mainly hiking over pristine slopes, passing impossibly turquoise lakes, sheep, trout-filled rivers, sheep, mint-green fields and yet more sheep. Sometimes a raft

will magically appear as some white water hoves into view, or gleaming mountain bikes will be discreetly propped up at the start of a hair-raising 6,000ft descent.

At other times, the hard miles are covered in fancy Polaris off-road vehicles, or by hitching a lift in a helicopter to reach the next luxury mountain cabin before sunset. After 250 miles and three mountain ranges, the west coast and Haast fill the horizon. If you're filthy rich, there's only one way to celebrate — a musician serenading you in your cabin.

The damage

Seven nights cost £30,000pp, all-inclusive, through Momentum Adventure. Flights are extra.

The cheaper alternative

This guided group trip treks, kayaks and rafts across South Island, visiting Kaikoura, Abel Tasman National Park, Cape Foulwind, the Southern Alps and Fiordland, with optional heli-hiking and whale-watching. Prices start at £5,075pp for 11 nights, including flights, most meals and activities.



£96,000: Palau and the coral reefs of Seven Islands via a 227ft superyacht (Antonio Husadel) **Tanzanian safari**

Ever enjoyed the cherry flavours of a Nederburg Auction Private Bin Italian Blend 2001? Probably not, unless you've stayed at Singita Grumeti. Everything about these safaris is exclusive, so the reserve bought every bottle of this sought-after wine, to be savoured along with big-five sightings within its perfectly preserved 350,000 acres of the Serengeti National Park.

That's just 23,000 acres shy of the Masai Mara, but whereas the Kenyan reserve has more than 7,000 beds, Singita Grumeti has 100, spread across five hideaways. The best is Singita Explore, a mobile camp where "roughing it" means a custom-built tent with Italian leather chairs, from which you can watch the wildebeest migration with not another soul to spoil the spectacle.

The damage

Four nights at Singita Explore and three at Singita Serengeti House start at £13,450pp, all-inclusive, flying in business class.

The cheaper alternative

Big-five sightings are all but guaranteed on safari at the Ngorongoro Crater and Lake Manyara and Serengeti national parks. From £3,345pp for six nights in lodges and a tented camp, full-board, including flights, game drives and park fees.