

# AROUND THE WORLD IN THIRTY DAYS

Luxury travel providers offer private jet journeys that allow clients to tailor itineraries to their particular interests or to take a multi-week tour around the entire globe.

By Sarah Binder

COURTESY TCS WORLD TRAVEL



**I**t's lunchtime at 30,000 feet. You sip a glass of Dom Perignon while gazing out the jet's windows and chatting with the co-captain. Yesterday you were cruising the Chao Phraya River in Thailand on a private longboat; today you will browse the energetic Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. In this moment, you have it all.

In the travel industry, nothing is more suited to today's have-it-all, on-demand lifestyle than around-the-world private jet tours, which whisk travelers from one bucket-list destination to another in ultimate luxury.

This epitome of travel began in the early 1990s. Before then, private jet tours focused on one area in depth, such as South America or Africa, immersing guests in several destinations within the region, explains Heidi Lakani, founder and owner of Lakani World Tours. Over the years, a new clientele emerged to alter the landscape —

highly seasoned travelers, and ambitious young people who had the financial means and desire to see the world, but not the time. The demand from both demographics to experience the highlights of the globe in luxury and convenience led to the creation of around-the-world itineraries.

"These itineraries developed into a discovery trip for people; they would go somewhere briefly, love it, and then we would design a follow-up tour for them to go back," says Lakani. "The industry evolved from 'in depth to highlights,' and then 'highlights to in depth.'"

Avoiding commercial flying restrictions and limiting tour sizes allows providers to pamper guests on board carefully customized aircraft, while flying direct to hard-to-reach destinations. "Our classic Around the World itinerary hits nine 'world wonders' in one trip, from Easter Island, Chile, to the 'Lost

City' of Petra, Jordan," says Andrew Lorence, account and marketing services manager for TCS World Travel.

When an itinerary includes more than a dozen flights across just a few weeks (most trips are approximately 24 days in length), globetrotters understandably seek the most high-end and efficient flying experience possible. TCS World Travel's expeditions feature a "newly reconfigured Boeing 757, which features comfy, flatbed leather seats with plenty of legroom, global Wi-Fi, amenities such as iPads and Bose noise cancelling headphones, and an executive chef on board," says Lorence. Lakani World Tours is known for its daytime-only flights; the lack of sleeper seats allows for a Sky Lounge where guests can socialize and have lunch with the captain and crew, explains Lakani.

In addition to TCS and Lakani, the number of key players in the realm of worldwide



## TAJ MAHAL



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private jet travel is small, yet distinguishable, from the Four Seasons Private Jet Experience, hosting guests in deluxe Four Seasons accommodations, to programs with in-depth experiential and cultural frameworks, such as Smithsonian Journeys, National Geographic Expeditions, and Abercrombie & Kent. Each provider operates just a few around-the-world-style itineraries per year, with most trips selling out far in advance. For example, all of Lakani's 2016 tours are already sold out.

No matter the tour operator, it goes without saying that an around-the-world trip offers something for everyone. Marveling at the Taj Mahal may be the ultimate bucket list item for a husband, while his wife highly anticipates a thrilling safari on the Serengeti.

Many itineraries introduce travelers to

off-the-beaten-path cities that nevertheless share commonalities with popular tourist hubs. "We go to places that are more difficult to get to and would normally require two to three flights, such as Porto, Portugal, rather than Madrid," says Lakani.

"What is most exciting is when travelers return home with a 'wow!' impression and a desire to return to a destination they have never previously thought of," explains Karen Ledwin, general manager of Smithsonian Journeys. Their highly educational travel programs, aimed at the 55-plus demographic, align with and support the efforts of the Smithsonian Institution.

Depending on factors such as the trip size, style, and tour operator, travelers encounter a wide variety of authentic opportuni-

## CAPE TOWN VINEYARDS



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ties to become immersed in local culture. On Smithsonian Journeys, offered via a custom-configured Boeing 757 for no more than 80 guests, a common highlight is an evening entertainment program that brings visitors and locals together.

"Because of our numbers, there are some special experiences that wouldn't be possible if a journey were only composed of two couples traveling together," says Ledwin. "One of the things that people really enjoy are these truly magnificent gala evenings that showcase the best of a destination via all of the performing arts, pageantry, and so forth that the culture has to offer. Whether in India or in Cambodia, travelers really enjoy these evenings."

With trips often encompassing seven, eight, or even nine destinations in a short

timeframe, one might think that it's nearly impossible to feel emotionally connected to any stop along the itinerary. However, TCS helps its guests create meaningful connections with local people. Guests on upcoming tours will have the privilege of witnessing rituals like a land diving ceremony to celebrate the yam harvest in remote Vanuatu or visiting local schools like the Akilah Institute for Women in Rwanda.

Globetrotters can work with tour operators in a variety of ways to design their optimal experience, from a completely customized private journey to personalized activities on group journeys. "I was in Africa with a family of 12, and the kids wanted to hike, but the parents wanted to relax and go to vineyards near Cape Town,"

## CAMBODIA



COURTESY LAKANI WORLD TOURS

says Lakani. "We design activities to suit whatever each member of the family likes." Lakani also creates a brochure of pre-designed frameworks for popular countries and regions; clients can then work with its team to customize their private journey to the destinations of their dreams.

The landscape of private jet travel will continue to ebb and flow. While the around-the-world journeys are highly popular right now, Ledwin predicts that as more and more travelers are introduced to them, the tide will turn. Trips may become more thematic, centered on a specific region, and offered via smaller planes. In order to keep its most experienced travelers coming back for more, TCS designs a trip just for them. "In 2017, our Kingdoms and Cultures of Eurasia itinerary

is taking guests to truly off-the-beaten-path places like Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Romania," says Lorence.

No matter the current trend, all three sources agree that these mega-trips offer an inherent value that far transcends their big-ticket cost, even with most journeys approaching or even healthily surpassing \$100,000 per traveler.

"People sometimes have sticker shock when they see the price tag of a private jet trip," says Ledwin. "If you were to take all of the air tickets you would need to make all of these stops, and put together all of these experiences with a high level of customer service and the intellectual overlay, it's a great value, especially for people who are trying to make up time with their travel."

## KENYA



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## EASTER ISLAND



## OLD TOWN OF PORTO

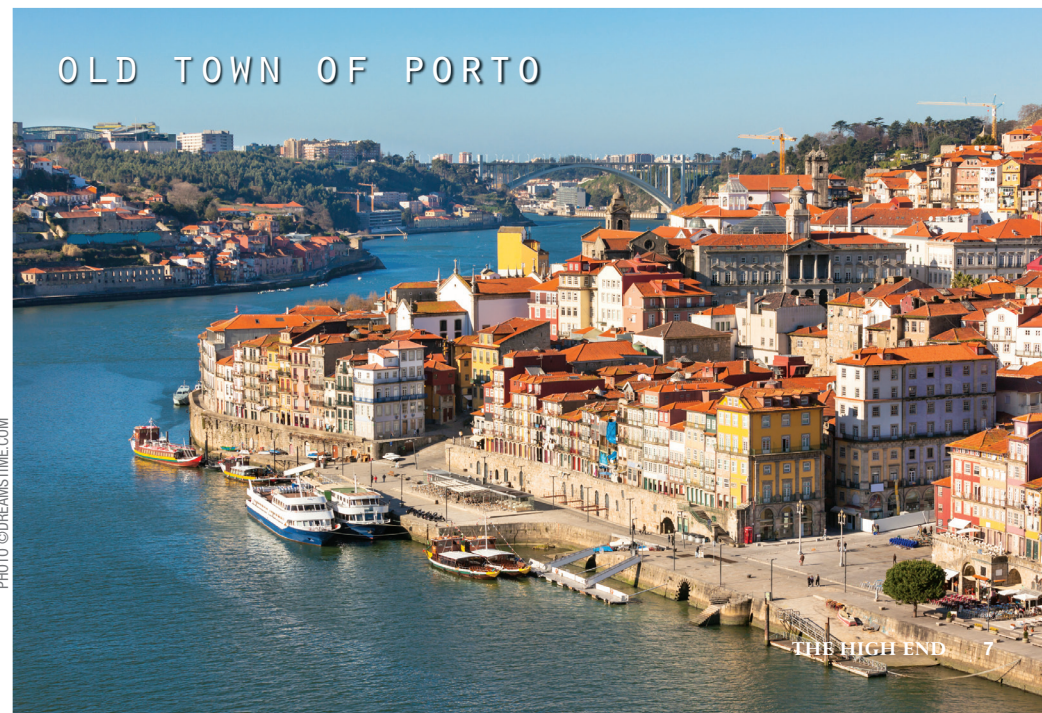


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