

Brave new world

As the world emerges from Covid-19, what and where will luxury travellers have on their mind? They'll likely seek private trips, wellness retreats, exclusive-use properties and remote locations

AUTHOR: APRIL HUTCHINSON

With the world currently on pause, no one knows how soon any kind of normal travel patterns are going to kick back into action or, when they can travel, where affluent consumers are going to want to go, how they'll get there and what they'll be looking for. But industry consensus is along the lines that we will see a magnification of habits we'd already started to recognise anyway: much richer, experiential trips; remote places and off-the-grid travel; travel that can prove its sustainability; and multigenerational travel that really allows them to connect with family. Add into that some new potential paranoia about crowds and health concerns and the pent-up demand to just see friends and family, perhaps missed birthday and special occasion gatherings, and if you're of a positive mindset, there could even be huge potential for travel companies to help plan some major trips coming out of this.

But as Misty Belles, managing director of global public relations for Virtuoso, says: "We know that luxury travel tends to lead the way in terms of pick-up, but much like after the global financial crisis of 2008, they are unlikely to want to be seen doing so in any obvious way, so discretion and privacy will be key."

There are already signs of a spike in interest among private jet charter companies too, with people looking for a more controlled way of flying.

"Hygiene concerns involved with flying commercially will certainly lead to more people chartering a private jet for going on holiday; people are nervous and want to keep their families safe," says George Galanopoulos, Luxaviation UK's co-founder and chief executive. "You choose the aircraft and the people who accompany you; you can arrive at the FBO just 15 to 30 minutes before departure; and avoid queues and crowds at every step.

"Private jet charter isn't necessarily out of budget for everyone either – if you're used to flying business or first class, it's not always a big step up in terms of price, but it's a significantly elevated experience in terms of efficiency, safety, and luxury," he adds.

It could be that 2020 remains sluggish, making the pressure for availability even keener in 2021 and accelerating the need to get travellers to commit to plans for next year, or literally miss out in some places.

"With most prices held at 2020 levels and good value flights, now is the time to book 2021 in Africa," says Kerry Golds, managing director of Abercrombie & Kent, about its Sanctuary Retreats range.

"Lodges are in big demand for 2021; we're seeing peak season dates sell out, as people realise most of them offer masses of space, and with an average of just eight to 10 rooms per lodge, we've always practised physical distancing.

"Travellers also need to come back, of course, so their tourist dollars can keep poaching dollars at bay. So many projects in Africa rely on tourists, whether it be Maasai dancers, Zambian bead-makers or rhinos under conservation."



Private life

Those keen to get travelling as soon as possible at the top end are likely to want to privatise as much of the experience as they can

STAYCATION STYLE

YTL Hotels' **The Gainsborough Bath Spa** has launched **The Townhouse**, an elegant four-storey Georgian property that combines the space of a private home with the luxury services of its sister hotel. Families and friends looking to gather for a post-lockdown staycation can head to historic Bath and stay in the three-bedroom house with champagne on arrival, welcome hamper, and breakfast each morning in **The Gainsborough**, where guests of **The Townhouse** can also take advantage of the **Spa Village** and natural thermal waters. Nights at **The Townhouse** start from £765 (weeknight), thegainsboroughbathspa.co.uk

BLISSFUL BEACHES

Private plane to get there? Tick. Private villas? Tick. Private yacht trips around the Caribbean? Tick. And all with the back-up of one of the region's best little boutique hideaways, **Bequia Beach Hotel**, on the sleepy little island of the same name. This November, the owning family will reveal a new collection of three modern villas, and guests can also charter **Star of the Sea** for the day or week, exploring the likes of **Mustique**, **Canouan** and **Tobago Cays**. The hotel also offers private flights from Barbados to the island with **Bequia Air** (left), ensuring a seamless transfer experience; the

chartered flight (available from November) part of the hotel's VIP Transfer add-on package and is available only to guests. bequiahotel.com

TAKE TO THE SKIES

SkySafari and the **Elewana Collection** have teamed up to offer fully private safaris for couples, families and groups of friends wanting to travel together. They can hire **SkySafari's** nine-seater executive-class Cessna Caravan exclusively for 2021 trips, experiencing set itineraries in Kenya and Tanzania with safari extensions including a stay at **Tarangire Treetops** (above), and avoiding travelling on scheduled regional flights. The trips also guarantee exclusive use of a private safari vehicle and only one check-in and -out procedure during the whole journey. The seven-night **Tanzania Classic** is £5,745pp for a full plane of nine passengers and includes seven-nights' full-board accommodation, **SkySafari** flights, transfers and park fees. skysafari.com

POLE POSITION

Cookson Adventures has a range of private trips, such as a bespoke Antarctic camp and flight to the South Pole; guests stay in a unique camp with six-course tasting dinners, fire-lit lounges and double-walled pods to sleep in. The trip includes unique wildlife, visits to research stations and talks from Antarctic explorers in total exclusivity. There's also the option to fly to the South Pole on a private **Basler** ski plane, stopping off at an expedition