

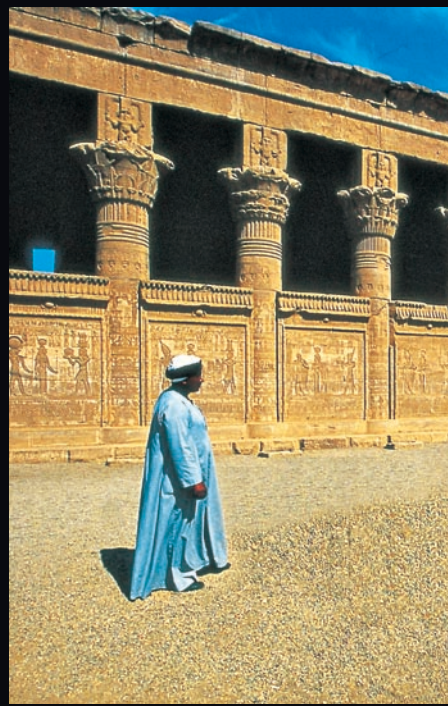
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MARTIN HARTLEY/COURTESY OF KENSINGTON TOURS; COURTESY OF MARCHESI DI BAROLO; RICHARD KOEGL/COURTESY OF COUNTRY WALKERS; COURTESY OF COX & KINGS; COURTESY OF ABERCROMBIE & KENT PICTURE LIBRARY



22

TRIPS OF A LIFETIME

On a quest to bring you the world's most extraordinary experiences, we reached out to some of our favorite tour operators and asked them to create exclusive itineraries just for T+L readers. The result? Luxury camps in Antarctica, an Italian Slow Food immersion, Egyptian ruins at sunrise, and more. **PLUS** All the information you need to book now. **REPORTED BY PETER J. FRANK**



UNITED STATES

1

The American Southwest Essential Canyon Country

The Operator Off the Beaten Path **The Highlights** Escape the crowds in America's iconic desert landscape. Start with a lesson in canyoneering—exploring the slot canyons of Utah's Zion National Park by foot and rope—followed by a stay at the new Amangiri, near Lake Powell, in Utah. A three-day raft trip through the Grand Canyon includes hikes >>



TRANSFORMATION VACATIONS Clockwise from top left: Exploring ice waves in Antarctica with Kensington Tours; inside the Marchesi di Barolo winery, in Piedmont, Italy, led by Country Walkers; cheese maker Silvio Pistone in Piedmont; the 17th-century Cartagena Cathedral, included on a Cox & Kings five-day Colombia tour; Egypt's Dendera Temple, on a trip with Abercrombie & Kent.

and gourmet food. Next, ascend for a rim-side dinner and visit remote Havasu Canyon. A night at the Aria Resort & Casino, in Las Vegas, caps off the trip. 800/445-2995; offthebeatenpath.com; April–October; from \$4,495 for 11 days.



2

Alaska

Adventure in the Kenai Peninsula

The Operator Austin-Lehman Adventures **The Highlights** On this action-packed wilderness trip, you'll spot whales and porpoises from a kayak, watch icebergs calve with a glacier expert, hike to North America's largest ice field, and pedal past wildflower-strewn meadows and valleys. Plus, a marine biologist will bring you behind the scenes at a sea-life rehab center. 800/575-1540; austinlehman.com; June 19–24; \$2,998 for six days.



THE CARIBBEAN

3

Haiti

Help Heal a Nation

The Operator Elevate Destinations **The Highlights** Assist in the earthquake recovery by rebuilding a boys' home in Port-au-Prince or a school computer lab in Jacmel. Besides volunteering, you'll visit waterfalls and white-sand beaches, hear musical performances, and meet metalworkers transforming oil drums into sculptures. 617/661-0203; elevatedestinations.com; March, August, and November;



Havasu Canyon, Arizona, on a tour of the Southwest with Off the Beaten Path.

\$1,600 for nine days (Port-au-Prince) or \$2,000 for 15 days (Jacmel).



CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

4

Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, & Honduras Unraveling the Maya's Mysteries

The Operator Overseas Adventure Travel **The Highlights** A four-country tour of pre-Columbian history and culture includes stops at Mayan sites Copán and Lamanai, plus a spine-tingling sunrise hike to Tikal outside of visiting hours. You'll interact with locals at area markets that most tourists don't see, zipline over Lake Atitlán, and fly a giant Guatemalan kite, a multihued construction handmade from tissue paper and flown to honor the dead. 800/493-6824; oattravel.com; May 30; from \$2,495 for 14 days, including airfare.



5

Colombia

Rediscover Lost Cities

The Operator Cox & Kings **The Highlights** A five-day exploration of Cartagena's Old City, Spanish-colonial architecture, and buzzing neighborhoods—with a private villa decorated by Colombian fashion designer Hernán Zajar as your base—is only a prelude for the real showstopper: an expedition to the Lost City of the Sierra Nevada, founded in A.D. 800. Whereas most people hack through thick jungle to get there, you'll chopper in and hike 90 minutes to the mountainside site, a series of 250 stone terraces still inhabited by indigenous tribes. 800/999-1758; coxandkingsusa.com; through December 2011; from \$6,135 for five days.



6

Ecuador

Travel to the Heart of the Amazon

The Operator Tropic Journeys in Nature **The Highlights** Stay in an eco-lodge situated at the headwaters of the Amazon and run by the Huaorani, one of the most isolated ethnic groups on earth: first contacted by the outside world only 55 years ago, they speak a language that is unrelated to any other. You'll learn to use a blowgun, hear their leader relate the tribe's fight against oil exploration, and take a two-day meander down the Shiripuno River in kayaks, watching for tropical birds and monkeys. 703/879-1575; tropicoco.com; November–March; from \$850 for five days.



TRIP KEY

Adventure	Culture	Philanthropy
Culinary	History	Wildlife

7

Patagonia Luxury at the End of the World

The Operator Blue Parallel
The Highlights Expert guides and special access help tame Patagonia's rugged landscape. On Península Valdés, watch sea lions and whales from your cliffside villa, which is stocked with limited-production Malbecs. Meet with a glaciologist before an ice-trekking excursion on Perito Moreno. In Ushuaia, you'll stay in a lodge overlooking the Beagle Channel, which you'll explore by paddle with a former canoeist from the Argentinean Olympic team. 800/256-5307; blueparallel.com; October-April; from \$10,500 for seven days.



EUROPE

8

France Cycling and Châteaux in the Loire

The Operator Butterfield & Robinson
The Highlights Pedal through the gardens and sunflower fields of the Loire Valley, touring *grands châteaux*, tasting little-known wines such as Domaine de Noire Chinon, and dining at the home of the renowned chef Jean-Claude Rigollet. Only B&R stays at the 15th-century Château du Rivau, where Joan of Arc was once a guest. 866/551-9090; butterfield.com; May-September; from \$6,795 for seven days.



9

Italy Walking Through Piedmont

The Operator Country Walkers
The Highlights Get to know the birthplace of the Slow Food movement on foot

(average three to six miles per day). Participate in a tasting at the historic Marchesi di Barolo winery, visit with a local cheese maker, and go hunting for white truffles in Neive. Learn to cook traditional Piedmontese dishes such as truffle ravioli and *vitello tonnato* at a family-run restaurant, and then dine on your own creations. 800/464-9255; countrywalkers.com; May-October; from \$5,498 for eight days.



10

Russia Glimpse the Imperial Past

The Operator Exeter International
The Highlights See Russia like a Romanov, with access to buildings closed to most. In Moscow, view the Kremlin's Faceted Chamber, where the czars held receptions, and go backstage at the circus. In St. Petersburg, explore the Hermitage and meet with a curator specializing in a

genre of your choosing. In between are a caviar tasting and a seven-day luxury cruise up the Volga River. 800/633-1008; exeterinternational.com; June-September; from \$10,650 for 11 days.



11

Turkey Ancient and Modern Aegean

The Operator Geographic Expeditions
The Highlights Spend three days in Istanbul then head to Termessos, one of Turkey's most complete—and least visited—classical ruins, a mountainside fortress that resisted the armies of Alexander the Great. Afterward, board a *gulet*, a traditional wooden vessel, and sail the Turquoise Coast, with stops at sites where Greek and Roman myths originated. 800/777-8183; geoex.com; April-October; from \$6,480 for 12 days.



ASIA

12

China Secrets of Shangri-La

The Operator WildChina
The Highlights Tour the snowcapped mountain landscape of northwestern Yunnan province via a circuit of three luxury lodges. Watch the sun set behind 19,000-foot peaks from your room, furnished with Tibetan art, rugs, and furniture, then meditate with a Tibetan master and hike ancient pilgrimage routes. 888/902-8808; wildchina.com; May 21-27 or September 24-30; from \$1,985 for seven days.



13

India Celebrate Holi Week

The Operator Banyan Tours & Travel
The Highlights This greatest-hits tour is designed to coincide with Holi, the Hindu festival of color, which you will celebrate with the maharajah of Jodhpur. Add in the Taj Mahal, tiger viewing in Ranthambore National Park, and a game of elephant polo, plus sessions with a master chef, an art historian, and a respected jeweler. 866/401-3705; banyantours.com; through April 30; from \$10,705 for 11 days.



14

Japan Kyoto Behind Closed Doors

The Operator Wabi-Sabi Japan
The Highlights Unravel the mysteries of the former imperial capital. A priest brings you to off-limits sections of an iconic temple in western Kyoto. Chef Tomoyuki Konagaya closes his restaurant to take you shopping in the Nishiki market, and shows you how to slice sashimi and >>



The 15th-century Château du Rivau, in France's Loire Valley, on a bike trip with Butterfield & Robinson.

vegetables. Afterward, you'll be entertained at a geisha teahouse, and one of Japan's best-regarded kimono artists will later host you in his home. 647/477-1711; wabi-sabijapan.com; March-May and September-November; from \$4,750 for two days.



15 Nepal

Finding the Character of the Country

The Operator Myths & Mountains **The Highlights** Founder Toni Neubauer has spent 26 years cultivating her contacts, so in addition to taking in shrines and gilded stupas and riding elephants, you will meet Nepal's elite. Visit the traditional home of a UNESCO-honored architect; tour a library built by READ, the company's philanthropic arm; and receive personal blessings from the Kumari of Patan, a young girl revered as a deity who is rarely seen by travelers. 800/670-6984; mythsandmountains.com; February 14-26 and November 26-December 9, or by request; from \$2,995 for 13 days.



16 Thailand

Live Long and Prosper

The Operator Remote Lands **The Highlights** Participate in a "prolong life" ceremony at the 14th-century Wat Chiang Man, thought to be Chiang Mai's oldest temple. This Buddhist ritual involving chanting monks is designed to bring you greater happiness. As if to prove that point, you'll also board a yacht in the Mergui Archipelago, a little-known paradise prized for its white-sand beaches and fishermen known as "sea gypsies." 646/415-8092; remotelands.com; year-round; from \$8,000 for nine days.



Kathmandu, Nepal, guided by Myths & Mountains.

AFRICA & THE MIDDLE EAST

17

Botswana

Wild River and Wildlife

The Operator &Beyond **The Highlights** Pair three nights at &Beyond's Matetsi Private Game Reserve, on the Zambezi—just upstream from thundering Victoria Falls—with three nights at the outfitter's Xudum Okavango Delta Lodge. You'll see game galore at both, but a climactic helicopter flight over the delta grants unparalleled views of animal herds, especially hippo and zebra. 888/ 882-3742; andbeyond.com; year-round; from \$3,861 for seven days.



18 Egypt

Cairo and Nile Cruise

The Operator Abercrombie & Kent **The Highlights** A&K takes you places off-limits to everyone else: Cairo's Antiquities Museum before it opens its doors; Nefertari's Tomb; and the roof of Dendera Temple. Cruise the Nile on a new *dahabieh*, a traditional sailboat with six spacious suites, a dining lounge, and

pool. 800/554-7016; abercrombiekent.com; September 19-October 2; from \$8,830 for 14 days.



19 Kenya

Digging up Humanity's Roots

The Operator Micato Safaris **The Highlights** Trace our species' beginnings with members of the Leakey family, the preeminent paleontologists. A series of adventures—dune surfing; tracking the Big Five—leads to a stay at a research station where 3.5-million-year-old hominid fossils were recently discovered. You'll work alongside Louise Leakey and her mother, Meave, in their search for human origins. 800/642-2861; micato.com; year-round; from \$19,700 for 10 days, including a donation to the Leakey Foundation.



20

Madagascar The Eighth Continent

The Operator Journeys International **The Highlights** Explore this biodiverse island nation, where 80 percent of the plants and animals are endemic, and many are found nowhere

else. Lemur, butterfly, and bird encounters are interspersed with visits to Malagasy communities and spice-scented islands. 800/255-8735; journeys.travel; October 7-20 or by request; from \$4,845 for 14 days.



AUSTRALIA

21

Australia Urban, Rural, and Tropical

The Operator Black Tomato **The Highlights** Traverse Australia from urban to remote. Start in Sydney with an Opera House tour and a flight to a secret lunch location. Follow a night in the Blue Mountains with a wine tasting in Hunter Valley, then a plush bush-camp stay in Jervis Bay. Finally, hole up at the Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island, for diving and spa treatments. 877/815-1497; blacktomato.co.uk; November-March; from \$7,749 for 12 days, including airfare.



ANTARCTICA

22

Antarctica The Center of the Bottom of the World

The Operator Kensington Tours **The Highlights** Kensington has coveted access to White Desert, a luxury tented camp set above a 200-foot icefall. After two nights in Cape Town and a G4 flight to an ice runway, guests select from a menu of try-and-top-this activities: exploring ice caves, walking on frozen waves, or meeting a colony of 12,000 penguins. 888/903-2001; kensingtontours.com; December 8-17; from \$24,900 for five days.



SEE ALL THE TRIPS!

FOR A SLIDE SHOW OF THE 22 EXCLUSIVE T+L ITINERARIES, GO TO TRAVELANDLEISURE.COM.

NOTE Subject to availability, trip price is per person based on double occupancy and may shift based on dates, group size, and other factors. International airfare is excluded except where noted. When booking, please ask for the T+L Trip of a Lifetime tour. For more information, go to TravelandLeisure.com.

* Denotes a Global Vision Awards winner. See page 145.