

NEW HORIZONS

Today's new breed of affluent traveller is taking a more experiential approach when it comes to planning a trip, opting for destinations and experiences that have a meaningful appeal

WORDS: CHARLOTTE MCMANUS

Racing Ferraris on a glacier. Flying a celebrity chef to a private island to prepare dinner for two. Having a hotel suite redecorated in madam's favourite colour. While we've all heard eyebrow-raising tales of HNW travellers demanding the moon on a stick, such outlandish anecdotes rarely reflect the reality of how the super-rich really travel these days.

In our fast-paced, always-on culture, today's HNWIs are cash rich but time poor, so their trips need to be planned with military precision. Accordingly, top travel specialists are in high demand: firms such as Black Tomato, Niquesa Travel and Experiential Pursuits take care of every detail, drawing on bulging contact books to create bespoke itineraries that are as stress free as possible. Nothing is too much trouble.

"We've negotiated with hotels to move paying clients — often by outbidding them — to get a presidential villa," says Thierry Macquet, co-owner of Experiential Pursuits. "We've secured exclusive use of a wing of a hotel just to make sure guests can change their view every day and we've organised last-minute helicopters to fly into the bush to get documents signed."

"As travel is so integral to people's lives now, today's luxury travel fixer is much more than just a travel planner," says Black Tomato co-founder Tom Marchant. "We spend a lot of time getting to know our clients and their passions."

Of course, luxury hotels still play a vital part when it comes to a guest's stay running smoothly. Such five-star groups as Langham and LUX* are renowned for going above and beyond to accommodate guests' needs. Nigel Bowen, head concierge at Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, has revealed that he was once tasked with recreating a mystery Middle Eastern fragrance from an empty, unmarked bottle, while Simon Manning, chief sales and





Previous page: Black Tomato's unique trips include camping under domes in Bolivia.

This page (top to bottom): the company can also take clients to experience destinations such as Myanmar, or see the Aurora Borealis in Scandinavia; Niquesa Travel's customers have enjoyed trips to meet Masai in Kenya

marketing officer at the Langham Hospitality Group, recalls “an Indian wedding at The Langham, Huntington in Southern California, which required bringing in an elephant”.

“Top hotels will do anything and everything to anticipate HNW guests’ needs,” says luxury hotel expert Tiffany Dowd, such as “blocking out floors above and below a suite to minimise noise. Sometimes, it means making it feel like ‘home’ — a Middle Eastern family once bought out a famous Canadian ski resort and had lighting put on the slopes so that they could ski at night and stay on their own time zone.”

However, recent years have shown a marked difference in what the super-rich seek to gain from their travels. Where once flashy destinations may have been the norm, today’s discerning traveller is leaning towards a more experiential, immersive approach, opting for trips with meaningful appeal that broaden their horizons with new challenges, unusual destinations, or even educational value.

“Luxury is becoming redefined, with a focus on unforgettable memories,” says Jenny Graham, managing director of concierge group Quintessentially. “The ultra-elite traveller is spending money on experiences — it’s about access over acquisition. Luxury travel trends are moving towards discovery, particularly to places that are fairly unknown or difficult to access.”

Macquet at Experiential Pursuits agrees. “HNW client’s are using emotional intelligence when crafting a trip. The trend is for bespoke experiential travel, where a client is enriched with a unique experience, close to what they value in life.”

So where is this new breed of thoughtful, affluent traveller heading to? While tropical escapes — Mauritius, the Maldives — remain



“The ultra-elite traveller is spending money on experiences — it’s about access over acquisition”

popular, as does Monaco, more intrepid destinations are on the rise. In Africa, the generic safari holiday is being passed over for countries with fascinating cultures like Rwanda and Ethiopia, while adventurous types are going off-radar in the likes of Mongolia or Greenland. With its wellness and wildlife offerings, Sri Lanka’s allure is growing and others are drawn to the otherworldly geography and Northern Lights of Iceland. India is another in-vogue destination, as vouched for by Jeremy Hackett, co-founder of the eponymous menswear label. “It never fails to capture my imagination. I love the atmosphere, people, elephants on the street, colour and the food... in Delhi, tea at The Imperial Hotel is a real treat.”

Other elites are taking a fresh perspective on transit — luxurious voyages by sea, air or rail make a trip about the journey, not the destination. Cruises are shedding their downmarket reputation with first-rate experiences from Silversea or Cunard, while



Top to bottom: Four Seasons Private Jet Experience takes guests to see the world in utmost comfort; LUX* ensures guests enjoy the ultimate luxurious experience; Langham will go above and beyond to ensure its guests' needs are met

“People will continue to chase off-the-beaten-track luxury, getting under the skin of a destination”

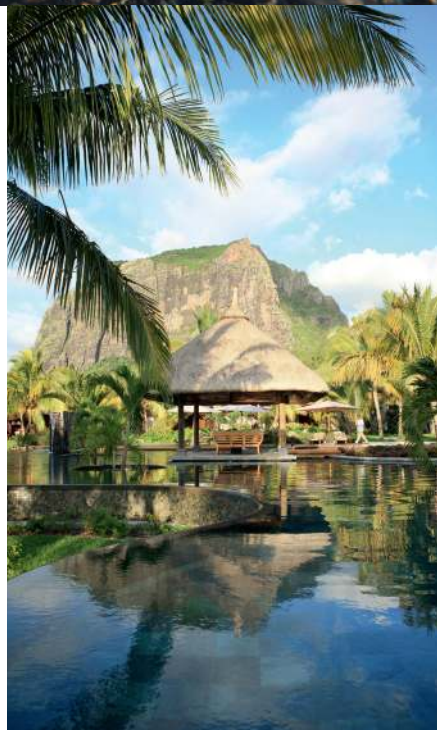
Belmond transports passengers across the globe in its plush, old-school-style trains.

Elsewhere, the super-rich are taking to the skies in the utmost comfort through initiatives such as the Four Seasons Private Jet Experience, where guests see the world with a personal concierge, dedicated travel planner, an on-board executive chef and luggage concierge, in addition to in-flight crew. Offerings include a mammoth trip that covers eight countries in 23 days. Itineraries can be fully customised, too.

“Every step of our guests’ journey is looked after,” says Javier Loureiro, director of guest experience for Four Seasons Private Jet. “Our itineraries take guests closer to their destinations by removing unnecessary stopovers, connections and time-consuming transfers.”

When it comes to budgets, a likely holiday spend may fall between £75,000 and £150,000 for the super-rich, although more extravagant trips could cost as much as £1m. For such high sums, travellers benefit from insider access and super-exclusive experiences — £100K can buy you a polar bear expedition in Svalbard by the Arctic Ocean with Niquesa Travel, or a nine-day excursion exploring the wreck of the Titanic through Quintessentially. Alternatively, you could enjoy a private operatic concert and champagne reception inside the crater of an Icelandic volcano through Black Tomato.

“Getting clients off the beaten path is very important to the success of trips,” says Black Tomato’s Marchant. “We craft unique experiences with our teams on the ground to allow clients exclusive access to the world’s



bucket-list locations.” On the more extreme end of Black Tomato’s offering is the Get Lost range, in which participants are effectively stranded in a remote terrain, disconnected from the outside world and have to explore their way out — they have no clue where they will be taken before showing up at the airport.

Such remoteness appeals to luxury sleepwear designer Olivia Von Halle, who cites sea kayaking around uncharted islands in Chile as one of her top travel experiences. She hopes to go to the Andaman Islands between India and Myanmar next: “It’s one of the most remote places on earth, with tropical jungles running to white sand beaches. I’m dying to go a hotel called Jalakara; it only has seven rooms and there is no internet anywhere on the island. Heaven.”

Looking ahead to 2019, the search for authentic experiences and local encounters will remain key. “People will continue to chase off-the-beaten-track luxury, getting under the skin of a destination,” says Niquesa Travel managing director Mark Allvey. “People are also looking to explore multiple destinations in a single trip, but for shorter periods of time, effectively compressing more experiences, hence the need for organisation to be seamless.”

Another trend on the rise is eco-tourism, with HNW types wanting to “give back” and take more responsible trips, from low-impact destinations to smaller-scale excursions. Others set out to achieve charitable or altruistic goals, such as releasing animals from wildlife sanctuaries, or sponsoring conservation efforts to remain connected to a cause after leaving.

Next year’s hot-ticket destinations include Japan — with trips around the Rugby World Cup — and Turkey, with interest rising again after some challenging years. Rouslan and Ivan Lartisien, co-founders of the Grand Luxury Hotels group, cite “small, luxurious properties in unusual locations that meet essential needs — culture, wellness and the like — such as Qasr al Sarab in the Abu Dhabi desert.

“Less glitz, more authenticity and the beauty of a peaceful environment.”