



OPINION

HYBRID HOLIDAYS

Lauren Ho on dual-aspect luxury travel

A new crop of cross-fertilised travel options includes floating luxury apartments and a boutique hotel on wheels.

Even the blow-the-budget traveller experiences the occasional bout of ennui, one more luxury resort or smart hotel offering pretty much the same thing as the last. In response, a number of enterprising outfits are putting a spin on established getaways, creating hybrid forms that offer indulgence and adventure.

“Residents of *The World* can enjoy unique behind-the-scenes experiences that are not available to the general public,” says Pamela Conover, CEO of *The World*, the largest private residential ship on the planet. Best described as a floating high-end apartment block, *The World*’s 165 residences – ranging from studios to generous three-bedroom apartments – are privately owned and residents can stay on board for as long as they want, with most spending an average of three to six months at sea each year.

“Ownership on *The World* is a ‘lifestyle’ as opposed to a holiday, which implies a temporary experience”, explains Conover. Circumnavigating the globe every two to three years, the ship’s itinerary is voted for in advance by the occupants and allows like-minded adventure-seekers to travel the world in the comfort of their own home, albeit with a range of luxury amenities similar to a six-star resort. “Our definition of luxury is getting what you want, when you want it”, says Conover. “Our staff know our residents’ preferences from how they take their morning coffee to how they like their refrigerator stocked.”



Residents of *The World* kayaking in the Antarctic’s Lemaire Channel. Credit: Courtesy of *The World*



andBeyond’s Private Jet Expeditions introduce travellers to conservation projects across Africa. Credit: *andBeyond andbeyond.com*

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Determined to open Kyushu up to the international luxury traveller, Koji Karaike, chairman of JR Kyushu, the former national rail company of the island, set about building an all-new cruise train that recalled legendary services such as the Orient Express. Completed in 2011, the Seven Stars – named after the number of prefectures on the island – comprises just twelve suites. With rich wood panelling, elaborate lattice screens and an opulent sense of colonial luxury, the suites have been designed for passengers to bunker down and indulge, although the itineraries – either a four-day full circuit or a two-day northern island journey – still provide authentic experiences, including overnight stays at traditional ryokans.

Whether on a short getaway or semi-permanently roaming the world, one thing remains certain: experiential travel is on the rise. And progressive companies like these are one step ahead, not just for their access to one-off escapades, but also for ultra-luxury offerings that have opened up adventure travel to a whole new group of jetsetters.

As far as adventure goes, *The World*’s residents, according to Conover, are interested in learning about new cultures, people, history and the environment. Indeed, the on-board “concierge and enrichment” team are on tap to create one-of-a-kind experiences, from being greeted with champagne and caviar after hiking to the top of an Arctic glacier to hot chocolate deliveries while kayaking through the Norwegian fjords.

For those with less time on their hands, hospitality brands such as the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and safari company *andBeyond* have upped their games with the launch of their own private jets, which also provide travellers with that much-desired dose of adventure but in an ultra-luxury hassle-free and accessible environment. “At this level, travellers are increasingly looking for local, authentic experiences that are off the beaten track”, says *andBeyond* CEO Joss Kent. As the owner and operator of 35 safari lodges throughout Africa and India, *andBeyond* has unique behind-the-scenes access to some of Africa’s most influential conservationists. “*andBeyond*’s Private Jet Expeditions offer the opportunity to engage with wildlife experts who have initiated or influenced ground-breaking conservation projects,” says Kent. “They also allow guests first-hand experience of the company’s conservation initiatives, including the opportunity to attend a rhino notching or take part in anti-poaching activities.” The Four Seasons Private Jet Experience, meanwhile, has a range of intrepid itineraries, from zip-lining across a rain forest canopy in Costa Rica to kayaking through the Malaysian mangroves.

Despite the fickle nature of the travel industry, the one destination that remains a constant draw is Japan. Its easy temperament, compelling culture and natural beauty has made it a popular draw for seasoned travellers and occasional tourists alike. And while many visitors tend to shuffle between Tokyo and Kyoto, one man saw the potential in Kyushu, the most southerly of the country’s four main islands, best known for its active volcanoes and natural hot springs.



Rolling-stock-turned-wood-paneled-suite on the Seven Stars cruise train in Japan. Credit: JR Kyushu Railway Company

Main image: *The World* is a floating high-end apartment block. Credit: Courtesy of *The World*