

TRAVEL

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TRIP PLANNING GUIDE

14 FOR '14

No expense — and no luxury — spared

BY AMANDA JONES

The economy is picking up, and this might be the year for a bucket list trip. Here are 14 ways to vacation like a rock star in 2014.

1 National Geographic Expeditions' Around the World by Private Jet

The ultimate in luxury trips, spend 24 days on a private jet heading to the world's wonders on five continents, guided by National Geo experts and explorers. See iconic locations such as Easter Island, Machu Picchu, the Great Barrier Reef and the Serengeti Plain after arriving by jet (only 77 passengers) and checking into luxurious hotels. Book now for 2015 departures for \$72,950 per person (all 2014 departures have wait lists).

Info: www.bit.ly/18vzupB

2 Yasawa Island Resort & Spa Fiji

Fiji is an excellent and underutilized tropical option for West Coasters, and its Yasawa Islands have all the ingredients: powdery beaches, warm water, teeming underwater life and activities for the restless. This resort is on its own island and has roomy beachfront villas with all the privacy and elegance required for romance. The resort allows children only at certain times, so you're alone with the sound of the waves (and the masseuse if you choose). Doubles from \$855 per night, includes food and nonalcoholic beverages.

Info: www.yasawa.com

3 Saffire Lodge Tasmania, Australia

The only luxury lodging on Tasmania, Saffire sits alone in the wilderness of Freycinet National Park on a sweeping bay of white sand.

A sleek, modern design (with the main lodge shaped like a stingray), the private pavilion rooms have a plunge pool, a dining room and kitchen where your private chef can cook dinner using Tasmania's abundant seafood, local meats, seasonal produce and wines from world-class local vineyards. Doubles from \$1,615 per night.

Info: www.saffire-freycinet.com.au

4 Exclusively NZ New Zealand

This luxury tour company arranges and guides visitors on private "experiential" trips around New Zealand focusing on wine and food, adventure and culture. Along the way you travel by helicopter, vehicle and plane; eat the freshest epicurean food; and stay at super-lodges, "glamping" tented camps and luxury boutique hotels.

Info: www.exclusivelynz.com

5 Pikaia Lodge Galápagos Islands

Pikaia, opening in May, will be the most luxurious lodging in the Galápagos. It's on Santa Cruz Island in the center of the island chain, and you can explore the volcanic island and its wildlife (the hotel has a giant tortoise preserve), dive the waters and visit other islands on the Pikaia I, the hotel's 100-foot yacht. The hotel has ultra-modern rooms with huge glass windows to capture the spectacular view. Three nights from \$3,230 per person.

Info: www.pikaialodgegalapagos.com

6 Amantaka Luang Prabang, Laos

The arty town of Luang Prabang finally has a luxury

hotel. Steeped in history, the hotel has 24 suites in what was once a French colonial hospital, with broad verandas centered on a leafy courtyard with an enormous pool. Spend the day visiting serene Buddhist temples, taking Lao cooking classes or riding elephants, then return for a lime and ginger body wrap at the spa. Doubles from \$800 per night plus a compulsory \$150 per person, per night, charge. Includes breakfast and choice of lunch or dinner, guided excursions and non-premium alcohol.

Info: www.amanresorts.com

7 Necker Island British Virgin Islands

Richard Branson's private Caribbean island famously burned two years ago (guest Kate Winslet carried Branson's 90-year-old mother out of the inferno). The resort has risen from the ashes and is more spectacular. Necker typically can be rented for the exclusive use of 30 adults and six children, ages 11 and younger, for \$62,000 a night. Many times a year they have Celebration Weeks, when rooms can be booked individually from \$27,475 for two guests for seven nights. Includes food, drinks, activities.

Info: www.neckerisland.virgin.com

8 Segera Retreat Kenya

The 50,000-acre Kenyan sanctuary of Jochen Zeitz, an international environmentalist and former chief executive of Puma, is now open as an eco-chic safari lodge with one of the world's finest contemporary African art collections. In one of the six private villas (run on solar power and using sustainably harvested water), you can sit in your outdoor whirlpool bathtub and watch elephants migrate over the Laikipia Plateau or watch game from the back of a camel. No need to forgo pampering while you're in the bush: There's a



Virgin Limited Edition

NECKER ISLAND in the British Virgin Islands is rebuilt and ready to spoil.

spa, a hot stone bath and a gym. From \$970 per person, per night. Includes food, game drives and non-premium alcohol.

Info: www.segera.com

9 Peter Sommer Travels Amalfi Coast, Italy

Sommer's tour company has sailed Turkey and Greece for years but now plies Italy's Amalfi Coast and the Bay of Naples by luxury gulet. Led by a historian and archaeologist, you visit places such as Pompeii and Capri as well as lesser-known sites with equally impressive history. By night you eat extraordinary Italian food on deck under the stars. The cost is \$5,800 per person for eight days, or charter the entire boat (10 passengers) for \$60,000 a week.

Info: www.petersommer.com

10 Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort Abu Dhabi

For a Lawrence of Arabia experience (in luxury, of course), this Anantara resort sits among the rippled dunes of the Liwa Desert's "empty quarter." Ride a camel, hunt with falcons, lie by the pool or have a milk bath at the Anantara Spa, your choice. The one-bedroom Royal Pavilion Pool Villas are \$1,800 a night, and you have your own butler. Other rooms from \$650.

Info: www.qasralsarab.anantara.com

11 Singita Mara River Tented Camp Serengeti, Tanzania

Singita has always been known for African luxury, and now it has the ultimate off-the-grid tented adventure on the Mara River in northern Tanzania. The camp hosts only 12 at a time, and you sleep in sustainable, solar-powered tent suites. From \$995 per person, per night in the low season. Includes all food, game drives and non-premium alcohol and drinks.

Info: www.singita.com/mara-river-tented-camp

12 Le Meurice Paris

The epitome of European elegance, Le Meurice was built in 1835 overlooking the chic Tuileries Garden. Royalty, aristocrats and celebrities have traipsed the gilded halls for years, and now Philippe Starck has added his design touch. Three-star Michelin chef Alain Ducasse presides over the kitchen. Although you can book rooms from \$920 a night, why not go for the over-the-top Belle Etoile Royal Suite for \$24,640 a night?

Info: www.dorchestercollection.com

13 Hotel Salto Chico Patagonia, Chile

Located above the Salto Chico waterfall and toward the eye-popping Macizo del Paine mountains in Torres del Paine National Park, this Explora lodge inspires a desire to hike, boat to icebergs, sit in a whirlpool tub or ride horses with gauchos. The elegantly simple lodge, built with wood and glass interiors, captures nature in every direction. From \$3,000 per person for a four-night stay. Includes food, bar, park fees and explorations.

Info: www.explora.com

14 Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe, Calif.

For a more achievable weekend destination (in summer and winter), this Ritz sits mid-mountain at the newly upgraded Northstar-at-Tahoe ski resort. It's woodsy in design with leather, fireplaces and picture windows. Ski valets carry your gear to the slopes and serve spiced hot drinks around the outdoor fireplace. Return after a day of skiing or hiking and soak in the spa's copper tub pretreatment. Doubles from \$469 a night. Three-bedroom residences from \$4,000 a night.

Info: www.ritzcarlton.com/travel@latimes.com