

POSTCARDS from the EDGE

Ten offbeat destinations that offer a holiday with a daring difference

By Francesca Syz

HIGH CAMP

LION SANDS RIVER LODGE, KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, SOUTH AFRICA

WHAT IT IS: an ultra-glamorous safari camp originally set up in the Thirties. Two new tree houses (one completed just six months ago), up in the branches of 500-year-old leadwood trees, have just been added. The perfect honeymoon destination, it's also an unforgettable experience for anyone.

WHY GO: for the thrill of sleeping among the tree tops, complete with desk, loo, dressing gown and slippers.

DON'T MISS: champagne dinner in your tree house, watching the sun go down.

LOWDOWN: Cazenove & Loyd (020 7384 2332; cazloyd.com) offers five nights (one night in a tree house), full board, from £2,449 per person, including flights and transfers.



BIG SKY COUNTRY

MOWANI MOUNTAIN CAMP, TWYFELFONTEIN, NAMIBIA

WHAT IT IS: 12 smart tents (and one suite), plus public areas resembling giant boulders, nestle unobtrusively among real, absurdly giant rocks on an elevated plateau overlooking this ancient landscape. All the tents have wooden viewing decks and outdoor marble baths. Expect a surge in popularity after **Brad Pitt**

and **Angelina Jolie**'s stay in Namibia.

WHY GO: to glimpse the rare black rhino and desert elephant, Damaraland's fascinating geological formations and the ancient rock paintings at Twyfelfontein.

DON'T MISS: game watching from a hot-air balloon above the Aba-Huab Valley.

LOWDOWN: Expert Africa (020 8232 9777; expertafrica.com) offers double tents, room only, from £210 per night.

BEDOUIN BLISS

AZWOU'N CRISARAN LODGE, RISSANI, MOROCCO

WHAT IT IS: a funky take on a traditional Bedouin camp with 16 "jaima suites" (or nomadic tents), owned by two Spanish hoteliers, on the edge of the Moroccan desert bordering the Sahara. Each tent has a lounge-cum-bedroom with zebra-print throw-covered beds, Moroccan rugs and floor cushions, a bathroom and fireplace.

WHY GO: located near the Merzouga dunes, it's an ideal base from which to explore the nearby markets and kasbahs.

DON'T MISS: a four-hand massage after a candlelit soak in the hammam.

LOWDOWN: Rusticae (00 21 12 22 36 16 32; rusticae.es) offers double tents, half board, from 440 euros (about £300) per night.





ECO CHIC

THE HOOPOE YURT HOTEL, NEAR RONDA, SPAIN

WHAT IT IS: one Afghan- and two Mongolian-style yurts set among olive groves and a lush forest on a hillside in the heart of Andalusia, which are both cutting-edge and very luxurious. Not only are the yurts eco-friendly, gloriously comfortable and beautifully decorated by their expat owners Ed and Henrietta, with crisp linens, exotic textiles and chic furniture, but the delicious home-cooked food is made with ingredients produced locally or grown in the couple's own vegetable patch.

WHY GO: because it's cheaper and easier to get to than Mongolia, the original home of the yurt, but as seemingly remote and just as beautiful. And staying here really isn't like camping at all – each yurt has its own nearby toilet and hot showers.

DON'T MISS: falling asleep in a hammock strung between shady cork trees to the sound of goat's bells and crickets.

LOWDOWN: The Hoopoe Yurt Hotel (00 34 66 06 68 241; yurthotel.com) offers double yurts, b&b, from £60 per night.

MOUNTAIN HIGHS

SHAKTI LUXURY CAMP, UTTARANCHAL, INDIA

WHAT IT IS: high-design and low-impact are not usually easy bedfellows, but this new, tiny, four-person-only camp by Shakti in the Himalayas seems to have managed. Two fully serviced, heated ensuite tents (which are moved seasonally) are located 2,400m up a mountainside, three hours' hike from the nearest town of Leti in the newly established Uttaranchal province. Each tent is

TRAILER TREAT

THE SHADY DELL, ARIZONA

WHAT IT IS: just 6km north of the Mexican border in a mountain copper mining town called Bisbee (aren't you loving it already?) is a trailer park with a difference. Half of it is an ordinary layover for modern-day trailers, the other features nine vintage aluminium models from the Forties and Fifties, which are available for overnight or weekly rentals.

Each retro trailer is stuffed full of individual vintage memorabilia, including phonographs, big band and early rhythm and blues cassettes, books, magazines and kitchen utensils.

WHY GO: to act out those trailer-trash fantasies and take hilarious snaps of your boyfriend in an apron cooking breakfast. Plus, its mountain-top location

means it's cooler than almost anywhere else in sun-baked Arizona.

DON'T MISS: eating in Dot's Diner, a 1957 Art Deco-inspired trailer on site, which offers great home-cooked meals five days a week.

LOWDOWN: The Shady Dell (00 1 520 432 3567; theshadydell.com) offers two-person trailers, room only, from \$40 (about £21) per night.



furnished in unfinished wood with a four-poster or twin beds swathed in pashmina blankets. There's also a communal tent for romantic candlelit dinners on a large, damask-covered dining table.

WHY GO: for truly spectacular trekking.

DON'T MISS: a gourmet picnic with views of the Himalayan peaks.

LOWDOWN: Ampersand Travel (020 7723 4336; ampersandtravel.com) offers three nights in a double tent, full board, from £1,150.

PLEASURE BOAT

ZAHRA, NILE, EGYPT

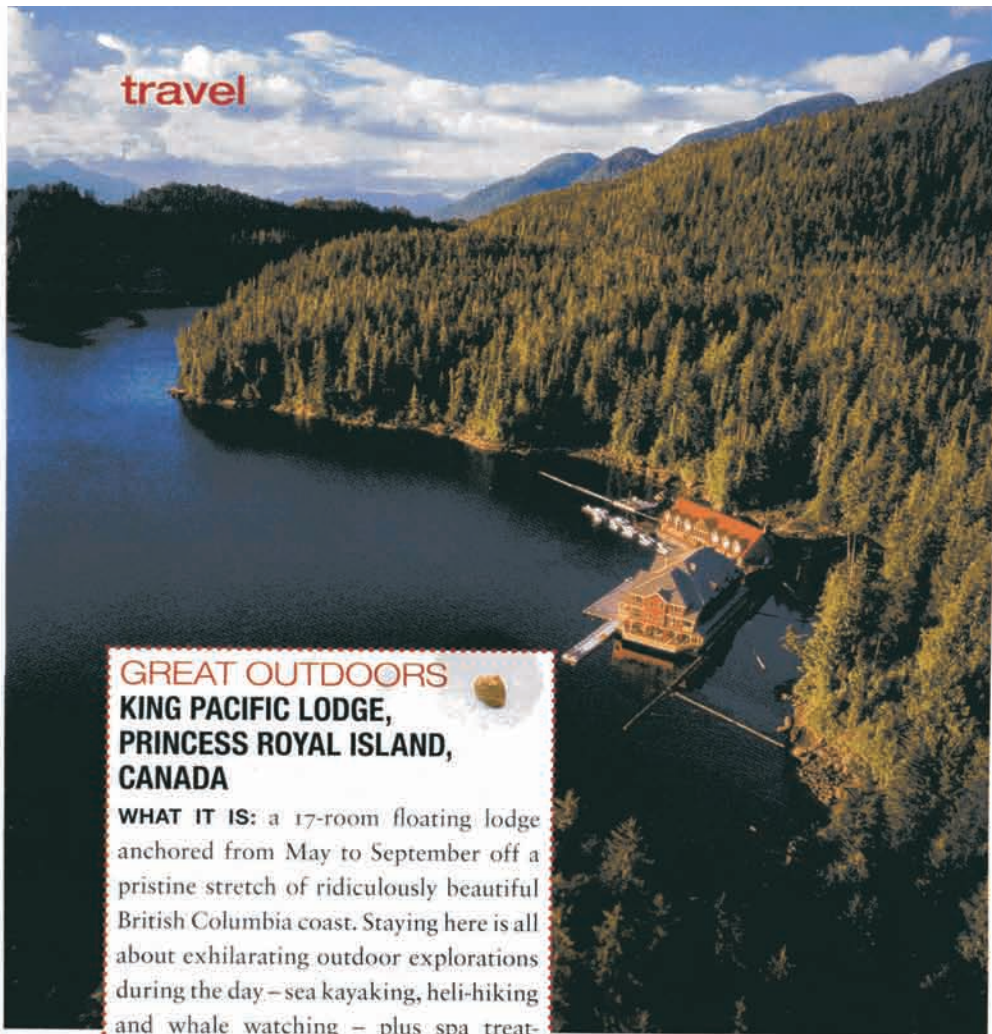
WHAT IT IS: an immaculate six-cabin replica of a 19th-century aristocratic river cruiser (or "dahabiyya"). Each cabin is individually decorated in colonial style with Oriental and Egyptian touches. The top deck is covered in carpets and floor cushions for guests to lounge on as they sail to historic sites such as Luxor, Karnak and Aswan.

WHY GO: a Nile cruise is a travel classic – this little boat, steeped in old-school glamour, is the hip new way to do it.

DON'T MISS: barbecues on the river bank.

LOWDOWN: Bales Worldwide (0870 752 0780; balesworldwide.com) offers four nights in Cairo, followed by seven nights on board the Zahra, full board, from £1,699 per person. ▶





GREAT OUTDOORS
KING PACIFIC LODGE,
PRINCESS ROYAL ISLAND,
CANADA

WHAT IT IS: a 17-room floating lodge anchored from May to September off a pristine stretch of ridiculously beautiful British Columbia coast. Staying here is all about exhilarating outdoor explorations during the day – sea kayaking, heli-hiking and whale watching – plus spa treatments, and gourmet food and fine wine in front of a roaring fire at night.

WHY GO: to release your inner lumberjack and breathe in super-clean air.

DON'T MISS: searching for the rare white “Spirit Bear” with local native guides during September.

LOWDOWN: Rosewood Hotels (020 7745 7205; rosewoodhotels.com) offers three nights in a Wilderness View double room, full board, from US\$3,700 (about £1,965) per person, including return transfers from Vancouver.

UNDER THE STARS

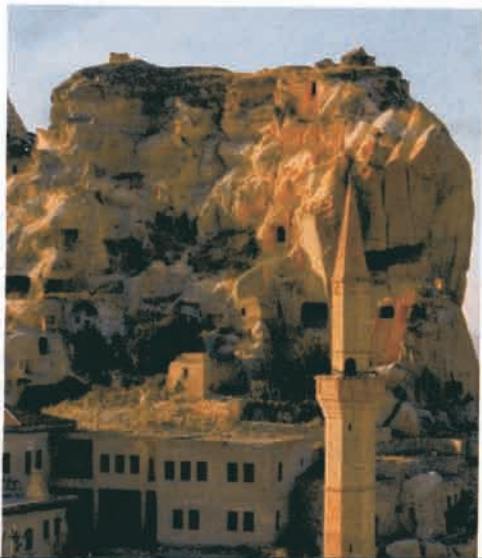
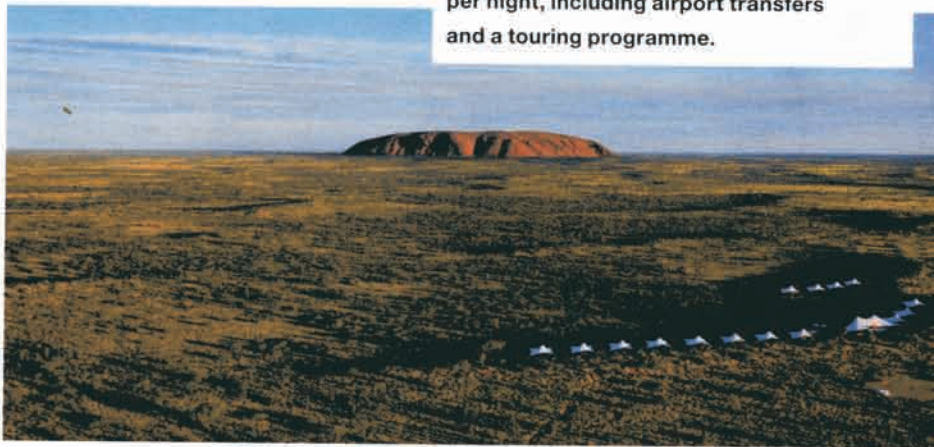
LONGITUDE 131°, ULURU-KATA
TJUTA NATIONAL PARK, AUSTRALIA

WHAT IT IS: 15 newly refurbished pioneer-chic tents on stilts, with soaring sail-like canvas roofs, at the foot of Australia’s iconic Uluru (Ayers Rock). Dune House, the main lodge, contains a communal dining area, an honesty bar and the library is crammed with interesting history books and maps. People say that seeing the sun rise or set over Uluru is one of those life-changing experiences. Here you can see both, every day. It’s the ideal spot to break a cross-country road trip.

WHY GO: since it became illegal to climb Uluru, a great view of it rather than from it has become the sought-after thing. Longitude 131° is the closest hotel and has by far the best views.

DON'T MISS: the Sound of Silence dinner under the stars with the hotel’s resident astronomer.

LOWDOWN: Tailor Made Travel (0845 456 8050; tailor-made.co.uk) offers two nights, full board, from £766 per person per night, including airport transfers and a touring programme.



HOUSE OF ROCK

THE HOUSE OF WISHES, ÜRGÜP,
TURKEY

WHAT IT IS: the extraordinary volcanic caves and teetering rock formations of Turkey’s Cappadocia National Park have been ingeniously turned into accommodation by generations of Turks. Some caves are now being transformed into chic places to stay and this new 21-room hotel is an exquisite example. Its curved-wall Cave Suites are naturally air-conditioned

all year round, so they stay perfectly cool in summer and warm in winter.

WHY GO: to combine the awe-inspiring landscape with excellent cuisine.

DON'T MISS: the hotel’s secret tunnel carved through the mountain, which re-emerges on a fantastic private balcony.

LOWDOWN: Exclusive Escapes (020 8605 3500; hiddenturkey.com) offers two nights, b&b, from £666 per person, including flights and transfers. ■