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TRAVEL

## Made to measure: expert advice on how to plan a bespoke luxury trip

Private, customisable travel with an emphasis on experience over ostentation is a worthwhile investment.

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Bait Ali Camp is a traditional Bedouin Arabic camp in Wadi Rum, a protected desert and national park in Jordan.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LESLIE PARROTT

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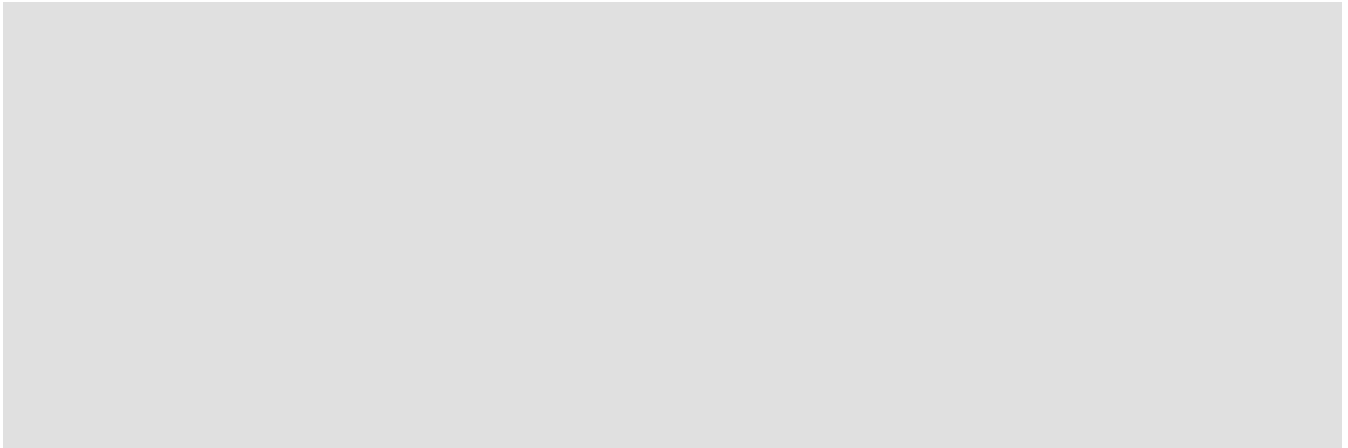
Luxury is changing. For many affluent travellers, five-star indulgence just isn't enough anymore as traditional ideas of top-end travel are being redefined. Opulent hotels and first-class travel are becoming less of a priority than experiences that are distinct and highly personalised.

This shift has meant bespoke travel companies have never been in greater demand – specialists in creating one-of-a-kind dream trips catering to the traveller's every want and wish: transport, accommodation, excursions and pace of trip. Bookings aren't made by travel agents but are curated by travel designers. These skilled individuals utilise their first-hand knowledge of destinations to craft tailor-made itineraries with the utmost care and attention to detail.

Moreover, they'll use their connections to make the impossible possible and manage all the logistics. They'll know how to gain VIP access to exclusive landmarks allowing you to skip the queues and bypass the crowds.

Take tour operator Cazenove and Loyd, for instance, which offers clients private access to explore Egypt's ancient pyramids alongside an Egyptologist. Another of its top picks is a trip to Peru, where travellers can experience treks most don't know about and enjoy Amazon expeditions with world-class naturalist guides.

Then there's Scott Dunn, which has launched a service so exclusive you have to apply to be a member. The platform is called Scott Dunn Private and is designed to meet the needs of travellers with deep pockets. Clients are assigned an adviser who travels extensively and is privy to details such as whether a hotel's presidential suite is worth the splurge. Scott Dunn Private also has an exclusive selection of properties on its books, from a chateau overlooking France's Loire Valley to a former monastery in Croatia.



A couple enjoys the view from a traditional living space in Japan.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **GETTY IMAGES**

## Shifting priorities

So, what has caused the shift towards bespoke travel? As can be said for much of our evolving world, Covid-19 has played a significant role. Privacy became a luxury in itself as travellers looked for ways in which they could have a safe and socially distanced holiday. In particular, the demand for tailor-made trips that included private jet flights and isolated villas for family reunions and group trips surged last year.

Bespoke travel companies also offer travellers flexible cancellation policies and 24/7 assistance, which became key amid the uncertainty created by the pandemic and frequent lockdowns. Travellers needed peace of mind, with plans constantly being thrown into disarray due to Covid-19 variants and the government's controversial traffic light travel policy.

There's an emotional element, too. A survey conducted by Hilton Hotels at the height of the pandemic revealed almost two-thirds (64%) of Brits said the one thing they missed most about travelling was the chance to create new memories. The pandemic gave people time to think about how they travel and it has fundamentally changed their priorities.

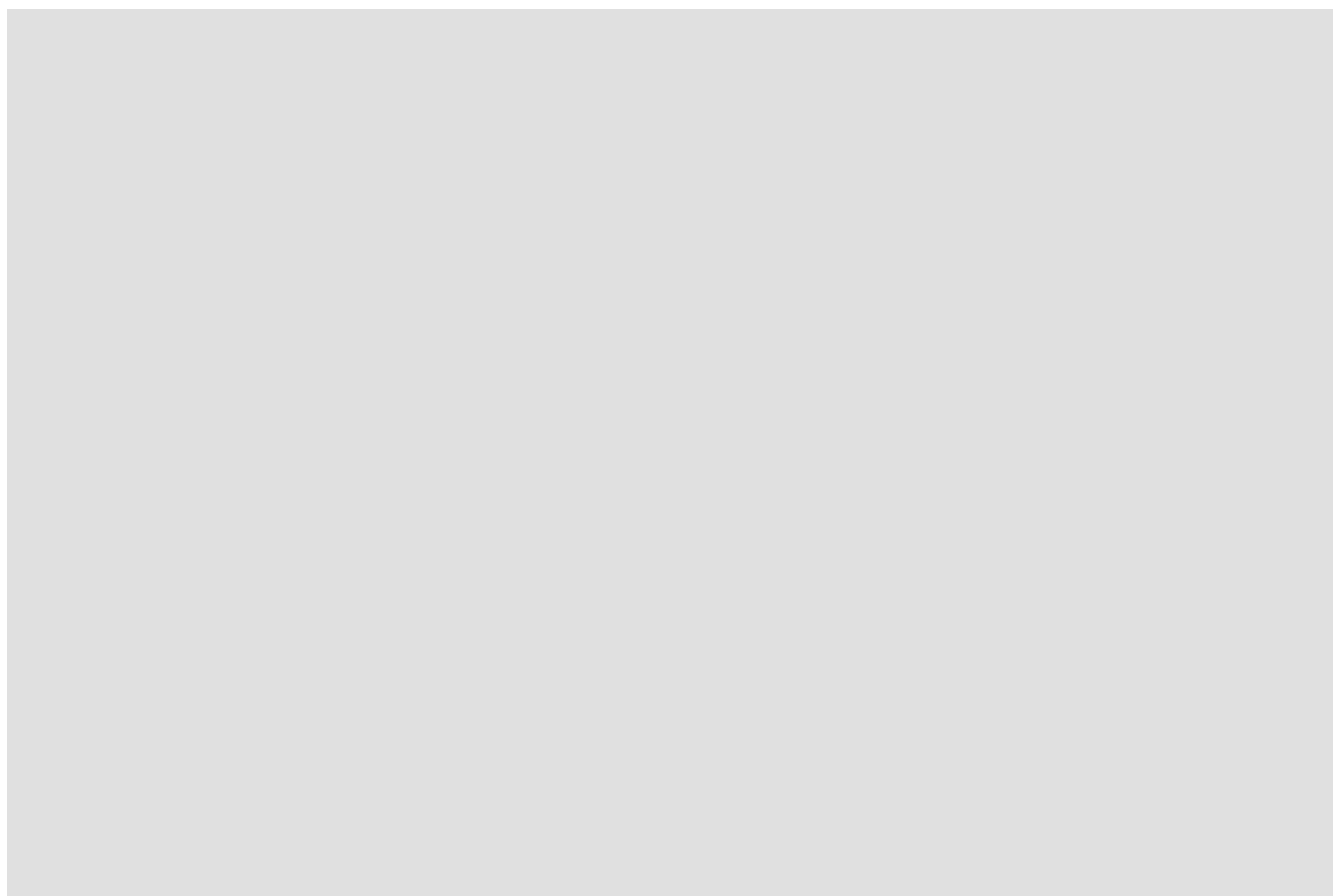
Luxury tour operators have observed how people are placing more emphasis on experiences and creating long-lasting memories. Several companies have seen unprecedented interest in big bucket-list adventures to remote parts of the world.

Audley Travel has noted clients are booking longer-duration trips and choosing high-spend destinations that have been on their wishlist for a while, such as Antarctica. It says

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the average spend on trips booked in 2021 increased by 9.4% compared to 2019.

Meanwhile, Black Tomato reports that a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Rwanda has proved to be one of its most popular itineraries. Guests visit Volcano National Park where they have a rare encounter with the endangered mountain gorillas and learn about important conservation work. The company has also seen strong interest in safari trips to Kenya, Botswana, Uganda and Tanzania for 2022, as well as itineraries to Chile, Egypt, Japan and New Zealand.



Travel pursuits that include fitness and wellbeing programs such as yoga treats lend themselves to bespoke itineraries.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **GETTY IMAGES**

## **Transformational travel**

Travellers have also developed an appetite to connect with the soul of a destination like never before. The latest industry buzzword is 'transformational travel' – this refers to a type of travel that provides deeper and more meaningful experiences.

The Transformation Travel Council, an industry group spearheading the trend, defines

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transformational travel as 'intentionally travelling to stretch, learn and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world'. It says adopting this mindset will allow you to go on a journey that lasts long after you return home.

Black Tomato is offering a number of bespoke breaks that cater to these trailblazers with its 'Bring it Back' collection. These immersive itineraries, which start from £4,150 per person, encourage clients to think about areas of their life that need improvement.

To create a healthier lifestyle, for example, it sends travellers to Copenhagen to learn the key for nailing work-life balance. You'll embed yourself in Danish culture, witnessing first-hand the nation's unique approach to separating personal and professional life.

In Iceland, those looking to broaden their business horizons will have a private guided tour of the Lava Centre – an innovative, high-tech facility set up in the aftermath of the 2010 volcanic eruption – and gather insight from senior managers at an ultra-luxe spa hotel on Iceland's Blue Lagoon.

And Peru is recommended for those on a quest to live more sustainably: travellers can meet with the country's most renowned potato farmer and get a taste of the ancient Peruvian way of cooking food underground.

High Point Yachting, which specialises in bespoke luxury yacht charter packages everywhere from the Mediterranean and Caribbean to French Polynesia, is also helping travellers explore the world with purpose.

The company has noticed its clients are making a conscious effort to travel more sustainably and want to know about onboard green initiatives.

High Point Yachting's fleet is employing innovative solutions to ensure their environmental impact is kept to a minimum. The crew onboard the Croatian-based yacht MALA, for instance, create their own drinking water for guests and provide glass water bottles, paper straws and cotton shopping bags. Beyond this, they lead regular beach clean-ups in beautiful Croatian bays.

Luxury travel looks very different in a post-pandemic era but it's by no means any less rewarding. Ultimately, tailor-made trips give you the opportunity to decide what this new, richer sense of luxury means to you. Once you figure it out, don't waste a minute making up for missed adventures.

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