

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## Life & Leisure

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### Ten wild adventures in the world's dreamiest destinations

*This story is part of our list of 50 new travel experiences for 2023. Here are 10 options for those seeking an adrenaline rush.*

**Jane Knight**

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Never drifted across Jaipur in a hot-air balloon as part of your 15-day private jet tour? Nor biked across the world's biggest salt plain (in Bolivia) then stayed in a purpose-built luxury lodge? How about a "micro cruise" for just 12 people in Svalbard? It's a new year, full of possibilities. Get out there and follow your dreams.

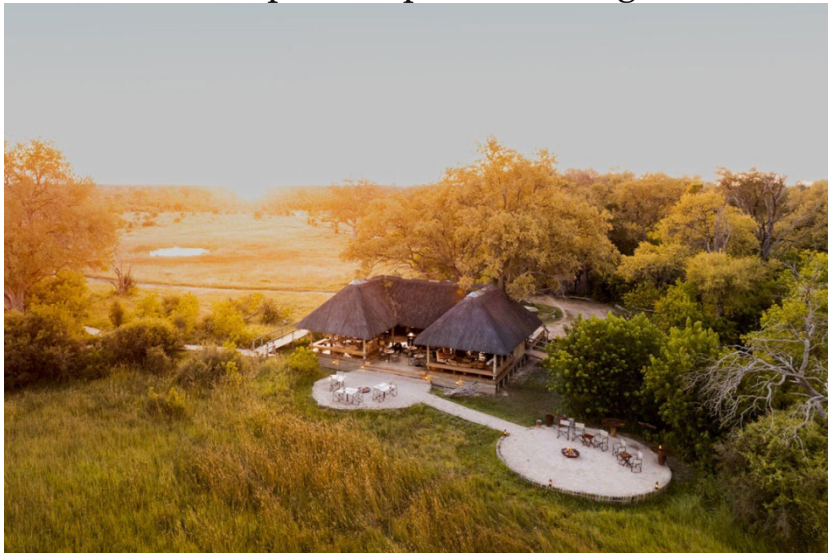
**Biking in Botswana | Africa**



Experienced guides cycle with tour groups on Aardvark's multi-day trip in Botswana's Okavango Delta.

Safari outfits have long offered different ways to spot big game, from hot-air balloons to on horseback. Now Aardvark is introducing a multi-day cycling trip across Botswana's Okavango Delta.

It involves up to 75 kilometres' cycling a day along well-trodden elephant highways that cut through acacia woodlands, rivers and savannah. Spot the wildlife as you go. Professional guides cycle with the small group as it moves from camp to camp over four nights.



The Little Sable camp.

The final two nights are spent at Little Sable, with its many delta experiences; there's also the option to sleep under the stars on a five-metre-

high platform overlooking a waterhole, reached by helicopter. Six nights, including activities and full-board accommodation, is from £5450 (\$9502).

Extend your stay at North Island Okavango, a three-tent camp that opens in June on a private island on the northern fringes of the delta, from \$1909 a night. See [aardvarksafaris.com](http://aardvarksafaris.com).

## From vast desert to salt flat | South America



Explora's newest accommodation, the six-room Uyuni Lodge, is scheduled to open on the world's largest salt flat in March.

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The lodge-to-lodge seven-night drive itinerary from Chile's Atacama Desert to the salt plains of Bolivia caused quite a stir when Explora launched it in August 2022. It wasn't that the high-altitude off-road route was new but that Explora – which specialises in lodges mixing comfort with adventure – offered a far more lavish way to do it.

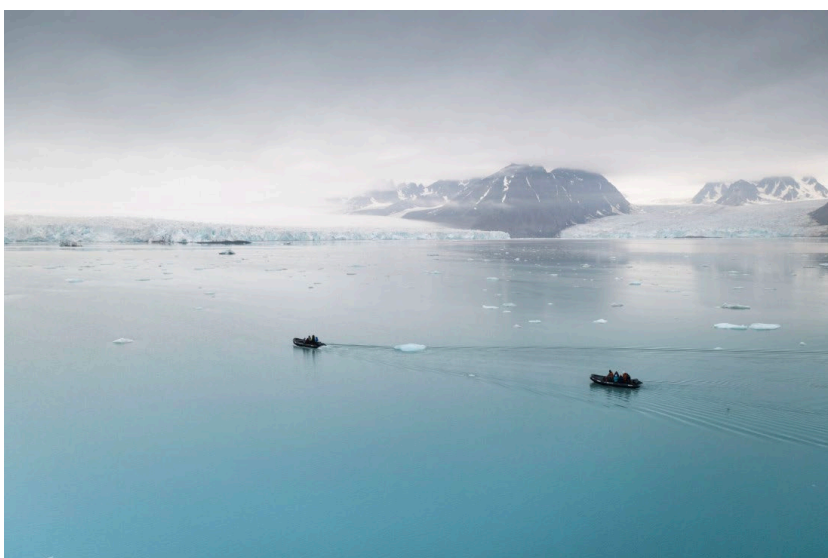
Guests on La Travesia set off in a provided four-wheel-drive, with their own guide and driver. En route, they stay in two modern mountain boltholes that were built by Explora in partnership with local families, and which make the most of the scenery and silence of Bolivia's altiplano. In between driving time, guests can hike, mountain bike, spot the wildlife and just generally lounge about.



There's plenty to see in this region, including llamas.

In March, the trip from the world's driest place (Atacama) to the largest salt flat on earth (Salar de Uyuni) gets a triumphant finale with the opening of the six-room Uyuni Lodge, beautifully set on a promontory overlooking the sea of white salt. The journey takes at least seven nights and costs from \$US8400 (\$12,130) per person. See [explora.com](http://explora.com).

## Micro cruises for 12 | Svalbard



Smaller vessels can reach remote Arctic areas not often visited by other boats.

It's an irony not lost on climate campaigners that the rising popularity of polar cruises – taken aboard the increasing number of new expedition ships being released – is contributing to the threat against the very landscape people go to see.

Suffice to say, how to best enjoy pristine wilderness remains a thorny issue.

Take a look at the credentials of Secret Atlas, which specialises in “micro cruises”. The tour operator is launching a new vessel in May designed to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by up to 95 per cent. What's more, the remodelled MV Vikingfjord will carry just 12 guests on its Svalbard circumnavigation.

Its diminutive size means it can access hard-to-reach areas such as the remote far north-east island of Kvitoya, seldom visited by other boats. Yet, there's still room for comfort: there's a sauna and outdoor hot tub, plus a lounge area on the bridge.

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Taking cruises small is a timely move given new regulations have already been proposed by Norway to limit the impact of cruise traffic in the Arctic, around Svalbard.



Guest numbers on the Secret Atlas micro cruises are limited to 12.

Daily shore excursions will be led by the ship's two expert guides, while wildlife viewing opportunities include possible polar bear and walrus sightings. The 14-night expedition is priced from €17,500 (\$27,276). See [mvvikingfjord.com](http://mvvikingfjord.com) and [secretatlastravel.com](http://secretatlastravel.com).

## Archaeological heli-tour | Guatemala



View Guatemalan ruins, including Tikal, from above.

While 2022's post-pandemic travel was about comfort and familiarity, adventure travel companies report clients are now seeking more intrepid trips. To help cater for the adrenaline rush, Black Tomato is launching a three-day heli-tour to less-known ruins in Guatemala.

Channel your inner Lara Croft and head off to a trio of sites, including the mural-filled Mayan temple of Holmul. The company has special access to archaeologists' tunnels which lead to an eight-by-two-metre ancient frieze decorated with deities and rulers, only discovered in 2013.

The heli-tour is part of a seven-night trip, which includes a stay in the new Relais & Chateaux hotel Villa Bokeh in the city of Antigua, set in a colonial-style hacienda (it opened in 2021).



Stay at Villa Bokeh as part of the trip.

It's all priced from \$13,718. For the ultimate adventure and an extra \$2000 for two people, take one more buzz in a chopper to a bespoke base camp in Uaxactun that looks out at

unexcavated Mayan temples, where locals will cook your candlelit dinner inside the ruins. See [blacktomato.com](http://blacktomato.com).

## Never enough hot springs | Iceland



Just horsing around at Hvammsvík Hot Springs, Iceland.

Geothermal springs are liberally scattered throughout Iceland. With its many geysers and glaciers, it's a real-life geography textbook. Hvammsvík Hot Springs opened late last year with eight pools (of varying temperature; each one almost one metre deep) on a 485-hectare family-owned estate with its own geothermal source, dating back at least 1000 years when the Vikings set up camp on the site.

Set against a spectacular fjord and flanked by meadows, the pools are just a few steps from the Atlantic Ocean's shoreline. Naturally, there are Icelandic ponies to hand, too. It's hard to believe Reykjavik is a 45-minute drive away.

Cool off in the ocean or go paddleboarding before recharging on seafood soup from the bistro.



Hvammsvík Hot Springs' Hilltop House in Iceland has three bedrooms and a private hot spring for guests' use.

Day visits cost from around \$75. The estate has four pre-existing and now fully refurbished lodges for overnight guests, including Hilltop House, with 360-degree views of the fjords and mountains, plus a private hot spring. Three-bedroom Hilltop House costs from €999 (\$1557) a night for six people. See [hvammsvik.com](http://hvammsvik.com).

## It burns so bright | India



The Captain's Choice 15-day itinerary includes a hot-air balloon adventure over Jaipur.

Australian owned and operated Captain's Choice returns to India for the first time in years in October with a 15-day private jet tour: The Spirit and Colours of India. Departing from Singapore on October 31, the tour takes in the all-important Diwali festival of lights.

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The festival is known for the brightly burning clay lamps that people put outside their homes during the five-day holiday, which runs this year from November 10-14. Destinations within India include Agra, Varanasi, Chennai, Mahabalipuram, Kochi, Udaipur and Jaipur.

Enjoy viewing the Taj Mahal in Agra, taking a cruise on the Ganges to Dashashwamedh Ghat, and see the famous Pink City of Jaipur – including from above on a hot-air balloon tour. This is adventure with a glass of the finest champagne never far away.



All 58 seats on the Boeing 737-700 are business class.

Only 58 guests can take the private jet tour, conducted on a Boeing 737-700 aircraft with all business-class seats. The Singapore-Singapore journey (October 31-November 14) starts from \$45,900 per person, twin share; see [captainschoice.com.au](http://captainschoice.com.au). – *Fiona Carruthers*

## Go high | Bhutan



The cliff-top Tiger's Nest monastery.

It would take more than a month to hike the entire 403-kilometre [Trans Bhutan trail](#), an ancient route running roughly across the middle of the country, which reopened in September after a 60-year hiatus.

*L&L* recommends instead tackling smaller sections of the path once traversed by pilgrims, armies, royalties and traders – the western part near Paro is particularly scenic.

Here, you can climb to the famous Tiger’s Nest monastery, which clings impossibly to the cliffs, and see the little-visited Haa Valley.

Abercrombie & Kent will soon release a new nine-night trip that takes in parts of the trans Bhutan trail. It will be priced from \$19,000 per person, including flights, accommodation and guides. The [Trans Bhutan Trail site](#) is also useful for planning a journey to the region; see [abercrombiekent.com.au](http://abercrombiekent.com.au) for updates on its Bhutan departures.

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## Walking cure | Indian Himalayas



Walk it out on the new three-day Shakti Kumaon Little Trek.

What’s almost as fun as a big walk? A little walk, of course. For years, tour operator Shakti (run by New Delhi-based Jamshyd Sethna) has offered travellers the chance to explore the vast Indian Himalayan region in style, combining walks, rafting and countless other activities with comfortable stays at local [family homes](#) that have separate quarters for guests, renovated by Shakti. The guides also stay on site or nearby.



The Indian Himalayan region is perfect for action-packed days and reflective, quiet nights.

This is breathtaking terrain – quite literally, thanks to the altitude – and time-consuming to get to. For those who can't spare a week or more for a longer experience, Shakti has introduced a Little Treks program of village walks in Sikkim and Kumaon. It's so new it's not on the website yet.

“The ‘big’ village walks were designed years ago to offer guests a very natural, authentic experience that helps people really get into the rhythm of rural life in the Himalayan mountains,” says Sethna. “At night, the locals love to tell the stories of their lives and traditions around the dinner table to their honoured guests.”

To go all out, combine one of the new Little Treks with a stay at Shakti's showstopping mountain retreat, 360° Leti – described by British booking site Mr & Mrs Smith as “less of a hotel, more of a peak-to-peak walking trail”.

A three-night Shakti Kumaon Village Walk in the Almora region (finishing at Shakti 360° Leti) is priced from \$US4083 (\$5762) per person, based on two people travelling. See [shaktihimalaya.com](http://shaktihimalaya.com).

## Camping with sea wolves | Canada



Search for sea wolves in British Columbia.

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Meaningful Indigenous experiences are one of the best ways to immerse yourself in a place. Amid the many new offerings in this space this year, Audley's exclusive product in Canada's British Columbia stands out with its focus on the area's sea wolves, which are almost entirely pescatarian.

Camping on the territory of the Tlatlasikwala First Nation on islets off northern Vancouver Island, a maximum of six guests learn how their Indigenous hosts track these animals, which are smaller than their grey wolf cousins with noticeably red-tinted coats.

Watch for the wolves to slip out from the dense foliage to forage on the beach, then return to your roomy tent to drift off to sleep to the sound of their howls.



Follow the wolves from the forest to the beach.

The two-night experience is available on select dates from May to August as part of a tailor-made tour: an eight-day trip (including two nights in Port Hardy and three in Vancouver) costs from \$7700 per person with accommodation, excursions and meals while camping. See [audleytravel.com](https://audleytravel.com).

## Bamurru's new retreat | Australia



An artist's render of the new Jabiru Retreat at Bamurru Plains.

Africa's safari camps were the inspiration behind Bamurru Plains at the top end of the Northern Territory near Kakadu National Park. Little expense is spared by said Africa camps, so no surprise that Bamurru is about to release a more upmarket option in the form of its new room category, Jabiru Retreat.

Scheduled to open in April, it consists of two new bungalows linked by a walkway, and with a shared private plunge pool and timber deck. This "camp within a camp" will sleep up to six guests, who have access to the 300 kilometres of floodplains and savannah on the Mary River shared by those staying in the main camp's existing 10 glamping-style options.



Watch wildlife parade across the floodplain. **Peter Eve**

Twice-daily wilderness safaris head out searching for some of the largest crocodile populations in the world, along with buffalo, dingoes and wallabies. Or you can just relax in that pool, watching wildlife parade across the floodplain. Priced from \$6160 for up to six people, all-inclusive; see [bamurruplains.com](http://bamurruplains.com).