

travelista

Frequent flyer Sophy Roberts fast-tracks international intelligence on where to be and what to see.

If spring in Provence simply won't cut it, try this for size: a 24-day private jet tour aboard a Boeing 757 covering 13 Unesco World Heritage Sites and 16,500 miles. Generally bypassing crowded commercial terminals, the itinerary covers parts of the world that would otherwise require torturous overland schleps. The binding principle is that all 10 destinations are connected to the World's Great Faiths, from Islam to Shinto, with stops in **ROME, ISRAEL**, Varanasi and Amritsar in **INDIA, KYOTO, LHASA**, Lalibela in **ETHIOPIA, ARMENIA** and

ISTANBUL. Departing on March 18, the trip is an airborne alternative to the educational cruise – with private chef and expert lecturers. The cost (from about £22,220; www.tcs-expeditions.com) represents all the fuel guzzled en route and a clutch of five-star hotels where geography allows. The plane is custom fitted for 88 passengers, though there are no flatbeds.

The intrepid traveller might also consider **IRAN**, where Wild Frontiers (www.wildfrontiers.co.uk) makes its first foray this April with a 15-day package from Tehran to Hamadan, Shiraz and Isfahan (£2,200 full board). And then there's **NORTH KOREA** with Steppes Travel (www.steppestravel.co.uk). The company launches an escorted 16-day

trip the same month to coincide with the Great Leader's birthday (with the chance to attend the Mass Games, featuring a stadium of 100,000 gymnasts and complex, choreographed homages to the two Kims). In the Demilitarized Zone you can step into the region's politics and gaze across the border. The trip costs from £2,795, the accommodation is mostly four star (but we're talking communist four star) and the food, as can be expected, hot pots and pickled cabbage.

For luxury and extreme adventure, try **PATAGONIA** where Nomads of the Seas (www.nomadsoftheseas.com) has launched *Atmosphere*, a new 28-passenger ship with a crew of 32 plus a Bell 407 chopper, a Zodiac Hurricane 920, six jet boats and six portable Heli-Zodiacs allowing you to partake in anything from extreme fly-fishing to whale-watching to jaunts into the Andes. There's an onboard thalassotherapy spa plus daily Chilean wine events. Rates are from about £5,230 a week for non-fishing guests to about £7,700 for those who want to hook the region's famed trout.

For those who prefer to get their kicks from skiing, all talk is of the **DOLOMITES** – one of Italy's better-



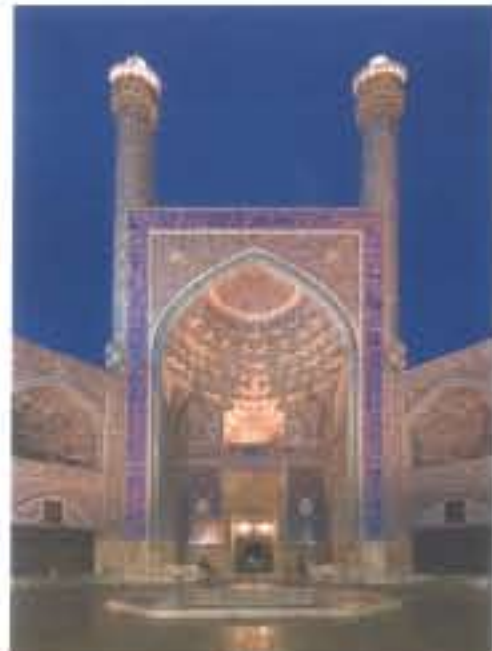
Camel riding on the beach at Essaouira, where the new Riad Lotus O Marine is located.



Above: The super-chic villa Casa N in Pantelleria, Italy. Below: Imam Mosque in Isfahan, Iran, where Wild Frontiers soon ventures for the first time.



Above: Red Travel tailor-makes itineraries in Italy for clients wanting to drive one of its top Ferraris, such as this F430 £1.



How to spend it

kept secrets, especially the private chalets and small, gastronomic hotels, such as the Rosa Alpina, that exist in the Val Gardena. For an Italy-based specialist who knows the scene, contact American-born Pamela O'Shea at www.customitaly.com. Capitalise on a low-cost routing, flying with Ryanair from Stansted to Verona Brescia or Milan Bergamo to pick up new connecting coach transfers (up to three hours) costing as little as £15 return. Book all this, plus ski pass and rental, through www.ryanair.com/transfers.

For an alternative thrill, go open-top and head south with the upcoming spring. Red Travel (www.red-travel.com) provides a top-of-the-range Ferrari, escort car and custom-



Above: Sleep under the stars in a Koija Star Bed in Laikipia, Kenya. Below: North Korea beckons with Steppes Travel's escorted 16-day trip.

made itinerary through **ITALY** (with preassigned parking spaces for your especially wide car in cobbled medieval villages) – all for a starting price of about £2,600 per person, including three nights in five-star accommodation. By the time April arrives (you need to book early, hence the alert now) you can strip off to your bikini on the chi-chi black volcanic isle of

PANTELLERIA. There are no flashy hotels to speak of, but the villa living is unbelievable. Casa N is up there with the best of them – a *dammuso*, domed house, built in lava rock by architect Gabriella Giuntoli (Giorgio Armani's choice) and sleeping 12 (bookings through info@cedricreversade.com).

From Pantelleria, you can see North Africa, where in **MOROCCO** there are two new fashion-savvy hotels to note: the five-room Riad Lotus O Marine (www.riadslotus.com) in the seaside town of Essaouira, and the trendy, 36-room Murano Oriental Resort in a date grove outside Marrakech (www.muranoresort.com) – sister to Paris's Murano Urban Resort.

The traditional bohemian rich (Morocco now harbours few of the old-school Tabitha Getty-style originals) should head for **KENYA** instead, where you can sleep under the stars in the Laikipia region. The family behind Loisaba Wilderness (www.loisaba.com) has unveiled the new Koija Star Beds – double sleeping platforms with four-posters fashioned from wood, wrapped in netting and en-suite, camp-style showers – positioned on the banks of the Ewaso N'giro River. Quite the spot for a total boho honeymoon beneath the African sky.

Nightlife on **ST BARTHS** may be higher octane but it is equally scene-conscious. Pink Elephant (www.pink-elephantclub.com) is a new indoor/outdoor Beach Club (from the people behind the eponymous Hamptons venue) adjacent to Saline Beach with seating alcoves and day beds for lazy afternoons, Cristal in hand. Later in the year, Pink Elephant will be making cameo appearances on the **CÔTE D'AZUR** – at the Cannes Film Festival and Monaco Grand Prix. <



Above: The Dolomites are this year's hot skiing destination.



Above: Haute luxury meets high adventure on Nomads of the Seas' Patagonia trip.

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