

ULTIMATE GLAMPING ADVENTURES FOR 2013

CECILY MABASA lists more exciting possibilities for the luxury adventurer



In my journeys, I've come across unique experiences in some of the most remote and unexplored destinations in the world. Here's a continuation of my top choices for this year.

1 TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK

I've been to Chile's Torres del Paine National Park several times, but I always find myself faced with a fresh new adventure on each visit. Photos just cannot do justice to the incomparable landscape.

You will never run out of places to explore as the Torres del Paine National Park offers a slew of adventures: challenging long-distance walks capped with delicious picnics in front of calving glaciers; horseback riding with gauchos and then a Patagonian asado in the quincho afterwards; half-day walks along the lakes with spectacular views of the majestic peaks of Torres del Paine. You can also take a boat cruise to the Grey Glacier.

At the remote and über-luxurious Explora lodge, I woke up to a beautiful sunrise each morning. And after a day filled with unknown adventures, the lodge became a place for recharging and pampering, with gourmet dinners and jacuzzi soaks under the starry sky.

For those who prefer a more outdoors experience, there are also the luxury gerts of Patagonia Camp.

Best time to go: November to March when the weather is warmer and days are relatively sunny.

2 ANTARCTICA EXPEDITION

Hands down, my favorite destination is Antarctica.

Remote and untamed, this is the ultimate adventurer's playground and wildlife haven. It's a paradise of glaciers, icebergs, snow-capped mountains, and passages through a maze of breathtaking channels and inlets. You can walk beside penguins with curious stares, watch seals playing in the water, observe leopard seals feeding their young, and take a dip in the hot spring holes while feeling the below zero air above the water.

Antarctica's essence can never be perfectly captured in pictures and words. The serenity of the scenery – including the rocky surfaces and the rare Antarctic sunsets – make it special.

Antarctica cannot be experienced just by just looking at photos or reading about it. The magic needs to be experienced. I guarantee this will be the experience of a lifetime.

Best time to go: November to March when the weather is at its finest. Expect daily drizzles for a short period of time.

3 SALKANTAY ROAD TO MACHU PICCHU

I had been to Machu Picchu via the Hiram Bingham train, but I longed for the adventure of traversing it. For many years, however, one could only get there by rough it up in tents, "outdoor-bush" toilets, and no showers. Then I discovered this outfitter that offered the only luxurious route to Machu Picchu via the Salkantay Inca trail.

As it is often said, the journey is just as important as the destination. The Salkantay Inca Trail to Machu Picchu proves this right. It's much less populated by trekkers, and it's a more scenic journey than the classic Inca Trail.

The trail is physically challenging. It involves a trek through twelve different bio-zones, changing altitudes, and varied terrain filled with flora and fauna. Of course, you're rewarded with the exquisite beauty of the Salkantay Peak at 4,800 meters and the Salkantay Glacier. If you're lucky, you may even spot a polar bear in one of the lakes.

Best time to go: Mid-April to October, which are the drier months, when you can see the most spectacular views. Book at least six months in advance due to limited slots and fixed departure schedules.

4 A WALK ACROSS ENGLAND

Alfred Wainright's legendary coast-to-coast ramble is considered one of the world's 10 best hikes. It is a 308-km traverse from the Irish Sea on the west, across England to the North Sea. We meandered through several national parks including the Lake District National Park housing England's highest mountains, the Yorkshire Dales National Park filled with rolling hills and river valleys, and the awe-inspiring landscapes of the Yorkshire Moors.

Walk through the picturesque mountains of the Lake District, filled with lovely photogenic villages, rushing streams, and meadows carpeted with flowers. Eat your way through traditional English pubs serving the best sticky toffee puddings, and enjoy from finding your way from one village to the next through unmarked paths.

We didn't need to hire a guide for this trek. Everything was pre-arranged for us including our route plan, accommodations, and laundry service. Our luggage was waiting for us at each lodge at the end of the day. All we took along was the Coast to Coast trailblazer guidebook, some cash to buy meals and a pint of ale along the way, daypacks, and all-weather rain jackets.

Whenever we got lost, we just waited for another walker to come along.

Best time to go: May to mid-September, as the best lodges close for the fall and winter months. ■

GETTING THERE

Cecily Mabasa traveled with the luxury adventure group Sea to Summit Explorations' custom-made journeys.

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