

OUR TOP

100

TRAVEL ADVENTURES

BY HELEN ANDERSON, MARK CHIPPERFIELD, ANTHONY DENNIS, KENDALL HILL, KATRINA LOBLEY, EMMA VENTURA

NATURE LOVER, HEDONIST, ADRENALIN JUNKIE, CULTURE VULTURE, OR ALL OF THE ABOVE – WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOU’LL FIND PLENTY OF BUCKET-LIST IDEAS HERE. SOME OF OUR MOST TOURIST-TRAP-AVOIDING, GLOBE-TROTTERING WRITERS SHARE THEIR FAVOURITE DESTINATIONS.

1 AFRICA**WILDLIFE**

THE EXPERIENCE Sleep with hippos and bathe with mongooses in Kenya’s Masai Mara.

A long, theatrical snigger hangs in the air, followed by a snort and a sharp riposte. All night this hippo banter continues, metres away, echoing off the banks of a horseshoe bend in the Talek River. The Masai Mara National Reserve is famous for the reliable abundance and diversity of wildlife seen on safari drives, and staying in an unfenced camp in the heart of the park means, thrillingly, there is only well-zipped canvas between you and the beasts. HA

DREAM TO REALITY Emirates (emirates.com/au) flies from Australia to Nairobi via Dubai. Wildlife Safari (www.wildlifesafari.com.au) includes the Mara Explorer Camp on its customised luxury safari itineraries.

2 MIDDLE EAST**OUTDOORS**

THE EXPERIENCE Sail a dhow on the Musandam Peninsula, Oman.

In all the turmoil of the Arab Spring, one Middle Eastern sultanate has maintained its cool. Peaceful, breathtaking Oman moves at the sort of relaxed pace you’d expect from a country blessed with generous oil and natural gas reserves and a desolate, captivating beauty. Channel Oman’s laid-back rhythm with a dhow trip on the sunbaked Musandam Peninsula, where the stark Hajar Mountains fall sheer into the Arabian Sea and stunning submarine worlds unfold beneath the surface. KH

DREAM TO REALITY Emirates (emirates.com/au) and Etihad (etihadairways.com) fly from Australia to the United Arab Emirates with connections to Oman. More information: omantourism.gov.om.

3 EUROPE**INDULGENCE**

THE EXPERIENCE Splurge on a meal at Alain Ducasse’s Eiffel Tower restaurant.

The only identifiable downside of dining halfway up the Eiffel Tower at the posh Le Jules Verne Restaurant (aside from the hefty bill) is that you’re effectively denied a full-frontal look at the famed structure itself. But the view of Paris, delightfully interrupted by



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WILD AT HEART: (above) a Masai warrior surveys his starkly beautiful homeland.

the milk-chocolate-coloured girders of the tower, is to dine for. A reservation here includes not just the master chef’s renowned killer cuisine, albeit in a slightly more touristic vein, but some welcome queue-jumping: the restaurant’s own dedicated elevator, which goes straight up one of the tower’s shapely legs, conveys diners directly to the second level. AD

DREAM TO REALITY Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) flies from Australia to Paris via Singapore. Le Jules Verne Restaurant: restaurants-tou Eiffel.com.

4 PACIFIC JOURNEY

THE EXPERIENCE Drive the coast roads of the Big Island, Hawaii.

There are two sensational driving routes out of Hilo, the sleepy main settlement on the Big Island. Highway 130 leads to the World

Heritage-listed Hawaii Volcanoes National Park where visitors can witness Earth’s creation as red-hot lava from the active Kilauea volcano adds an extra 16 hectares to the island’s surface area each year. Alternatively, take the Hamakua Coast road north-west for cinematic seascapes, farmers’ markets, bohemian villages and the cowboy town of Waimea. KH

DREAM TO REALITY Hawaiian Airlines (hawaiianair.com) flies from Sydney to Honolulu and on to Hilo. More information: gohawaii.com.

5 ASIA CULTURE

THE EXPERIENCE Climb the startling rock fortress of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka.

Most of the island’s eight UNESCO World Heritage sites are clustered in this dry central zone, where wild elephants roam and ancient kings built marvellous cities. Among the most

startling of these ruins is Sigiriya, a pleasure palace built improbably atop a volcanic plug. It's best known for its 1500-year-old cliff-face frescoes of spectacularly well-endowed, wasp-waisted women, thought to be a rebel king's concubines or celestial goddesses. After an eyeful, pass between the monumental stone paws of a lion and climb another 1682 steps to a throne with views of a long-gone kingdom. **HA**

DREAM TO REALITY Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) flies from Australia to Colombo via Singapore. Banyan Lanka Tours (banyanlanka.com) arranges customised luxury itineraries.

6 SOUTH AMERICA ADVENTURE

THE EXPERIENCE Get face to face with Easter Island's stone sentinels.

Famed for its towering stone sculptures, Easter Island (Rapa Nui) is a place of mystery and rare physical beauty that's also a magnet for hikers and scuba divers. Successive waves of colonisers have each left their mark on this remote Pacific island, but it is the giant sculptures, or *moai*, that dominate the visitor's imagination. **MC**

DREAM TO REALITY Qantas (qantas.com) and LAN (lan.com) fly from Australia to Santiago, Chile. Easter Island, a special territory of Chile, is 3700km from South America and can be reached via LAN, which flies direct from Santiago. Stay at Posada de Mike Rapu (see explora.com), a contemporary lodge with a good program of guided excursions.

7 EUROPE CULTURE

THE EXPERIENCE Take in some of the finest ballet you'll ever see at Moscow's magnificently restored Bolshoi Theatre.

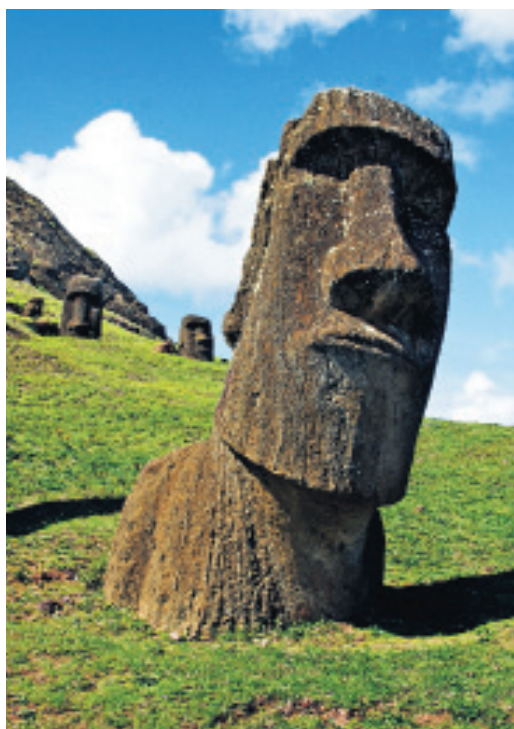
It boasts the world's most bolshie, inept ushers and crankiest, most curt cloakroom attendants, and it's wickedly expensive. Fortunately, it's the famed troupe's dancers who are the stellar attraction, and a visit to Moscow is positively incomplete without attending a performance of the Bolshoi Ballet. This is especially the case since late last year, when the company reopened its stupendous 1720-seat grand theatre - a 19th-century Moscow landmark in its own right, and now Putin's new pride and joy - after an interminable and controversial restoration. **AD**

DREAM TO REALITY Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) flies from Australia to Moscow via Singapore. Bolshoi Ballet: bolshoi.ru/en.

8 AFRICA ADVENTURE

THE EXPERIENCE Explore Morocco's spectacular Atlas Mountains.

The snow-capped Atlas Mountains loom over Marrakech and the harsh, khaki-coloured desert that surrounds this colourful medieval city. Rising to a height of 4167 metres, the magnificent mountains separate the Atlantic coast from the Sahara Desert. While most visitors are content to spend their time exploring the souks and crumbling palaces of Marrakech, a hiking trip through the Atlas Mountains is a special joy - especially if you are lucky enough to walk with a local Berber guide who takes you to his aunt's house for mint tea and flatbread dipped in wild honey. Despite their proximity to Marrakech, the mountain villages seem to belong to another age as bearded men haggle in colourful Berber markets and ancient mud-walled towns cling to the sides of high, treeless ravines. There are few roads - old women carry huge stacks of firewood on their shoulders, village boys drive sheep across fast-flowing mountain streams. But even in this harsh wilderness, it's



9 FREQUENT FLYER EUROPE

Maeve O'Meara
Gourmet Safaris director.



THE PLACE Sardinia, Italy.

THE EXPERIENCE Sardinia's capital, Cagliari, is one of the great unexpected finds. Everywhere you look there are lovely palm trees, cobblestone streets, winding alleyways and great little places where you can stop and eat and have a glass of something. They do a red mullet roe called bottarga, which is an intense, pressed, salty, fishy product that's much-prized - you grate it over spaghetti so you get this lovely seafoody flavour.

DETAILS British Airways (britishairways.com) flies from Australia to London with connections to Rome. Alitalia (alitalia.com) flies daily from Rome to Cagliari in 70 minutes. Moby Lines (moby.com) operates the fastest ferry (four hours, 45 minutes) between Civitavecchia near Rome to Olbia, Sardinia. **KL**

still possible to find a French-style *auberge* where you can enjoy a dish of grilled lamb, a fresh salad and a glass of chilled Moroccan rosé on the terrace. Multi-day treks with local guides, cooks and mules are available, as are expeditions on horseback. Overnight accommodation is in Berber-style tents or local guesthouses. **MC**

DREAM TO REALITY Etihad (etihadairways.com) and Emirates (emirates.com/au) fly from Australia, via Abu Dhabi and Dubai respectively, to Casablanca, with connections to Marrakech. Morocco By Prior Arrangement (moroccohypriorarrangement.net) can arrange Atlas Mountains guided walking trips.

10 AFRICA HERITAGE

THE EXPERIENCE Be amazed by the historic rock churches of Ethiopia.

Local legend has it that the 11 marvellous monolith churches of Lalibela in northern Ethiopia were carved from bedrock by humans during the day and by angels at night. Laid out in the 12th century as a "New Jerusalem", the masterpiece of this holy assembly is Bete Giyorgis, which was hewn from stone in the shape of the St George's cross and built in a single day, apparently, because on this occasion man and angel worked side by side. The stories can seem far-fetched but the experience is genuine; inside these World Heritage-listed



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churches, Coptic Christians still worship as they did in the first millennium - clad in white robes, prostrate in prayer and shrouded in incense. **KH**

DREAM TO REALITY Emirates (emirates.com/au) flies to Addis Ababa via Dubai; Ethiopian Airlines (ethiopianairlines.com) offers an air pass that includes flights to all the country's major historical sites at Lake Tana, Gonder, Aksum and Lalibela. More information: tourismethiopia.org.

11 NORTH AMERICA URBAN

THE EXPERIENCE Lift your spirits at one of the world's most unusual parks.

Grab a coffee and a copy of *The New Yorker* and make like a local by hanging out on the High Line - an elevated park fashioned from an abandoned 1930s freight rail line that's revitalised Manhattan's Meatpacking District. The first section opened in 2009, another 10 blocks were added last year and there's lobbying to extend the 2.2-kilometre-long park further. The hip design includes a sunbathing lawn, wildflower field and native grasses, along with the occasional art installation. **KL**

DREAM TO REALITY Qantas (qantas.com) flies from Australia to New York City via Los Angeles. Stay at The Standard (standardhotels.com), which straddles the park. More information: thehighline.org.

BUILT TO LAST:
(top left) Easter Island's famous moai statues; (above) New York's High Line aerial park.



15 EUROPE INDULGENCE

THE EXPERIENCE Soak up the champagne lifestyle at London's Harvey Nichols.

At this ever-fabulous department store, a complimentary appointment with a personal shopping assistant makes for thoroughly civilised retail therapy. A session in the shopping suite, to be booked in advance, includes advice on style and fit, plus access to showers and refreshments. When you're done trying on the latest designer collections, the Fifth Floor Champagne Bar, with its airy, floral decor, inspired by the work of Emile Gallé, is the perfect place to break for bubbles. **EV**

DREAM TO REALITY Qantas (qantas.com) and British Airways (britishairways.com) fly from Australia to London. To book a personal shopping session, visit harveynichols.com/personal-shopping.

16 ASIA CULTURE

THE EXPERIENCE Witness the mesmerising Hindu aarti ceremony on Varanasi's ghats.

On a stifling, humid evening by the Ganges, not far from the haunting, smoky funeral ghats (or stepped hillsides), Varanasi's spectacularly intense daily fire ceremony can leave the visitor in a near trance-like state. Far from being merely a tourist attraction, this sacred, clamorous event involves young Hindu priests facing "Mother Ganga" and waving flaming aarti lamps around a person or a deity in order to achieve purification. **AD**

DREAM TO REALITY Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) flies from Australia via Singapore to six Indian destinations, including Mumbai and Delhi, with domestic connections to Varanasi. Stay at the Nadesar Palace (tajhotels.com), a former maharaja's 19th-century residence.

17 AUSTRALIA NATURE

THE EXPERIENCE Hand-feed Adelaide's giant pandas.

As breakfasts go, panda cake doesn't look particularly appetising. But this steamed concoction of ground bamboo, corn and rice powders, soy flour, calcium, sugar and eggs looks just fine to Wang Wang and Funi, the male and female giant pandas resident at Adelaide Zoo. Turn keeper for a morning and experience the thrill of popping a piece of cake or slice of apple straight into a panda's waiting mouth. **KL**

DREAM TO REALITY Virgin Australia (virginaustralia.com.au) and Qantas (qantas.com) fly regularly from Sydney and Melbourne to Adelaide. The behind-the-scenes VIP Panda Tour runs four mornings a week (zoossa.com.au). Stay at the Clarion Hotel Soho (clarionhotelsoho.com.au).

18 ASIA NATURE

THE EXPERIENCE Ride an elephant along the Thai-Burma-Laos border.

The 65-hectare Anantara Golden Triangle is part luxury resort, part elephant sanctuary – a sort of rough-luxe alternative to the mindless pampering of most five-star developments. Trainee mahout (elephant driver) programs bring humans and elephants together for gently paced walks and swims in the border rivers between Thailand, Burma and Laos. When fully booked, the resort has a human-to-elephant ratio of about 160:30 – about one pachyderm among five people. **KH**

DREAM TO REALITY Thai Airways (thaiairways.com.au) has multiple daily flights from Australia to Bangkok and on to Chiang Rai. Stay at Anantara Golden Triangle (goldentriangle.anantara.com). The resort is a 70km drive from the airport.



12 EUROPE JOURNEY

THE EXPERIENCE Cruise the beautiful Stockholm archipelago and stay at the same hotel as Nobel laureates.

The five-star, 345-room Grand Hôtel Stockholm, the preferred accommodation of Nobel laureates when in the Swedish capital to collect their citations, serves as the perfect base from which to explore the enormous Stockholm archipelago. The hotel, which is located on one of Stockholm's 14 city islands, is next to the multitude of wharves from which ferries depart to the scantily populated but stunningly beautiful isles of the archipelago, a haven for sun- and fun-loving locals in summer. **AD**

DREAM TO REALITY Emirates (emirates.com/au) flies from Australia to Copenhagen via Dubai. SAS Scandinavian Airlines (flysas.com) connects regularly between Stockholm and Copenhagen. The Grand Hôtel: grandhotel.se/en.

13 ASIA CULTURE

THE EXPERIENCE Visit the greatest museum of Chinese antiquities.

Taipei's extraordinary National Palace Museum eclipses anything on the mainland, largely by virtue of modern Sino history, and much to the chagrin of the mainland Chinese. Its contents – more than 600,000 pieces – were smuggled



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WORLDS APART: (clockwise from top) elephant riding in Thailand; a ghat leading down to India's Ganges River; Wang Wang, one of Adelaide Zoo's giant pandas; the Fifth Floor Champagne Bar at London's Harvey Nichols.



across the Taiwan Straits by Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist troops as they fled Mao Zedong's victorious Communists in 1949. The museum's exquisite treasures, including the priceless *Jadeite Cabbage with Insects*, encompass the entire breadth of China's epic history. No wonder mainlanders, courtesy of relaxed travel regulations, are flocking to Taipei. **AD**

DREAM TO REALITY Taiwan's China Airlines (china-airlines.com.au) flies directly from Australia to Taipei. National Palace Museum: www.npm.gov.tw. Stay at Les Suites Taipei (lessuiteshotels.com). More information: taiwantourism.org.

14 ASIA ISLANDS

THE EXPERIENCE Chill out on China's only tropical island.

China's southernmost province, Hainan Island, is often described as "the next Hawaii" because of its palm-fringed beaches and tropical climate. The best beach resorts are in the southern district of Sanya. Elsewhere, you'll find rugged mountains, dense rainforests and ancient temples. The pace of development is staggering – there are now more than 500 hotels on the island – but if you want a self-indulgent beach holiday with a difference, look no further. **MC**

DREAM TO REALITY Hainan Airlines (global.hnair.com) flies from Australia to Hainan via Shenzhen, or fly direct from Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai.