

An invitation from Collette you can't refuse

With their usual haunts inaccessible, travel connoisseurs are opting for local getaways. Tapping into the desire for deftly curated trips is Collette Dinnigan.

By GEORGE EPAMINONDAS



Collette Dinnigan at her Southern Highlands property. Picture: Felix Forest

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Don't expect the jet-set to cool their jets.

With their usual haunts inaccessible — the ski slopes of Aspen, the islands of Croatia, the safari camps of Tanzania — keen-eyed connoisseurs of travel are opting for lavish getaways in their own backyard.



farm Picture: Felix Forest

Dinnigan on Champagne duty at the oyster

Tapping into the desire for deftly curated trips is tastemaker Collette Dinnigan.

Along with her husband Bradley Cocks, [Dinnigan is hosting a clutch of immersive experiences on the NSW south coast and in the southern highlands.](#)

The three-day jaunts feature a blend of culinary and creative pursuits, as well as meals at casa Collette.

“It’s about our world and our friends and we’re inviting people into our homes,” she said.

The first experience, capped at just 10 guests, will unfold in late April in the seaside town of Milton. Highlights include collecting lobster with spearfishing champions Ian and Lara Puckeridge, a cooking lesson with chef Guillaume Brahimi, and a photo session with lensman Hugh Stewart. The second outing in October is a writers’ workshop in Bowral, while another in November will explore world-class equestrian facility Willinga Park.

“Before you would go somewhere because it was an amazing hotel but that’s not enough any more,” Cocks said.

“Travel has to have substance now; it has to be relevant to your lifestyle.”



Dinnigan's husband, Bradley Cocks, centre, with spearfishing champions Lara and Ian Puckeridge. Picture: Felix Forest

Above all, affluent travellers crave privacy and personalisation. It's a delicate balancing act, the confluence of exclusivity and authenticity, and those that do it well are thriving.

"We are seeing clear demand for all our lodges across the country," said Penny Rafferty, executive officer of Luxury Lodges of Australia.

The company's members include rarefied retreats Saffire Freycinet on Tasmania's east coast, El Questro Homestead in The Kimberley and Lizard Island in Queensland.



Dinnigan and Cocks enjoying oysters at the Clyde River on the NSW South Coast. Picture: Felix Forest

“Guests are seeking connection with nature and a sense of adventure but in the safe hands of expert guides,” Rafferty added.

“The natural isolation of our lodges, in regions with something compelling to ‘do’, along with small numbers of guests, is more appealing than ever.”

Emboldened by the relaxation of travel across state borders, well-heeled wanderers are traversing far-flung corners of the nation on private air charters.

Bas Bosschieter, chief operating officer of tour virtuosos Captain’s Choice, said: “Our guests want to experience the remote and hidden parts of Australia. Swimming with whale sharks at Ningaloo Reef, reaching ‘The Tip’ at Cape York, and sampling cheese on King Island.”

And sometimes all on the same champagne-laced itinerary. For those undeterred by price, buyouts — annexing an entire resort for your sole use — are trending too. The nine suites at Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island are available for \$65,400 for three nights. And the 15 custom-designed tents at Longitude 131 at Uluru cost \$115,600 on a two-night stay.

Baillie Lodges chief operating officer Craig Bradbery said: “An exclusive-use booking allows guests to have the run of the house.”

If you're considering a multigenerational get-together or a corporate escape, it's one way to ensure a secluded "safecation".

A privacy bubble is, after all, priceless.

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