

Travelista Travel

## Four great camping adventures

Sleep under canvas at the edge of the wild, from Bhutan to Mexico via Oz and the Okavango Delta

Maria Shollenbarger AUGUST 11 2023

### The Himalayas done with heart in Bhutan



The dzong (fortified monastery) in Punakha © andBeyond.com

Bhutan is a kingdom of towering mountains and breath-stealing altitudes; but Punakha, a small village in its centre-west – sitting at around 1,250m above sea level, compared to Gangtey's 3,000m – is unexpectedly lush, verdant with banana-tree groves and rice terraces (and boasting a *dzong* that's one of the most beautiful monasteries in the whole of the Himalayas). It's here that AndBeyond, the adventure-safari leader that made its name back in the day as Conservation Corporation Africa – and has carried those values into its current operations in 13 countries across three continents – will next month open its first fully owned lodge in Asia.



Inside the Punakha dzong, the second largest in Bhutan © andBeyond.com



The Punakha Valley in Bhutan © andBeyond.com

Punakha River Lodge's six tented suites overlook the rushing rapids of the Mo Chhu river and, in every direction, the Himalayan foothills that embrace the valley. (There's also a two-bedroom family villa, with a small pool.) A walking bridge affords unique access to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, the gilded, decorated stupa commissioned by the late queen mother to protect the valley from evil spirits. The detail of design across its four stories is exquisite, and the trail system that surrounds it is ideal for early-morning hikes, with paddy-field picnic lunches and visits to community farming projects. [andbeyond.com](https://www.andbeyond.com), from \$1,130

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## **Off-grid bush-beach glamping in Western Australia**



The Ningaloo Reef coastline in Western Australia



I'm not sure it qualifies, in terms of remoteness, as one of the most actually end-of-the-earth places I've ever been; but stunning Ningaloo Reef, in Western Australia, definitely felt like one of them. "Where the bush meets the beach" is how this coastline bills itself – a landscape, I once wrote, that looks like Venus colliding with Mars. Along one of its emptiest stretches is Sal Salis, which is part of the Luxury Lodges of Australia alliance.

FT Weekend Festival returns on Saturday 2 September at Kenwood House Gardens, London. Book your tickets to enjoy a day of debates, tastings, Q&As and more... Speakers include **Julian Barnes, Margot Henderson, Henry Holland, Ravinder Bhogal** and many others, plus all your favourite FT writers and editors. Register now at [ft.com/festival](https://ft.com/festival).

This tented camp, however, takes a very liberal (in a good way) view of luxury: the tents themselves are simple, privileging the important things – big, comfortable beds, breezy semi-alfresco bathrooms, a hammock strung across the wood deck out front (the thumping sound you might hear early in the morning is the kangaroos coming up the boardwalks that lead across the sand to each tent; they like to cop a bit of shade, or take curious peeks inside).



Swimming with whale sharks off the Ningaloo Coast

The [food](#) is honest, and excellent, served at a big common table in a communal gathering tent with top-shelf Margaret River and Barossa Valley wines. Early risers can accompany a guide into the canyons that mark the bluffs miles inland; in Mandu Mandu Gorge, you might spot a tiny, shy, endangered black-footed rock wallaby. Fearless swimmers can get in the water with whale sharks, when the season's right. But all year round it's the place itself that amazes. The setting is pure Crusoe, the only sounds those of wind, birds, and wavelets kissing coral sands. [salsalis.com](https://salsalis.com), from A\$2,050 (about £1,056) per tent

## Escape to the jungle on Mexico's Pacific coast



The pool at Naviva, on the Punta Mita peninsula in Mexico © Naviva

Back in the noughties, Four Seasons was a pioneer in the glamping stakes: the global behemoth's Tented Camp in Chiang Rai, in Thailand's Golden Triangle, set a precedent for how to do luxury "camping" in deep wilderness. Now comes Naviva, at the edge of the Punta Mita peninsula in [Mexico](#), which opened last December as a complement to the Four Seasons Resort at Punta Mita. Naviva's 15 elevated tents – space-agey domes with separate sitting areas and wide, wood decks – hover in or above the canopy of almost 50 private jungle acres overlooking the Pacific, which breaks picturesquely onto a small, private, sand beach in a placid cove, for the swimmers and sunbathers.



One of the 15 elevated tents at Naviva © Naviva



Chef Sofia in the Copal Cocina restaurant © Yoshihiro Makino



What seems to set Naviva apart from the conventional Four Seasons beach destination is the breadth, and depth, of the experiences: artists' studio visits; private temazcal (sweat lodge) ceremonies; nocturnal "forest bathing" with an astronomer to parse the skies; and a day-long free diving tuition, for the PADI-certified. All this interspersed with rotating agendas of (complimentary) tastings, performances, movement classes and hikes, and evening "rituals", under the heading of the "Daily Naviva". [fourseasons.com](https://www.fourseasons.com), from \$3,950 full board

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### Expert Okavango-Delta glamping, on a private island



Great Plains Sitatunga's private island camp in Botswana © Great Plains Conservation

The whole island sleeps only eight guests, in three enormous tented suites; it's set deep in the Okavango Delta, where the birding is as rewarding as the hippo-, crocodile- and elephant-spotting – not to mention the rare aquatic antelope from which Sitatunga Private Island, Great Plains Conservation's new Botswana camp, takes its name. Founder Dereck Joubert – who along with his wife Beverley is an award-winning filmmaker, photographer, conservationist and National Geographic Society explorer-in-residence – knows the Delta as intimately as anyone.



A young Chacma baboon © Great Plains Conservation

He claims to have found a truly exceptional, and exceptionally unspoiled, corner of it here. The camp he's created reflects his conviction, with the elevated tents shaded by ebony trees, the canvas ceilings further protected by thatch, and the zip-down walls allowing for air circulation. Each has its own sitting area, multiple decks, outdoor bathrooms and a small pool overlooking the channel that fronts the camp. As ever with Great Plains' Reserve properties, there are professional cameras and lens sets in the tents for guests to use throughout their stay.

[greatplainsconservation.com](https://www.greatplainsconservation.com), from \$1,550

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