

Travel + LUXURY

BOTSWANA BOUND
A venerable safari camp is reborn

WAVE HUNTERS
Indonesia's greatest surfing odyssey

NATURAL HIGH
Canada's coveted wilderness lodge

CUTTING EDGE
Cruising Norway in an icebreaker

*THRALL OF
THE WILD*

*Epic adventures from
Africa to the Arctic*



10 OF THE BEST

By Nikki Wallman



Adventure tours

These days, enjoying exhilarating travel experiences doesn't mean forgoing creature comforts – luxury can be found in the most remote and wild destinations for the win.

THE NEW YEAR calls for novel travel adventures, for boundaries to be expanded, and for new interests to be sparked and pursued. When it comes to heightened experiences combining modern luxury, it means choosing your own adventure, be it the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition to explore the mountains of Nepal or to heli-ski virgin Patagonian powder, or swimming eye-to-eye with humpback whales. It may involve an inward journey, forged in a soul-stirringly remote location free of everyday distractions, or even the satiation of an endlessly curious palate. So bring on 2023 – adventure in all its forms and all its glory awaits.

1 RIO PALENA LODGE, CHILEAN PATAGONIA

Adrenaline junkies are in for an Andean alpine heart-starter here, thanks to adventure specialist Eleven. Newly remodelled rustic-luxe retreat Rio Palena Lodge will be your remote home base. Tucked away in a largely uninhabited part of Chilean Patagonia, the seven-room riverside lodge is intimate and deeply comforting – all wood and river stones and cushy, layered Mapuche-inspired interiors, with a sauna and wood-fired hot tubs to soothe muscles exhausted by a day of downhill escapades. These, led by expert guides, take place according to your personally tailored itinerary, and will see you dropped by helicopter into largely untapped terrain with features running the gamut from steep couloirs to glaciated bowls (expect around six to 10 runs each day, averaging around 600 to 750 metres in length). First tracks take on a thrilling new level of adventure here. Later, gather round the campfire at the lodge, sup on a hearty feast prepared on the asado grill and enjoy warming local wines as you and your treasured few swap tall tales.

BEST FOR Crack skiers to snow bunnies. elevenexperience.com



2 WHALES, ISLANDS AND WILDLIFE IN TAHITI

Turquoise-hued, tropical Tahitian island bliss meets the electrifying experience of swimming with these magnificent creatures on this journey from Majestic Whale Encounters. A week spent sailing the waters around Moorea in the Society Islands archipelago aboard a brand-new 54-foot catamaran with six double berths (also available for private buyout) gives guests the opportunity to swim with dolphins, pilot whales, turtles, sharks, rays – and, of course, the astounding humpback whales. The tours aim for “maximum interaction and minimal impact”, with a tour leader, guide and skipper observing the whales' behaviour to ensure it's safe for both the whales and swimmers before slipping into the water. You'll head out in a custom-built boat for these encounters, returning to your plush home-at-sea for meals and sundowners and deeply restful sleep. You'll also have the chance to snorkel; hit sandy beach bars, pineapple plantations and other activities on land, or simply lounge on the deck, cocktail in hand and mind all at sea.

BEST FOR Ocean lovers. majesticwhaleencounters.com.au



PEAK PERFORMANCE

From top: Steep terrain in the Andes; Rio Palena Lodge; tours in Tahiti offer the opportunity to swim with humpback whales.

3

BETHLEN ESTATES, ROMANIA

In the charming Transylvanian village of Cris, surrounded by wild woods, glacier lakes and flower-strewn meadows, a modern-day fairytale has come to fruition. Launched in 2021 by Gladys and Nikolaus Bethlen, wife and son of the late Count Miklos Bethlen, the project comprises historic buildings sensitively revived as private guest houses, another available on a room-by-room basis, and a rustic Kitchen Barn dishing up local delicacies such as smoked river trout with mussels and lovage. It's the culmination of the Count's dream to ensure his ancestral village, which fell into neglect in the political turbulence following World War II, continues to flourish into the future. The romantic dwellings (the latest, a 300-year-old haybarn reimagined as The Corner Barn, opened in May, while another is set to open in 2024) celebrate traditional interiors and painstakingly restored façades, marrying them seamlessly with features such as Tom Dixon lighting, sculptural staircases crafted by local carpenters, and a tile oven repurposed as a fireplace. Outside, time-winding valleys are home to medieval castles, untouched wilderness, and exhilarating activities: cycling, horse-riding or carriage rides, heli-skiing in the Carpathian Mountains, and spotting brown bears and wolves.

BEST FOR Time travellers and castle fans. bethlenestates.com



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