

# Peak Season

Conquer these spectacular mountain ranges with the help of high-end travel specialists.

By Kristen Ordonez

Himalayas



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Satisfying one's "wanderlust" or the intense desire to travel, can be as simple as exploring an unknown forest or mountainous region, letting the mysteries of the rugged landscape unfurl with every step. For those looking to venture even farther over deep hills and cascading cliffs, while also experiencing the culture of the surrounding areas, there are several expertly designed travel tours that take adventure-seekers around the world through these beautiful mountains.

For those who hear the call of the mountains often, the most notable mountain range in the world exists in the rural Eastern region of Nepal, known to all as the Himalayas, with Mt. Everest as its reigning commander. This mountain range and the countries and communities its presence touches offers memorable experiences for those embarking on exploring the area.

TCS World Travel, a pioneer in the private jet industry, offers luxury jet expeditions to more than 200 destinations, including the Lands of Merchants and Maharajas tour that also highlights iconic land and mountain-scapes.

"I'm excited about our Lands of Merchants and Maharajas itinerary because we're giving travelers an opportunity to explore South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula in new ways," says Shelley Cline, TCS World Travel President. "Our guests won't just see the Himalayas, they will fly helicopters to one of the highest lodges in the world to take in spectacular views of the mountains and enjoy a champagne breakfast with climbers who have summited Mt. Everest."

This remarkable excursion offers more than just the invaluable views of the Himalayan Mountains. Guests can immerse themselves in nine different destinations along the way on their 22-day journey and experience the vibrant cultures of places like Athens, Oman and Nepal, as well as the legacy of India's Maharajas, who built palaces and imposing fortresses that have

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# Oberoi Vanyavilas



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withstood the test of time.

Smithsonian Journeys, a custom travel tour program under the umbrella of the Smithsonian Institute, offers “Himalayan Kingdoms,” one of the most engaging tours in the region, which focuses on Bhutan and the communities in and around the Himalayas. Himalayan Kingdoms is an enthralling journey to Nepal and Bhutan that takes travelers through historic temples and rural villages to amazing architectural sights, all within the mountains.

Travelers get fully rounded experiences, from staying in luxury hotel suites in stunning cities like Kathmandu, to trekking through the beautiful Kathmandu Valley to the hilltop Kopan Monastery, where monks and nuns welcome seekers and visitors to meditate and learn about Mahayana Buddhism, heavily practiced within the region. Guests who take part in this trip also get the chance to stay in the homes of locals, creating a much richer experience as they learn how the landscape and mountains play such a pivotal role in the lives of the people living in the communities.

Out of the plethora of tours offered by the organization, Himalayan Kingdoms is one of the most highly recommended tours, according to Vice President of Program Management Karen Ledwin. “Bhutan

is one of those gems that I really think people should take advantage of visiting if they have the opportunity,” she says. “The beauty of going to places like Bhutan and Nepal is that the mountains serve as natural barriers to protect [these people] ... their lives are very much tied in with the landscape.”

Throughout Europe are iconic mountain ranges, from the Swiss Alps to the Pyrenees, all of which offer their own atmosphere, almost feelings that captivate those who endeavor to experience them. The Great European Adventure, hosted by Smithsonian Journeys, is a riverboat/railway tour that not only reflects the sensibilities of the mountains, but also the town’s guests travel through as well. The dual cruise/train venture is the perfect combination from which to see both the natural landscape and the storied towns that inhabit the mountains, not to mention the historic trains that guests get to ride along the way. From the river cruise along the canals of Amsterdam, Germany and France, to the rolling hills of Switzerland, this type of program is open to any and everyone according to Ledwin, and provides incredibly stunning scenery of dramatic views that surpass expectations.

Brown + Hudson also caters to the luxury travel market with custom tours in places all over the world. One of the company’s

# Sarek National Park



PHOTO COURTESY BROWN + HUDSON

# Queen Charlotte Sound



# Amsterdam



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# Cairngorm National Park



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mountain-specific tours starts in the hills of Sweden in Sarek National Park, known to many as “Europe’s Alaska” or the “last wilderness in Europe.” Travelers can either walk or fly by helicopter across dramatic mountain and glacier peaks and meandering deltas, all the way to Skierfe Mountain.

From there, guests will experience luxury treatments, from butler service to meals prepared by a private chef, all within the comfort of a stunning luxury tent posted right on the mountain with breathtaking views of Rapa Valley. Lucky guests might catch glimpses of the northern lights as they learn from leading astronomers about the galaxies above, while others can take part in more intense activities like paragliding off the 400-meter vertical steep from the mountain. Home to the native, reindeer-herding Sami people, guests will be welcome into the homes of indigenous families to learn about their lifestyle and the natural environment of the area.

Across the channel lie the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland where another excursion led by Brown + Hudson awaits, as well as intensive knowledge about the region and its history. Guests will be immersed into the culture of the region in various ways, from learning about the art of crafting whisky through a molecular

mixologist workshop with access to a private whisky distillery, to an evening of folklore, myths and legends brought to life in the company of a professional storyteller. Other activities range from guided hikes through the Cairngorm Mountains, salmon fishing in the River Spey, and taking a private charter around Loch Ness.

As part of Smithsonian Journeys’ Active Journey collection, “Hiking New Zealand’s South Island,” is a more intense adventure that offers wilderness hikes, sea kayaking and white-water rafting to some of New Zealand’s most amazing landscapes in a matter of two weeks. Most of the hikes range from four to seven miles a day with a lot of variety in between in regards to activities and places to see.

Those venturing on this adventure trek two days along the Queen Charlotte Sound take wilderness hikes in Arthur’s Pass National Park and the Southern Lakes district, learning about various ecosystems of the South Island. Wildlife sightings are endless, from birds unique to New Zealand to seal colonies and a 6,000-acre sheep farm in Abel Tasman National Park. The incredible splendor of the mountains is what continues to earn the South Island such a strong reputation, one that does not disappoint, according to Ledwin.