

“THE REAL VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY CONSISTS NOT IN SEEKING NEW LANDSCAPES, BUT IN HAVING NEW EYES.”

If we were to decipher Marcel Proust’s famous words in today’s context, it would simply mean travelling is no longer about ticking places off on your bucket list, rather it’s about a discovery of one’s own identity. This is especially true while talking about luxury travel.

From stargazing in the African wilderness to just going off the grid in search of true nirvana, it becomes clear that real luxury is found in the simple things that make us happy. Kicking off your shoes and running on soft, bone-white sand and feeling the wind caress your hair without being interrupted by the beep of a message on your smartphone or the incessant consumption of social media channels – welcome to the world of barefoot luxury where everything that is insignificant in the virtual world is, conversely, extremely important.

“It means enjoying the simple things in life that leave you refreshed and revived,” says Marteyne van Well, General Manager of Six Senses Laamu in the Maldives. “Jet-setters want to disconnect from their fast paced lives, kick back and relax... sit down and enjoy an organic dinner in a calm location, or walk on a sandy beach with no shoes and enjoy serene, untouched nature.”

What the arbiters of luxury are trying to say is that high thread counts, personal butler services or enormous suites with high-tech gadgets no longer typify the grandeur of travel. In fact, there is a yearning for old-fashioned exploration, through which modern and savvy travellers are eager to retrace the steps of the great explorers. Moving away from fast and flashy experiences that thrive on a “right here and right now” culture, lovers of barefoot luxury are going in search of rich experiences that often dovetail with ideologies and ethical issues such as environmental concerns. Niche travel companies have sprung up that promise to deliver meaningful and soul-nourishing experiences, found in the last frontiers.

In Botswana’s Okavango Delta, the boutique resort Sanctuary Baines’ Camp organises educational cosmic safaris around bonfires; guests can soak in moonbeams and watch shooting stars. With several constellations clearly visible in the dark skies overhead, it offers an out-of-this-world experience that beckons those who have been there and done that. Unsurprisingly, the last thing on their mind is freshly pressed suits or champagne service in their rooms.

The luxury tents of Amanwana on Moyo Island in the eastern Indonesian archipelago are a world away from the nearest city. Besides eco-chic wilderness, the resort also offers some of the world’s most stunning diving and snorkelling sites.



KICK OFF YOUR SHOES AND EXPERIENCE NATURE AT THESE EXCLUSIVE HIDEAWAYS

SANCTUARY BAINES' CAMP,
BOTSWANA

Situated on the Boro River in a private concession bordering the Moremi Game Reserve in the Okavango Delta, this resort is an intimate property comprising five luxury suites built on raised platforms. Surrounded by feathery papyrus beds and lush waterways, it not only offers an abundance of wildlife including elephants and hippos, but is also one of the best places on earth for stargazing. Guests can even have the four-poster bed wheeled out onto the private wooden deck for a celestial experience. In keeping with its nature-inspired manifesto, the structures have been built partially using recycled cans that were bought from the local tribes living in surrounding areas. www.sanctuaryretreats.com/botswana-camps-baines

CONRAD MALDIVES RANGALI
ISLAND, THE MALDIVES

The only resort in the country spanning two islands, each with its own personality, Conrad Maldives offers superb dining, spa and leisure facilities, great service and stunning sealife, including whale sharks, manta rays, dolphins and a vast coral reef. As General Manager Lyle Lewis says: "Conrad Maldives is the quintessence of a once in a lifetime experience, which we hope turns results in more!" Of the two islands, smaller, adults-only Rangali offers the ultimate in barefoot luxury, including the truly unique experience of fine contemporary European cuisine 16 feet underwater in an amazing all-glass restaurant. conradhotels3.hilton.com/en/hotels/maldives/conrad-maldives-rangali-island-MLEHIC1/index.html

NORTH ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

Located 30km from the main island of Mahe, North Island is an idyllic spot in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Fine white beaches are lined by coconut palms and high granite outcrops, and nestled among them are 11 ultra-luxury guest villas handcrafted from wood, stone and glass. The island's landscape (including four breathtaking beaches) and the resort's facilities are special, but what makes this a true barefoot paradise is the resort's impressive conservation programme. Guests can relax here, knowing they have helped to restore the island's natural habitat – indigenous plant and animal species are once again thriving on the island, thanks to this resort. north-island.com

AMANWANA, MOYO,
INDONESIA

This nature reserve on the island of Moyo in Indonesia is home to a wealth of wildlife, including wild boars, macaques, sea eagles and ospreys, as well as a rich array of sea life that live among pristine coral reefs. It's also home to the extraordinary Amanwana resort, a wilderness hideaway offering luxury tents that skirt both forest and ocean. Here, guests have an unparalleled opportunity to switch off from the real world and get back to nature. Each tent offers 624 sq ft of living space with open sides, immersing guests in the sights and sounds of the wilderness. www.amanresorts.com/amanwana/home.aspx

"Nowadays, people are busy in their daily lives, so the ideal of travel is for them to discover, explore new things, and relax and recharge – all at the same time."

Lyle Lewis



Sanctuary Baines' Camp in Botswana is only open to guests above the age of 12. There isn't much to do there after all, besides gazing at the stars and the wildlife.

Vatulele Island Resort in the tropical paradise of Fiji has a no shoes, no news policy to help guests overcome unnecessary distractions. Dawid Koegelenberg, General Manager of Paresa Resort in Thailand, says: "Barefoot luxury means a guest can relax and forget. Telling someone to remove their shoes says that it's also okay to wear an old T-shirt or come to breakfast in a bathrobe. I love seeing this because it means that my guests are relaxing, not worrying about who might be thinking what about how they dress."

Lyle Lewis, General Manager of Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, opines that time is the biggest denominator of luxury. "Nowadays, people are busy in their daily lives, so the ideal of travel is for them to discover, explore new things, and relax and recharge – all at the same time," he says. "For me, barefoot luxury delivers this, because it's all about relaxing and enjoying quality time in a peaceful place with unpretentious style." In essence, barefoot luxury is really about getting as far away from the crowds and hustle and bustle as possible – but still knowing that you're going to be completely looked after in unique style.

The real definition of luxury, as such, is very subjective. It means different things to different people. While some will imagine open oceans, others simply dream of a life without internet. For others, it's an opportunity to reconnect with their inner selves and escape being consumed by the demands of this insanely busy world. It's like what the French novelist Gustave Flaubert said: "Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world."

Indeed, you would be hard-pressed to find a presidential suite luxurious enough to compete with the aura of earth's lush rainforests or the infinite expanse of oceans. At the same time, inspired by the intrepid explorer's determination, we've rounded up a few destinations that are providing alternative luxury getaways.