

To the ends of the earth IN EXTREME LUXURY

How the megarich are organising expeditions that don't scrimp on style. By Susan d'Arcy and Jeremy Lazell

The idea of a super yacht based in the Antarctic might seem laughable. But specialist charter firm Eynos Expeditions is doing brisk business down there, with high-net-worth clients happy to splash out €550,000-plus for a week's polar exploration that doesn't mean missing out on life's little luxuries, such as heated pools and Balinese massages.

VIP, it seems, now stands for Very Intrepid Person.

"These days, it's all about visiting pristine destinations that nobody else can get to – and bespoke everything," says Ben Lyons, CEO of Eynos. That includes personalised Inuit parkas in the Arctic, rare vintage wines on safari in the Serengeti and underfloor heating at Egyptian wilderness camps.

Geoffrey Kent, of upmarket adventure operator Abercrombie & Kent, has spotted the trend and launched a series of ultra-exclusive expeditions. The first will be to Palau in Micronesia next year, recreating Jacques Cousteau's trip in the 1960s.

It costs up to €173,000pp for nine days and includes access to a World Heritage Site that has been out of bounds to the general public since 1956. "It's a new kind of journey," says Kent, "taking intrepid travellers to unexplored places only accessible by private jet."

Want a piece of the action (and have a

spare few zeros on your bank balance)?

Here are eight places your megabucks can get you in 2016 – with a more realistically priced (if not necessarily cheap) alternative in each case.

CRUISING ANTARCTICA

The Antarctic is hardly crowded, but the elite adventurer needs to be certain theirs are the very first footprints in a particular patch of snow. Enter the 253ft superyacht Legend, launching next May and ice-strengthened to power through

to the places other boats cannot reach, in a style they can't begin to match.

It comes with vast suites, a spa, movie theatre and a pool. Walking with emperor penguins and kayaking with leopard seals are incredible experiences – but readily available to other holidaymakers hereabouts, so Legend comes with a superior toybox including an on-board helicopter (an extra €260,000 a week) to provide an albatross's eye view, and a three-person submarine (oh go on, it's only another €86,000), capable of diving to nearly 1,000ft.

THE DAMAGE A week costs €540,000 for up to 26 people through Eynos Expeditions (eynos-expeditions.com). Fuel and food is extra – about another €90,000 depending on how partial guests are to foie gras and Château Margaux. Flights

are also extra; most likely a private jet, which

from London would add €160,000pp.

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE

Join the 16-night Antarctic Express cruise holiday from Ushuaia, crossing the Drake Passage to the South Shetland Islands and Antarctic Peninsula, with excursions and Zodiac trips to spot penguins, elephant and fur seals and whales. You'll also visit the grave of Sir Ernest Shackleton at Grytviken as well as the Shetland islands. From €18,200 for 16 nights, full-board, including flights (gohop.ie).

EXPLORING THE ARCTIC

Baffin Island is one of the world's most inhospitable environments. Unless you're super rich, in which case tents have 10ft-high cathedral ceilings, beds with proper mattresses and steaming hot showers →



Blowing hot and cold
Top, ballooning in the Arctic offers serious dinner-party cachet. Inset above, drop into New Zealand



→ to create an appropriately warm and fuzzy bubble after a hard day's kayaking or sledding in search of polar bears and narwhals. Heli skiing and scuba diving are impressive tidbits to slip into dinner-party conversation but, for real cachet, it has to be hot-air ballooning, wearing your welcome prezziie – a bespoke Inuit parka.

THE DAMAGE Nine days costs up to €117,000pp, full-board, including activities and guides, through Red Savannah (redsavannah.com). Flights are extra.

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE Visit the Arctic Watch camp on Somerset Island, around 1,290km northwest (a stone's throw around these parts). Discover the World (discover-the-world.co.uk) has a seven-night trip to Arctic Watch Wilderness Lodge from €7,240pp, full-board, including all activities.

ARCHEOLOGY IN EGYPT

For decades after its discovery in 1918, the Abu Ballas pottery hill baffled scientists. How did 400 large earthenware jars come to be in the middle of the Western Desert? The riddle piqued the interest of six Canadian businessmen cum Indiana-Jones wannabes.

They wanted to explore the various theories for themselves, assisted by three leading archaeologists, but didn't exactly want to slum it. Enter bespoke operator Brown + Hudson, which laid on a private jet and helicopter transfers to get them there, and created a desert camp that was less boy scout, more Roman emperor. Muslin-draped beds, silk rugs, hammered copper fittings, hot showers and – courtesy of a special metal lining on the tent and some game chap with a shovel and a pile of coal – underfloor heating through the cold desert nights.

THE DAMAGE Their eight-day tour can be replicated from €186,000pp, all-inclusive, with private jet travel and chopper transfers, or bespoke alternatives can be created (brownandhudson.com).

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE Join archeologist

guests access to the coral reefs of Seventy Islands, a World Heritage Site closed since 1956, as well as exclusive use of Jellyfish Lake – so it's just you and a million (non-stinging) jellyfish in the water. Your base isn't bad either. The 227ft super-yacht Saluzi has slick suites, a spa, nightclub, cinema and water slide to ensure a big splash when you take a dip in the South Pacific.

THE DAMAGE Nine days from €133,000pp, all-inclusive, through Abercrombie & Kent, sailing from Hong Kong on November 13 (abercrombiekent.co.uk).

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE A live-aboard holiday diving in Palau (including Jellyfish Lake) costs from €5,725pp. Includes seven nights, full-board, on an eight-berth *pimisi* (traditional Indonesian sailing ship), two nights on Palau, B&B, flights, and up to four dives daily (diveworldwide.com).

Dr Neil Faulkner in Jordan visiting Roman ruins, byzantine churches, Amman, Petra, the Dead Sea and TE Lawrence's desert camps in Wadi Rum. The country borders Syria, but is considered safe, with travel sanctioned by the Foreign Office in all but a narrow corridor along the border. From €2,615 for seven nights, B&B, including flights (coxandkings.co.uk).

OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

Western Australia is 32 times the size of Ireland with a population of just 2.5m – vast tracts are untouched, but the area locals prize as true wilderness is the Bungle Bungle Range, an expanse of otherworldly sandstone towers and gorges in Purnululu National Park, east of Broome. Most visitors arrive by road, a bumpy five hours on dirt tracks, and stay at campsites with no showers. The wealthy explorer, however, checks into Berkeley River Lodge, accessible only by private plane with 20 high-spec villas perched on sand dunes overlooking the Timor Sea. From here, they take a helicopter into the Bungle Bungles' least-visited corners, with just a guide and a champagne picnic for company.

THE DAMAGE A 21-night trip, including three at the Berkeley River Lodge as well as stays in the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru and Kangaroo Island, all-inclusive, with domestic travel by private jet and first-class international flights costs from €65,000pp, through Bridge & Wickers (bridgeandwickers.co.uk).

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE This three-week outback trip between Adelaide and Darwin takes in Kangaroo Island, Alice Springs, Uluru, Watarrka National Park and Broome, where you pick up a 4WD for a nine-day journey through the Kimberley region and Kakadu National Park on the spectacular Gibb River Road. From €4,490pp, room only, including flights and car hire (austravel.com).

DIVING IN MICRONESIA

Geoffrey Kent has been globetrotting for more than 50 years, so when he says Palau's string of 250 islands, southeast of the Philippines, are among the most unsullied on earth, who's going to argue? His little black book gets

€2,370, full-board; bareboat charter (no crew or provisions) on a 33ft yacht costs from €2,210, including flights, fuel and fees (seafarersailing.co.uk).

ALL-ACTION NEW ZEALAND

It's three parts James Bond glamour, one part Bear Grylls grit on this coast-to-coast adventure across South Island. Explorers are parachuted on to a golden lick of beach outside Moeraki to start an epic journey, plotted to avoid roads to encourage a pioneering spirit.

It's mainly hiking over pristine slopes, passing impossibly turquoise lakes, mint-green fields and sheep. The hard miles are covered in fancy Polaris off-road vehicles or by helicopterto reach the next luxury mountain cabin by sunset. After 400km and three mountain ranges, the west coast and Haast fill the horizon. If you're filthy rich, there's only one way to celebrate – a musician serenading you in your cabin.

THE DAMAGE Seven nights costs €41,500pp, all-inclusive, through Momentum Adventure (momentumadventure.com). Flights extra.

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE This guided group trip treks, kayaks and rafts across South Island from Christchurch, visiting

SAILING IN THAILAND

You don't have to sail far from the southern Thai coast to appreciate why the privileged love this stretch of the Andaman Sea dotted with tropical islands, each a bouquet of palm trees with a ribbon of bone-white beach. Your temporary home? The 194ft motor yacht Senses, with a range of 6,000 nautical miles ideal for long-distance cruising off the beaten track. Her creamy interiors are courtesy of Philippe Starck and her crew numbers 14, including top chefs and dive, kitesurf and jetski instructors.

THE DAMAGE A week from €367,000 for up to 10 people through Y.Co (y.co). "Budget" an extra €90,000 or so for food and fuel. Flights are extra.

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE Island-hop for seven nights in the Andaman Sea. Cabin charter (skipper and crew included) on an 82ft, 10-cabin catamaran costs from

Kaikoura, Abel Tasman National Park, Cape Foulwind, the Southern Alps and Fiordland, with optional heli-hiking and whale-watching. From €7,015pp for 11 nights, including flights, most meals and activities (discover-the-world.co.uk).

TANZANIAN SAFARI

Ever enjoyed the cherry flavours of a Nederburg Auction Private Bin Italian Blend 2001? Probably not, unless you've stayed at Singita Grumeti. Everything about these safaris is exclusive, so the company bought every bottle of this wine to be savoured along with sightings of the Big Five within its 350,000 acres of the Serengeti National Park. Singita has just 100 beds, spread across five hideaways. The best is Singita Explore, with custom-built tents and Italian leather chairs from which you watch the migration of wildebeest with not another soul, or a 4WD, to spoil the spectacle.

THE DAMAGE Four nights at Singita Explore

and three at Singita Serengeti House from €18,600pp, all inclusive, with business-class flights through Scott Dunn (scottdunn.com).

THE CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE Big Five sightings are all but guaranteed on safari at the Ngorongoro Crater and Lake Manyara and Serengeti national parks. From €4,625pp for six nights in lodges and a tented camp, full-board, including flights, game drives and park fees (audleytravel.com).



Hot hangouts Above, from left: pristine Palau; camping it up in Tanzania; the 194ft Senses yacht is your home with a helipad in Thailand. Below, lounge at Lizard Island on an Australian adventure