



Travel with a difference

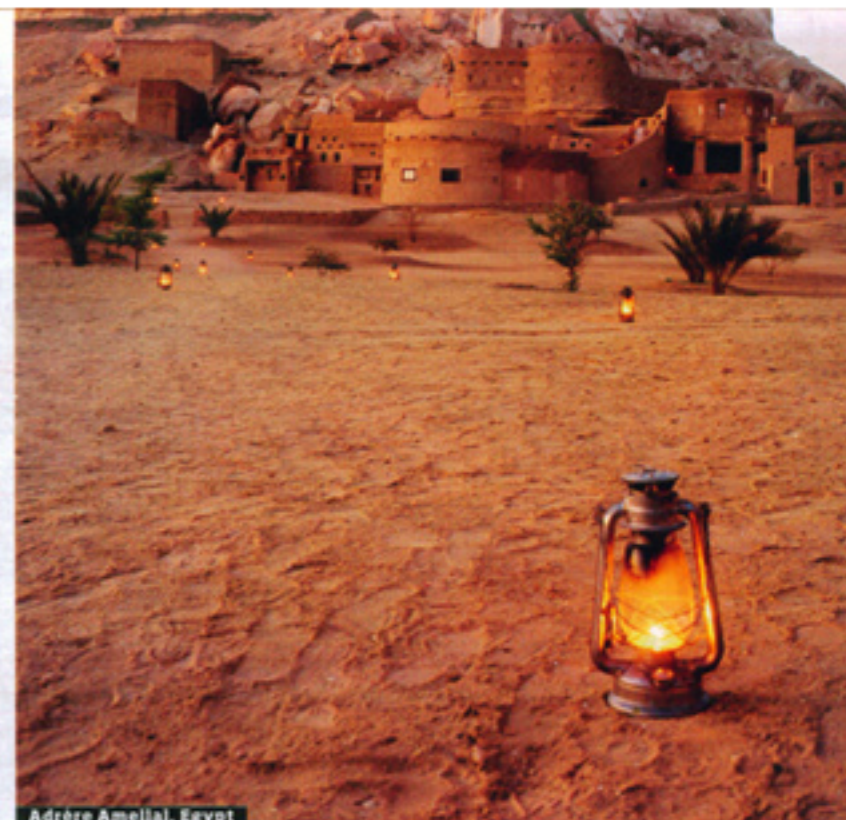
THE WOW FACTOR

When we say trip of a lifetime, we mean it. *Luxx* reveals the travel wonders of the modern world, including the enchanting Moilinere Underwater Sculpture Park in Grenada, above

REPORT James Collard



Sasaab game lodge, Kenya



Adrère Amellal, Egypt

Game on

What kind of things make us say, "Wow!?" It could be anything from a stunning swimming pool to seeing wildlife in its natural habitat – or better still, a combination of the two, such as when you're swimming in the pool at **Sasaab** and see baby elephants splashing around in the Ewaso Nyiro river below you. With its panoramic views, hip, Moroccan-style interiors and amazing service, Sasaab is an exceptionally well-appointed game lodge. It belongs to the Carr-Hartleys – an Anglo-Kenyan family who have been involved in the game and then wildlife sector since the first Carr-Hartley arrived in Kenya almost a century ago. In other words, they know what they're doing.

Boutique beauties

Someone else who clearly knows what she's doing is **Andrée Putnam**, the doyenne of interior design who, back in 1984 – along with **Steve Rubell** and **Ian Schrager** (of **Studio 54** fame) – conceived what is often called the first boutique hotel, **Morgans**, in New York. These days, the hotel is the flagship of the Morgans hotel group. The group recently got a bit of stick for its makeover of the **Royalton** – in its heyday, the New York hotspot – and replacing **Philippe Starck's** famous decor. But if they got it wrong at the **Royalton**, they seem to be

getting it right at **Morgans**, where Ms Putnam herself is in charge of the refit. We're especially excited about the 19th-floor duplex penthouse suite – the perfect spot for a drinks party with a wow.

At the other end of boutique in scale, although not in excellence, is **Agua Barú** – a gem of a hotel on a narrow spit of land facing the **Rosario Islands**, Colombia, easily accessed by an exhilarating speedboat ride from the delightful Spanish colonial port of **Cartagena de Indias**. There are just three rooms, two of which are halfway up a hill above the vast, spectacular, communal 'living room' – a symphony in bamboo. But best of all is at the top of the hill. There are a few more steps to climb, for sure, but it's more like a villa than a hotel room, with a little belvedere that affords stunning,

360-degree views over to the islands and the other side of the peninsula. **Agua Barú** is sited in a little bay – originally deserted, but, since it was built, emerging as a cool place for rich Colombians to have a little island getaway.

If you fancy a spot of sun worship, the hotel's launch will drop you off at the nearest beach and collect you when you're ready to decant your sun-kissed self into your private pool back at base. Original Travel suggests combining a few days here with a few in **Cartagena**, staying in the **Sofitel Santa Clara** and pottering around the streets of fine old houses and churches.

Your own desert island

An island that looks set to be one of next year's most exciting destinations is **Nikoi**, off the coast of Indonesia. Hitherto a private home, next year it will become a stunning, very high-end little hotel – and perhaps the last word in barefoot luxury. Stays on **Nikoi** will be managed by **Original Travel**, but don't call them now to arrange a trip – they're not taking bookings yet. Watch this space.

Life on the ocean wave

In the meantime, you could do a lot worse than boarding the **Silolona** – a handsome schooner that cruises Southeast Asian waters, including

the seas around Indonesia. It's a proper sailing boat and as fine a craft as **Captain Aubrey** ever sailed, but with pretty well all the creature comforts and mod cons to which the old salt was unaccustomed, including cool, contemporary interiors. A week of balmy breezes filling the sails and star-packed skies will set you back a little more than six grand per person, all in.

If that all sounds too mellow for you – and time on a boat not spent catching the critters of the deep, hook, line and sinker, is time wasted – look no further than a trip described as "a sporting safari like no other". You'll sail around the largely unspoilt **Andaman and Nicobar Islands** in the **Bay of Bengal** on a fishing experience, during which you can go jigging, bottom fishing, trolling and popper casting. We're not sure quite what all that means, to be honest, but if that's your thing, you doubtless do know – and it's presumably a whole lot of fun (and fish, too).

Alternatively, how do you feel about life under the ocean waves? Here's an interesting alternative to the typical diving holiday – swimming at the **Mollinere Underwater Sculpture Park** in **Grenada**, constructed by sculptor, diver and naturalist **Jason de Caires Taylor** on a seabed site previously

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A once-in-a-lifetime chance, the publicity bump informs us. Not in mine, is my immediate response. But it's clearly a unique trip.

If you crave simplicity without the nomadic life, head instead to the eco lodge at **Adrère Amellal** overlooking **Lake Siwa** in **Egypt**, one of many interesting hotels in the **Epoque** collection. From a distance, this extraordinary place looks more like a village of mud huts, but rest assured: this is high-end simplicity, with good food as well as the stars above to inspire you.

Let it snow

If that's not exactly slumming it, neither is the new **Artemis villa** in **St Anton**, opening next year. The hexagonal, four-storey chalet has six bedrooms with great views, en suite bathrooms and wonderful sound systems, plus its own 12-seater cinema and what sounds like a lovely mix of traditional Alpine with contemporary style – including a dining room with a floor-to-ceiling wine wall. So, along with the sauna and steam room, there's no shortage of a warming tippie when you're back from the slopes.

Alternatively, fans of gorgeous **St Moritz** have been raving about the newly refurbished **Carlton** hotel – in particular, its spa and spectacular outdoor pool. Wow indeed. **LS**

GETTING THERE

Rooms at **Sasaab** start from £298 per person (from £597 per double) based on two sharing, inclusive of food, drinks, game drives and camel walks; call 00 254 20 892234 or visit www.sasaab.com. **Virgin Atlantic** flies from London Heathrow to **Nairobi** daily, with fares from £449 inclusive of taxes; call 08705 747747 or visit www.virginatlantic.com. Upper-class fares start at £2,983. From **Nairobi**, **Boskovic Air Charters** fly to **Sasaab** from £200 per person based on four sharing a C206 aircraft or from £140 per person based on ten sharing a C208v; call 00 254 20 606364 or visit www.boskovicaircharters.com.

To book a room at **Morgans Hotel**, call 00 1 212 686 0300 or visit www.morganshotel.com. Rooms start at £270; the penthouse at £1,577. Three nights in the **Sofitel Santa Clara** in **Cartagena** and two nights in **Agua Barú** cost from £1,220 per person based on two sharing, including international and domestic flights and transfers. Call 020-7978 7333 or visit www.originaltravel.co.uk.

A week aboard the **Silolona**, offering everything imaginable, costs from £6,300 per person, including flights from London to Indonesia, onward connections by air and private transfers. Call 020-7306 4646 or visit www.theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk.

The **ITC Classics/Botham & Miller Fishing Experience** includes seven nights and eight days' fishing on the **Reef Blue**; one night in **Delhi**, all flights, transfers, food and beverages on board and taxes in the **Andamans**, from £5,470 per person. Call 01244 365400 or visit www.itcclassics.co.uk. **Kuoni's** exclusive Concierge Service can co-ordinate a diving or snorkelling excursion

to the **Mollinere Underwater Sculpture Park** from £33 per person. A week in a pool suite with a spacious terrace and private plunge pool at the nearby **Calabash** starts at £1,569 per person on a bed and breakfast basis, including flights and transfers. Call 01306 747008 (or 01306 744774 for the Concierge Service) or visit www.kuoni.co.uk.

The **Aman Hotels** tour starts from £5,699 per person based on four travelling together and staying in twin or double rooms, and includes flights with **British Airways**, accommodation (full board in **Aman-i-Khás** only), transfers, game viewings and a jeep excursion to **Bhangarh**. Call 020-7487 9111 or visit www.greavesindia.com.

To enquire about the **Migration of the Berbers trek**, call 020-7371 1113 or visit www.onthegotravel.com. The trip starts at £600, which includes flights and full board. To book at the **Adrère Amellal**, call 00 1 305 538 9697 or visit www.epoquehotels.com. Rooms start at £56.

A stay at the **Artemis villa** starts at £1,875 per adult for seven nights on a full-board basis, including **British Airways** club-class flights, private transfers, the services of a chef and host, six five-course dinners with wine, full English breakfasts and afternoon tea. **Laurent-Perrier** champagne will also be served on six evenings. Opens December 14.

A seven-night stay in a Junior Suite at the **Carlton St Moritz** on a bed-and-breakfast basis starts at £2,205 per person, including flights from London with **British Airways**, but not transfers. Call 01244 202000 or visit www.seasonsinstyle.com. For more wow-factor travel suggestions, visit timesonline.co.uk/travel